

South Asia Biosafety Program

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Abstract Submission Call

7th Annual South Asia Biosafety Conference

September 14-16, 2019, Dhaka, Bangladesh

About the Conference

Join scientists, academics, researchers, and officials from research institutions, universities, government departments and ministries, and the private sector at the 7th Annual South Asia Biosafety Conference (SABC2019) in Dhaka, Bangladesh on September 14-16, 2019. The premier biosafety meeting in South Asia, SABC2019 is organized under the auspices of the South Asia Biosafety Program by the ILSI Research Foundation and Biotech Consortium India Limited. Registration is now open, and the provisional agenda may be viewed on the conference website: <http://sabc.biotech.co.in>.

Call for Abstracts

Conference attendees are invited to participate in this year's program by submitting an abstract for Plenary Session III, IV, V, or VII, the Lightning Round, or for the Poster Program.

Deadline: August 2, 2019

Plenary Sessions

Abstracts for consideration in a plenary session should describe research directly relevant to the session topic. This year, sessions open to participation by selected SABC2019 attendees include:

- Plenary Session III: Rationalizing Risk Assessment and Regulation of Low Risk Activities
- Plenary Session IV: Biotechnology Research and Development in South Asia
- Plenary Session V: Planning and Permitting Field Trials for Novel Organisms
- Plenary Session VII: Public Sector GE Crop Development and Deployment

Lightning Round

The Lightning Round is a unique opportunity for students and early career researchers to share their research in an oral presentation format that is exciting, challenging, and entertaining. All presentations must convey relevance to biosafety research, environmental or food safety assessment of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), or the regulation of GM plants, animals, arthropods, or micro-organisms. Each participant will be given five minutes and five slides to clearly present their work, challenging them to think carefully about how best to use the allotted time and visual aids. Prizes will be awarded to the top two participants.

Poster Program

Presenting a poster at SABC2019 is a noteworthy way to share expertise or accomplishment, and poster presenters will have a dedicated time to present and discuss their work with the diverse group of attendees. All posters must convey relevance to biosafety research, environmental or food safety assessment of GMOs, or the regulation of GM plants, animals, arthropods, or micro-organisms. All posters accepted to the Poster Program will be eligible for the Poster Competition and judged based on the guidelines detailed on the SABC2019 website. Prizes will be awarded to the top two participants.

How to Submit

Abstracts may be submitted online via the SABC2019 website at:

<http://sabc.biotech.co.in>

In order to participate, attendees MUST register for the conference and pay the registration fee once notified of their acceptance.

Harmonization of Biosafety Framework in South Asian Countries: A Perspective

Dr. M.A. Yousuf Akhond, Biotechnology Division, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute



Dr. Aparna Islam (Country Manager, South Asia Biosafety Program), Dr. Andrew Roberts (Deputy Executive Director, ILSI Research Foundation), Mr. Kamalaranjan Das (Chief Guest, Additional Secretary - Research Wing, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh), Dr. M Shahidur Rahman Bhuiyan (Senior Food Security & Ag. Policy Advisor, Economic Growth Office, USAID Bangladesh), and Dr. Pradyumna Raj Pandey (Senior Program Specialist - Crops, SAARC Agriculture Centre), at the SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting on the Progress and Prospects of Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety in South Asia (June 18, 2019).

Over the last couple of years, South Asian conferences and meetings on biotechnology and biosafety have become instrumental in bringing biotechnology and biosafety professionals in the region together on a single platform. The recent *Regional Expert Consultation Meeting on the Progress and Prospects of Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety in South Asia* was no exception. The meeting was held on June 18-20, 2019, in a Dhaka hotel and was jointly organized by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh, ILSI Research Foundation, Washington, DC, USA, and the South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP). The joint sponsorship offered by SAC showed the importance the organization placed on issues relating to biotechnology and biosafety in the SAARC region.

