



Knowledge Café Guyana – Access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing

Background

The LAC ABS Project included knowledge Cafés to allow for national dialogue on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing. The knowledge cafés are intended to be a meeting, workshop or discussion forum with a flexible format to allow a group of people to have an open, respectful and creative conversation on a topic of mutual interest, in this case the ABS. It aims at creating an environment to share knowledge, ideas and opinions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

Knowledge Cafés in the LAC ABS Project should:

- Promote technical understanding through discussion and in-depth analysis of concepts;
- Explore areas of mutual interest among the issues addressed by the LAC ABS Project (Access to Genetic Resources, Benefit Sharing, Traditional Knowledge, Intellectual Property Rights, International Relations and Negotiation, among others);
- Facilitate making new contacts and rekindle existing relationships among stakeholders;
- Involve stakeholders in the different stages of the project in order to maximize their intervention and cooperation;
- Promote interaction among the participants, the presentation of different points of view, and stakeholder relations before, during and after the event;
- Generate interest in ABS among young professionals; and,
- Share experiences and explore possible partnerships.

Any knowledge Café on ABS in Guyana must incorporate the following key facts related to ABS in Guyana:

- Guyana belongs to the high forest cover, low deforestation rate countries and has high biodiversity.

- Approx. 11% of the population of Guyana is Amerindian, with ~14% of Guyana's landmass being titled Amerindian lands. Amerindians have a critical role in discussions related to Access and Benefit Sharing.
- There are a number of Amerindian NGOs and a National Toshao Council responsible for liaising with Amerindian communities to promote community development, mainly through projects.
- Guyana has a formalized permitting system for biodiversity research and filming aspects of ABS through the CBD focal point. There has however been no application for bio-prospecting related commercial activities.
- There is limited industrial activity in Guyana, particularly in sectors related to genetic resources. There is only one local pharmaceutical company in Guyana.
- National consultations on ABS in Guyana occurred in 2005 and resulted in the drafting of the National ABS Policy and subsequently the draft ABS Regulations. Since then, however, very little national dialogue on ABS has transpired. There is therefore a need to resuscitate national dialogue on ABS and to hold discussions on the general direction that ABS should take in Guyana.

Planned Activities

Bearing the mind the current situation of ABS in Guyana, the following Knowledge Café sessions will create the best results:

Date	Knowledge Café /Public Awareness Sessions	Target Group	Main Intended Outcomes
November 27, 2012	Panel discussion or round table with two speakers	Amerindian NGO's and Groups, Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, Pharmaceutical Companies, Government representatives, Environmental NGOs and National Tshaos Council.	General Discussion on ABS and its applicability to Indigenous Knowledge

November 27, 2012	Keynote Lecture	National Biosafety Steering Committee which comprises of scientific, Environmental NGOs and Business Community	ABS in Guyana
November 28, 2012	Panel discussion on the general national direction of ABS in Guyana	Biosafety Steering Committee, National Council, Toshaos Government Representatives and Opposition Representatives, Private Sector Representatives	An outlined direction of ABS in Guyana
November 29, 2012	Press Conference	Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, EPA, and Media	Government of Guyana's focus on ABS in Guyana

Table 1 Outline of proposed Knowledge Café Sessions in Guyana

The knowledge cafés will be conducted in two phases: phase 1 which would be held on November 27, 2012 is intended to initiate discussions on ABS, bio-prospecting and bio-piracy; phase 2, to be concluded with a press conference will consist of a Knowledge Café intended to result in strategic discussion on a proposed direction of ABS in Guyana.

The November 27, 2012 panel discussion will focus on bringing important discussions to bear on ABS, its importance, and current issues and challenges related to ABS in Amerindian communities in Guyana. There will be a discussion on community rules related to ABS and seeking to establish commonalities within those rules.

The implementation of separate ABS and biotechnology/biosafety activities in Guyana would result in overlaps. Since a National Biosafety Steering Committee is being developed for the Caribbean Biosafety Project, these Committee members of the Biosafety Steering Committee could be the target of any ABS-related discussion. The session on the afternoon of November 27, 2012 would begin with a presentation on ABS and Bioprospecting in Guyana, with a follow-on discussion of national implications for Guyana. Feedback from Committee members is anticipated in order to have linkage between the science and business.

The final Knowledge Café on November 28, 2012 will be to create consensus on a proposed national direction for ABS in Guyana.

Conclusion

The planned knowledge café sessions are structured in two phases: the first phase focusing on reactivating discussions on ABS issues in Guyana and the second phase is intended to develop a strategic direction of ABS in Guyana. A Press Conference will be held to divulge information to the public on the ABS and the focus of the Government of Guyana on ABS issues.

ANNEX 1 – Photographs



Photo 1: Knowledge Café Guyana



Photo 2: Knowledge Café related to Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit-Sharing