

Civil Society Participation in Algeria's Biosafety Process

With the coming into force of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which regulates the transboundary movement of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), there is a high level of demand for consultancy services to help implement the provisions of the protocol at national level.

Against the background of the planned commercial production of genetically modified wheat in Canada and the USA (main wheat exporters to Algeria), the Algerian Government through the Ministry of Agriculture imposed a ban on the import, dissemination, marketing and utilisation of genetically modified plants or parts thereof on 24 December 2000. Scientific work with genetically modified plants is still permissible but requires official authorisation. The Ministry of Agriculture justified this precautionary measure as an effort to avoid polluting indigenous plant genetic resources through outcrossing of foreign genetic material, and secondly as a way of protecting organic farming.

In addition to this ban concerning agriculture, a law on the regulation of GMOs is currently drafted. The 2001 National Environmental Report did provide for the establishment of an institutional system for dealing with genetically modified organisms. This report explicitly called on all parts of society to take part in the process. There has, however, been little public debate on the use of genetically modified organisms in recent years, and most NGOs working in the fields of the environment, consumer protection and agriculture have limited knowledge of this topic.

The cooperation with the Algerian NGO AREA-ED (Association de Réflexion, d'Échanges et d'Ac-



Photo: al-Janabi

tions pour l'Environnement et le Développement) is to improve the information work in the field of biosafety, and boost the influence of civil society on the development of a national biosafety system. AREA-ED is a member of the international NGO desertification network (RIOD) and operates as the Head Office of this network for North Africa. AREA-ED is also home to

the Algerian office of the international network on rural women and development (DIMITRA). One of its main instruments is the Environmental Documentation and Information Centre (CDIE), which supplies individual members of the Algerian NGO network with regular information by e-mail, fax and letter. The main office is also a point of contact for the media and interested members of the general public.

Within the scope of a two-year project, an internet-based documentation system comprising all relevant information is being set up, as is a national information network. National and regional seminars are being held for multipliers and decision-makers, and strategies developed to improve lobby work in the field of shaping the national framework for biosafety. AREA-ED is to participate in international conferences on biosafety in order to gain more experience and establish contacts, and to present the project and its results.

Biodiversity and the Convention on Biodiversity

The term "biological diversity", or short "biodiversity", encompasses the diversity of life on earth, ranging from genetic diversity and diversity of species to the diversity of ecosystems. The Convention on Biodiversity adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 comprises three elements: the conservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use and the equitable distribution of benefits arising from its use. In the meantime, 187 countries and the European Union have joined the Convention. By signing the Convention, Germany has agreed not only to conserve biodiversity on its own territory but also to support developing countries in implementing necessary measures.

Project tasks:

Setting up an Information Network

Various activities and media are to be used to establish a network of NGOs, and thus strengthen the position of civil society groups.

Information Work

Different instruments and media are to be used to disseminate the opinions of non-governmental actors and launch a dialogue with decision-makers at national and international level. With the help of the AREA-ED documentation centre, information on biotechnol-

ogy and biosafety are also to be made available to interested members of the general public. Information material is to be produced in Arabic, and made available to a wide group of individuals.

Capacity Building

AREA-ED experts and other staff members of the NGOs involved in the project will be up-graded in the field of biosafety, with special emphasis on risk analysis and management, the precautionary approach and liability issues.

Project data

GTZ 2004

Project title: Civil Society Participation in Algeria's Biosafety Process – An individual measure within the framework of the convention project "Implementing the Biodiversity Convention"

Duration of the project: 2 years

Course of the project: First contacts between AREA-ED and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) exist since a workshop on intellectual property rights and genetically modified organisms which took place in Cameroon in 1999. The project proposal was received by the convention project "Implementing the Biodiversity Convention" in June 2001. After the positive appraisal through the Advisory Committee of the convention project, a project appraisal mission as well as a planning workshop was conducted in April 2002. On this basis, a work proposal was prepared and submitted to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The Ministry commissioned GTZ with implementing the project in February 2003. Thereupon, the relevant contracts were agreed so that the work of the project could start in August 2003. The first planned activities such as workshops already took place. The project will presumably be concluded in mid 2005.

The project "Implementing the Biodiversity Convention" is being conducted by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

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