Most of the South Asian countries, including those under SAARC, are deeply connected by a long heritage of shared culture and livelihood. The economic development of the countries is also connected and dependent to a large extent on the developments in agriculture. With the looming threat of a changing climate, the farmers of this region are

facing serious and interconnected challenges, including the constant threat of pests and diseases, increasingly severe consequences of global warming, other forms of environmental degradation and land use changes, which do not follow political boundaries. These challenges will require innovations in agricultural technology, including the development, deployment, and adoption of modern biotechnology, as well as the relevant policy reforms to accommodate changes brought about by the new technologies.

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Going back several years, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which came into force on December 29, 1993, clearly recognized the potential of modern biotechnology, and consequently sought to ensure that these technologies are developed with appropriate oversight, to safeguard biodiversity by its conservation and sustainable use. In 2000, to advance this goal and to provide a clear pathway for the safe development and deployment of biotechnology, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) to the CBD was finalized. Thus far, 171 countries, including the SAARC countries have ratified or acceded



Participants at the SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting (June 18, 2019).

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Dr. Andrew Roberts, giving a presentation at the SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting (June 18, 2019).



Dr. Aparna Islam, delivering a speech at the SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting (June 18, 2019).



Group photo of participants and speakers at the SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting (June 18, 2019).

to the Protocol. In line with the obligations under the Protocol, and their domestic needs, SAARC countries have subsequently developed their own national biosafety regime.

Considering the commonalities of livelihood, as well as the problems faced by the 2 billion people living in the SAARC region, it was felt that concerted efforts are required by scientists, agriculturalists, and policy makers to develop and deploy adaptive strategies to meet the upcoming needs of South Asia's farmers, and in this regard, the topic of the keynote lecture and the ensuing discussions were appropriate and timely.

It was evident from the presentations delivered by the participants from the SAARC countries that all the countries have already developed their own system of regulating the development and deployment of biotech crops. India and Pakistan have a long history of growing Bt cotton. Bangladesh has joined the club by releasing Bt eggplant for cultivation, having developed its own comprehensive biosafety regime beforehand. There are several areas common to these three countries' biosafety regulatory policies and hence, a little effort will be required to harmonize the system. The outcome of such harmonization will be greatly beneficial in reducing the time and effort for the development and deployment of future biotech

crops, especially during urgent situations, such as the introduction of wheat blast disease or the fall armyworm.

Representatives of countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal, who have yet to catch up on the technologies, showed great interest in learning from their neighbors' experiences and were happy to have the opportunity to directly interact with their South Asian colleagues. Harmonization of the policies might benefit these countries, and as such, an initiative will save a lot of time, money, and effort on their part, if and when they decide to adopt the products of modern biotechnology.

Bhutan's stand on not developing or introducing biotech crops for growing on their own soil at the moment but allowing the introduction or import of products derived from biotech crops for food, feed, and processing was interesting but quite logical from their perspective. However, the delegate was keen to know what their neighboring countries are thinking and doing. A greater understanding on the issues discussed in the meeting will surely help them with their future decisions and harmonization efforts.

Some of the participants, quite rightly, also emphasized the need for harmonization within the countries themselves, among different

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Speakers and guests at the inaugural ceremony of the SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting (June 18, 2019).

regulatory institutions and policies related to standardization, food safety, and quarantine regulations.

On the final day of the three-day meeting, participants had an opportunity to visit the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), located about 20 km from the hustle and bustle of the city. The delegates showed great interest in visiting several labs and enjoyed the opportunity to interact informally amongst themselves and to share their knowledge and experience with young scientists of the host institute.

During the conference, a need for harmonization of biotechnology and biosafety policies among the SAARC countries was felt and echoed by the representatives of all the participating countries.

During the conference, a need for harmonization of biotechnology and biosafety policies among the SAARC countries was felt and echoed by the representatives of all the participating countries. However, as the perception regarding the acceptability of biotech crops varies among different countries, any harmonization efforts should be cautious in its approach and should not be seen as being forced upon any particular country in accepting such technologies or crops *per se*.

