



ICGEB RECEIVES GRANT FROM THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION TO STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND BIOSAFETY SYSTEMS IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

Grant Aims To Help African Regulatory Bodies Ensure Safety Of Crop Biotechnology

The International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) today announced a US \$3 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help support the development of effective safety and regulatory systems for biotechnology in Africa. The project will focus on improving training, information and other support to regionally-based specialists so African countries have the opportunity to safely access scientific advances.

The project will assist governments and scientists in the Region, to support the implementation of reliable regulatory systems that follow recognized international guidelines to protect consumers and the environment. The project's goals align with recommendations in a recent report by the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which highlight the need for Africa to develop scientific capacity to assess and regulate biotechnology and inform policies.

"The ICGEB is honoured to be entrusted with the implementation of this project supported by the Gates Foundation," said Decio Ripandelli, Director of External Relations and Head of the Biosafety Unit at the Centre. "This grant highlights the importance of building capacity in Africa to properly regulate the use of biotechnology and demonstrates the integrity of the ICGEB in this field, which is committed to the credible use of science."

Working primarily out of its new Cape Town facility, the ICGEB will create regional focal points on biosafety from where expert personnel will organize practical workshops responding to the needs of scientists and representatives of National Competent Authorities (NCAs) in the region. The project will also offer fellowships for a one-year residential Masters of Science course in biosafety, and provide funds to encourage the participation of African biosafety experts in regional and international conferences in order to support their development and foster links with the international scientific community. ICGEB is actively encouraging African women to become involved in all aspects of the project.

"African leaders have highlighted the need for appropriate policies and regulations to ensure the safety and effectiveness of biotechnology," said Dr. Rajiv Shah, Director of Agricultural Development, Global Development Program for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "This project will bolster those efforts so African regulators, farmers and consumers can make informed choices about how to build healthy, productive lives."

The foundation's Agricultural Development initiative is focused on helping small farmers – most of whom are women – increase their yields and incomes so they can lift themselves and their families out of hunger and poverty. The foundation is working with partners on efforts across the entire agricultural value chain – from seeds and soil to farm management and market access –

with the goal of helping small farmers access the tools and opportunities they need to improve their lives.

The ICGEB approach aimed at promoting the safe and sustainable use of biotechnology is in line with these efforts: the grant will be used to build upon work already underway at the Centre, and could represent a first step towards other initiatives at the global level through extension to other areas of the world such as southern Asia.

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The International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) is an intergovernmental organization, established within the United Nations system to provide the developing world with a centre of excellence for research and training in genetic engineering and biotechnology, focused on solving some of the major problems affecting health, nutrition, agriculture and industrial development. The ICGEB operates since 1987 through its three Components located in Trieste (Italy), New Delhi (India) and Cape Town (South Africa). To date, the ICGEB Statutes, i.e. the international treaty establishing the Organization, have been signed by 77 Governments and ratified by 57 Member States. Further information at <http://www.icgeb.org>

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people – especially those with the fewest resources – have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Patty Stonesifer and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.