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## “Rules governing bio-safety aspects are inadequate”

Special Correspondent

*Concern over lack of public participation in policy-making*

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*‘Rules governing import, storage of hazardous micro-organisms are inadequate’*

*‘There are no district level Bio-technology Coordination Committees in any State’*

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JAIPUR: Civil society organisations working on the food security issues here have expressed concern over what they describe as lack of public participation in policy-making on bio-safety in India in the run-up to the international conference of the signatories to the Cartagena Protocol on Bio-safety to be held in Bonn, Germany, from May 12 to 16.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety – the first international regulatory framework for safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms – addresses the potential for harm of genetic engineering on the environment and human health. India signed and ratified the protocol in January 2003.

Bio-diversity activist and secretary of the Jaipur-based Centre for Community Economics and Development Consultants’ Society (CECOEDECON), Sharad Joshi, said here on Saturday that the rules governing the aspects such as use, import and storage of hazardous micro-organisms and genetically engineered organisms in the country were inadequate to address the protocol’s mandate.

### Right to safe food

CECOEDECON is one of the members of the Save Food Coalition campaigning for the right to safe food as a fundamental right and working for public awareness, capacity building and advocacy on the subject. The coalition is supported by the groups such as the Gene Campaign, Food Trade and Nutrition Alliance-Asia and Pairvi.

Mr. Joshi said there was an “ambiguity” in the roles assigned to various agencies formed under the rules for handling matters pertaining to genetically modified organisms and some of them existed merely on paper “with no implementation at the ground level”.

While the State Bio-technology Coordination Committees have been constituted only in three States, there are no district level committees in any State. Mr. Joshi said there was no mechanism in place to promote education and participation, incorporate socio-economic considerations and provide for an effective liability and redress regime.

Mr. Joshi will attend a parallel conference on “Planet diversity” focusing on the future of the local, diverse and genetic modification-free food and farming on the sidelines of the Bonn

conference on the Cartagena Protocol as a representative of grassroots farmers in Rajasthan.

### Protocol

While the official conference will review the implementation of the protocol, the parallel event will highlight the miseries of farmers caused by GM technology and the threat posed by it to bio-diversity and livelihoods of millions of people. Mr. Joshi said he would raise the issue of “reckless introduction” of GM seeds during the conference. Mr. Joshi pointed out that India was still far from developing any liability regulatory framework under the Cartagena Protocol.

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