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CPI/44

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Vienna, 25 June, 2003

How can biotechnology benefit Latin America and the Caribbean?

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization – UNIDO and the Government of Brazil are inviting the region's major biotechnology players to a three-day workshop in Brasilia, Brazil, 22 – 25 July 2003.

Formally announced as the *Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Consultative Meeting*, the event will give an opportunity for regional biotechnology constraints and opportunities to be addressed by Latin America and the Caribbean and international experts and prioritized on the basis of social and economic benefits that the technology can bring to the region.

The Brasilia meeting is the second of four regional meetings in preparation for the UNIDO *Global Biotechnology Forum*, which will be held in Concepción, Chile, March 2-5, 2004.

Biotechnology in the region faces a dilemma. On the one hand, the region has an immense wealth of natural resources and significant scientific and technological capacities to take advantage of biotechnology. On the other hand, the extent of natural wealth (megadiversity) makes the risk / benefit analysis more complex. *The Cancun Declaration of Like-Minded Megadiversity Countries*, introduced in February 2002, elaborates the concerns of the signatories (eight of the 14 signatories are in LAC). The Declaration both recognizes "the urgent need to develop human resources, institutional capabilities, as well as an appropriate legal framework and public policies to enable our countries to take an active part in the new economy associated with the use of biological diversity, genetic resources and biotechnology" and at the same time expresses concern "over the limitations of various international instruments to protect effectively the legitimate interests of the countries of origin of biodiversity".

In addressing what the biotechnology has to offer the region and the major challenges ahead, the Brasilia meeting will look specifically at issues relating to biodiversity, biosafety and intellectual property rights (IPR), the effects of trade and economic integration treaties in technology transfer and the kind of funding mechanisms needed to mobilize the required resources.

Participants will include prominent policy makers and representatives of the scientific and technical community, consumer and environmental organizations, farmers, agro-industrial firms and the technological inputs industry.

The conclusions and proposals of the Brasilia meeting will be analysed in their global context and will provide guidance for the deliberations of the Global Biotechnology Forum 2004.

More information on the LAC Regional meeting is at [http://binas.unido.org/global_forum/html/LAC - complete document.pdf](http://binas.unido.org/global_forum/html/LAC-complete_document.pdf).

the Global Biotechnology Forum is at <http://www.unido.org/biotech>.