

Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

Precaution in Progress

Doreen Stabinsky, PhD
Greenpeace International
College of the Atlantic

Background – what's the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB)?

- Global rules for international trade in GMOs
- Protocol to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity
- International agreement that GMOs (referred to as LMOs in the Protocol) constitute novel risk to the environment that must be regulated independently
- Finalized in 2000, after collapse of talks the year before. Entry into force in 2003.

Why might you want to be cautious about GMOs in international trade?

- There are potential ecological effects of GMOs, which will vary from country to country
- Persistence of GMOs in the environment – living organisms that can reproduce and spread
- Possible human health impacts

Major sticking points in negotiations were around three topics:

- documentation to accompany GMOs in international trade
- relationship with other agreements (i.e., WTO)
- precaution

The CPB includes two tracks for decisionmaking on GMOs/LMOs

- AIA – prior informed consent procedure – for intentional introduction into the environment
- LMOs for food or feed, or for processing (i.e., not for deliberate environmental release)

What does the precautionary principle language look like in the CPB?

- Preamble and Objective (Article 1) reference the precautionary approach contained in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration
- Article 10.6 (Decision procedure) or 11.7 (Procedure for LMOs intended for direct use as food or feed, or for processing)
 - **Lack of scientific certainty** due to insufficient relevant scientific information and knowledge **regarding the extent of the potential adverse effects** of a living modified organism on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in the Party of import, taking also into account risks to human health, **shall not prevent that Party from taking a decision**, as appropriate, **with regard to the import of that living modified organism** intended for direct use as food or feed, or for processing, **in order to avoid or minimize such potential adverse effects.**

Socio-economic impacts may also be considered in decision making

Article 26.1:

The Parties, in reaching a decision on import under this Protocol or under domestic measures implementing the Protocol, may take into account, consistent with their international obligations, socio-economic considerations arising from the impact of living modified organisms on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, especially with regard to the value of biological diversity to indigenous and local communities.

Why is the CPB significant?

- Explicit, broad precautionary language
- Recognizes GMOs as posing unique risks
- Recent implementing decision requires precise documentation of GMOs in international shipments
- Enables rejection of specific GMOs

A few further points...

- Southern countries were key leaders in the fight for the precautionary principle language
- A number of countries beyond the usual suspects are taking precautionary action on GMOs, for example, South Africa, Zambia, and Poland
- Some serious concerns remain unaddressed, such as GE corn in Mexico. Recent train spill in Veracruz state demonstrates continuing risks to this important center of corn diversity.

Take home lessons from the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety