



Outcome of the e-Discussion

Challenges and experiences in establishing and maintaining inter-agency communication on biosafety-related issues



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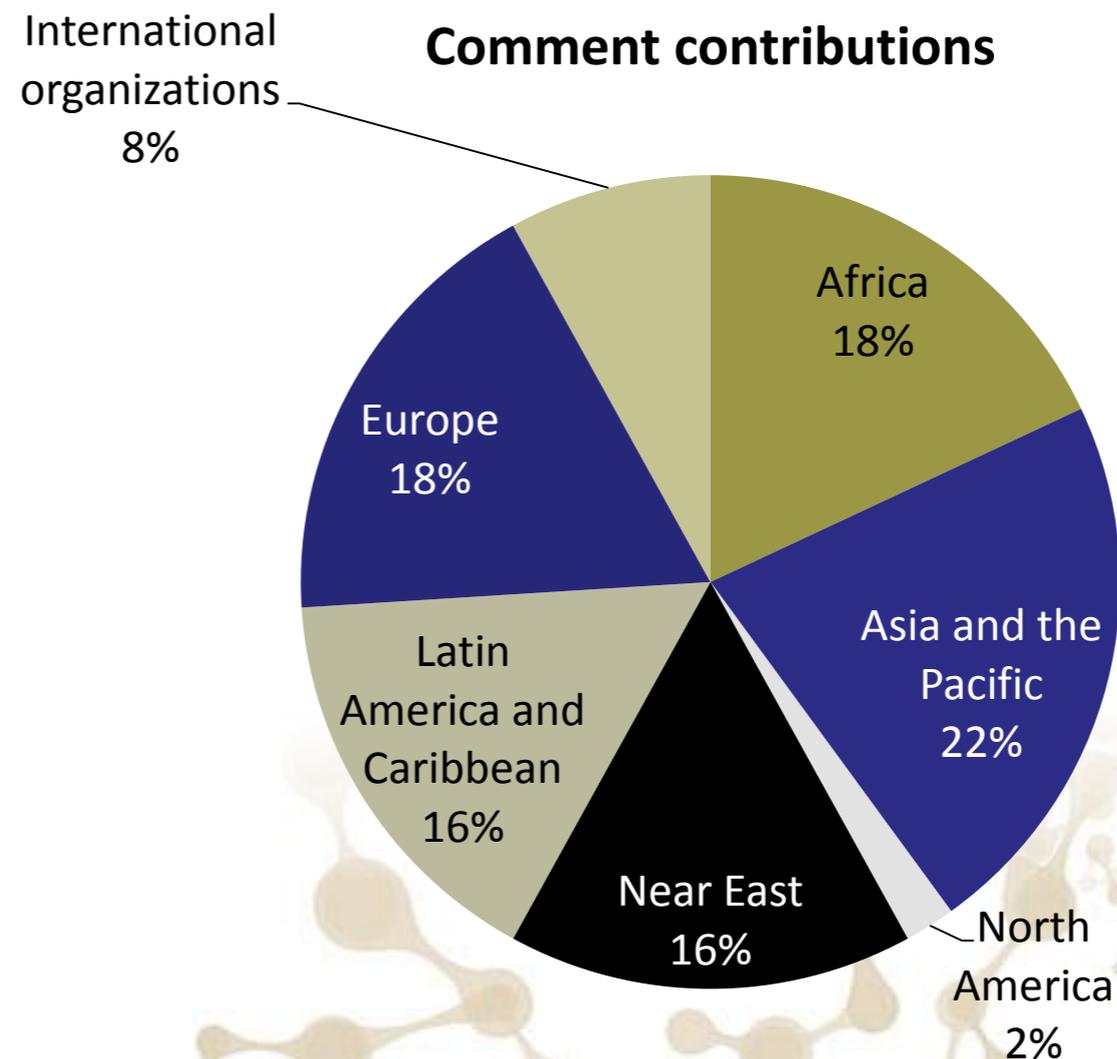
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Objectives

- To provide a forum on which countries can share
 - experiences,
 - good practices and
 - challengesin establishing effective national communication and coordination mechanisms on the topic of biosafety.

Participation

- A total of 327 people registered and participated
- A total of 50 comments contributed
- The discussion was held online at http://bch.cbd.int/onlineconferences/portal_art20/fao-cbd-oecd/discussion/



Needs and importance confirmed

- The importance of inter-sectoral communication mechanisms among the various involved authorities was recognized
- Biosafety = multidisciplinary topic: efforts needed to achieve coordinated action of all relevant sectors/agencies
- Mechanisms that facilitate the functional coordination are important

Experience: existing mechanisms

- Many countries have a formal body (e.g. National Biosafety Committee)
 - Cambodia, Niger, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Iran, Madagascar, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Lebanon, Japan, Belarus, Laos, Belgium, the Philippines, Spain, Uganda, Turkey, Egypt, Ghana, South Korea, etc
- Various sectors involved
 - Agriculture
 - Health
 - Environment
 - Trade and Industry
 - Finance
 - Science and technology



Roles of the coordination mechanisms

- Vary among countries
- Major roles are:
 - Regulatory responsibilities (Zimbabwe, Turkey, Spain, Germany, etc)
 - Provision of scientific advice – risk assessment (Ghana, Japan, Spain, Uganda, etc)
 - Coordination and information sharing
 - Functional inter-agency coordination (Mauritius, Cuba, Belgium, Mexico, Iran, etc)
 - Harmonization of regulations, procedures and standard-setting (Phillipines, Cuba, Laos, etc)
 - Collecting and sharing information and data (Moldova, South Korea, etc)

Informal mechanisms

- Some “informal” mechanisms that could also work well are also reported
 - Canada: monthly informal teleconference to update each other on the status of the risk assessment (environment, food safety, feed safety, etc)
 - Japan: informal network exist to casually communicate among different “safety” sectors (environment safety and food safety)

Challenges

- Establishing effective framework
 - Requires high-level decision(s) such as approval by the parliament and the mechanism takes long time to be functioning (Bhutan, Rwanda, etc)
 - No communication mechanisms (Kazakhstan)
 - Roles and responsibilities unclear (Malaysia, Laos, etc)
 - Mechanisms heavily on one sector (environment) and not inter-sectoral (food and environment) (Japan)
- Awareness issue
 - Lack of awareness among stakeholders, policy-makers, general public on the importance of biosafety (Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, etc)
 - Low awareness results in insufficient resource allocation (also below) (Zimbabwe, Iran, etc)
- Resource and experience + capacity issue
 - Human and financial resources limited (many countries)
 - Experience in performing risk assessment is limited (Belarus, Laos)
 - Capacity for identification/detection of GMOs and Lab resources (Zimbabwe, Iran, Niger, etc)
- Streamlining biosafety policies with other national policies (Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Pakistan, etc)
- Transparency and data availability (Moldova, Iran, etc)



Roles of international organizations

- Databases
 - Regulatory decisions, environmental risk assessment, food/feed safety assessment – global databases are extremely useful (Belgium, Spain, Slovenia)
- Capacity development and trainings (Kazakhstan, Moldova, Laos, Uganda, Bhutan, Iran, Turkey, Philippines, etc)
- Facilitating communication channels (many countries)
 - International organizations could help countries by developing a list of all contact points of different databases then everyone knows the exact person to contact/communicate regarding the shared data on the respective databases (Japan)



Conclusions

- E-Discussion achieved to have many participants from various parts of the world exchanging their experiences on national communication/coordination mechanisms in the area of biosafety
- It is recommended for FAO/CBD/OECD to follow up on all suggestions and needs to be considered for future joint webinars and other joint activities