IN THE PRESS

Focus on South Asian Cooperation to Ensure Regulation for GE Crops

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Experts at a meeting on Tuesday highly focused on regional cooperation among the South Asian countries to ensure biosafety and regulation for genetically engineered (GE) crops. The SAARC Regional Expert Consultation Meeting on the Progress and Prospects of Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety in South Asia was held at a city hotel. The SAARC Agriculture Centre (SAC), Dhaka, Bangladesh, South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP), Bangladesh, and the ILSI Research Foundation, USA jointly organized the event.

Speaking at the inauguration of the three-day program as the chief guest, Additional Secretary of the Agriculture Ministry (research wing), Kamalaranjan Das, said the country is now highly focusing on the safe and nutrition-rich food. He said incessant use of pesticide, followed by outbreak of many diseases, is a common problem now in traditional farming practices. The scientist and concerned researchers of the government research organisations should make a way forward to ensure safe food for people, he added. Close coordination, cooperation and knowledge sharing among the SAARC countries regarding biotechnology and biosafety could mutually benefit all the countries in the region, he said.

Senior Food Security and Agricultural Policy Advisor of USAID, Dr. M Shahidur Rahman Bhuiyan, said agriculture is facing serious and interconnected challenges, including the constant threat of pests and diseases, increasingly severe consequences of climate change, other forms of environmental degradation, and land use changes. He said that these challenges will require concerted efforts by scientists, agriculturalists, and policy makers to develop and deploy adaptive strategies to meet the needs of South Asia's farmers. He said innovations in agriculture, including the development and deployment of modern biotechnology, are essential to the success of these efforts.

Dr. Pradyumna Raj Pandey, Senior Program Specialist (crops) at SAARC Agriculture Centre, Dhaka, in his welcome address, said agriculture is increasingly a global enterprise, with the movement of produce, seeds, and commodities among the countries. This is providing an essential mechanism to ensure access to adequate food and nutrition, he said, adding that agricultural biotechnology can contribute to achieving food and nutritional security in an increasing trend in global trade. And for that, harmonization of the biosafety rules and regulation among the SAARC countries is needed, he said.

SABP Country Manager, Dr. Aparna Islam, said the consultation meeting aims to share information on the current status of agricultural biotechnology and biosafety regulations in South Asian countries. The program is expected to explore mechanisms to promote harmonization, including a regional biosafety platform, she mentioned.

"We will also identify areas where SAARC countries can adopt harmonized policies that will provide benefit to farmers and consumers through access to food and technologies," she added.

Deputy Executive Director of ILSI Research Foundation, Dr. Andrew F. Roberts, presented the keynote paper titled *Global Status and Need of Harmonization Biotechnology and Biosafety Framework* at the inauguration. Biotechnology and agricultural experts from SAARC nations like Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh are participating in the consultation meeting. Senior Program Specialist of SAARC Agriculture Centre (livestock), Dr. Ashis Kumar Samanta, coordinated the inauguration of the program.

Regional Workshop on Harmonization of Biosafety Regulatory Systems of South and Southeast Asia

Mr. Mohammed Solaiman Haider, Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bangladesh



Mr. Abdullah Al Mohsin Chowdhury, respected Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, speaking at the Workshop on Regional Harmonization of Biosafety Regulatory Systems of South and Southeast Asia (May 4, 2019). On the stage (from left): Dr. Alex Owusu-Biney, Portfolio Manager for Biosafety, UNEP-GEF, Dr. Sultan Ahmed, Director General, Department of Environment, Mr. MD Shahabuddin MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and Mr. Solaiman Haider, Director (Planing), Department of Environment.

The Workshop on Regional Harmonization of Biosafety Regulatory System was held on May 4-5, 2019 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The workshop was organized by the Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to enhance the capacity of the country to implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The workshop was an integral part of the implementation project supported by the UN Environment Program and Global Environment Facility (UNEP-GEF). Biosafety Expert Officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Philippines, and Vietnam participated in the workshop. The workshop discussed and consolidated the issues of harmonization of biosafety regulatory systems among the countries of the South and Southeast Asian regions.

The opening session of the workshop was graced by the Chief Guest, Mr. MD Shahabuddin MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Environment,

Forest and Climate Change, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Mr. Abdullah Al Mohsin Chowdhury, respected Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was the Special Guest.

Country participants from the South and Southeast Asian regions presented developments in terms of the biosafety regulation system in their respective countries and also pointed out the areas of regional harmonization.

Country participants from the South and Southeast Asian regions presented developments in terms of the biosafety regulation system in their respective countries and also pointed out the areas of regional harmonization. At the end of the two days, delegates recommended that a regional mechanism of exchanging information on biosafety regulations, risk assessment, and risk management should be created, which would enable countries to interact with each other. In this regard, development of a regional Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) was recommended. In addition, capacity building on biosafety risk assessment and management was recommended to strengthen the capabilities of the countries in the region.



Participants at the Workshop on Regional Harmonization of Biosafety Regulatory Systems of South and Southeast Asia (May 4, 2019).

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

EVENT	ORGANIZED BY	DATE	WEBSITE
BANGLADESH			
7 th Annual South Asia Biosafety Conference	South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP), ILSI Research Foundation, and Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL)	September 14-16, 2019 Dhaka	http://sabc.biotech.co.in
14 th Asia-Pacific Biosafety Conference: Biosafety & Biosecurity for Sustainable Development in Health and Agriculture	Asia Pacific Biosafety Association (A-PBA)	September 17-20, 2019 Dhaka	https://www.a-pba.org
INDIA			
International Conference on Plant Protection in Horticulture – Advances and Challenges	Association for Advancement of Pest Management in Horticultural Ecosystems; ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru; National Institute of Plant Health Management, Hyderabad; Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi	July 24-27, 2019 Bengaluru	https://icar.org.in/sites/default/files/ICPPH%202019-Final%20circular.pdf
3 rd Annual AgriBiotech India Summit 2019	Inventicon Business Intelligence	July 25-26, 2019 Hyderabad	https://agribiotechindia.com
Seed World 2019	Indian Council of Food and Agriculture	September 4-7, 2019 Bengaluru	http://icfa.org.in/event.php
2 nd International Conference on Recent Advances in Agricultural, Environmental & Applied Sciences for Global Development	Agro Environmental Development Society (AEDS) and Dr. Y. S. Parmar University of Horticulture & Forestry	September 27-29, 2019 Nauni, Solan, Himachal Pradesh	http://www.yspuniversity.ac.in/trainings/Conference_Brochure__Solan.pdf
INTERNATIONAL			
6 th Plant Genomics and Gene Editing Congress	University of Nottingham and Crops for the Future	July 29-30, 2019 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	http://www.isaaa.org/kc/cropbiotechupdate/article/default.asp?ID=17364 and http://www.global-engage.com/event/plant-genomics-asia/#register
Course: Basic Laboratory Training on GMO Analysis	International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) and National Biotechnology Development Agency, Abuja, Nigeria	September 15-21, 2019 Abuja, Nigeria	https://www.icgeb.org/courses/course-basic-laboratory-training-on-gmo-analysis/



SOUTH ASIA
BIOSAFETY PROGRAM

The South Asia Biosafety Program (SABP) is an international developmental program implemented in India and Bangladesh with support from the United States Agency for International Development. SABP aims to work with national governmental agencies and other public sector partners to facilitate the implementation of transparent, efficient, and responsive regulatory frameworks for products of modern biotechnology that meet national goals as regards the safety of novel foods and feeds, and environmental protection.


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