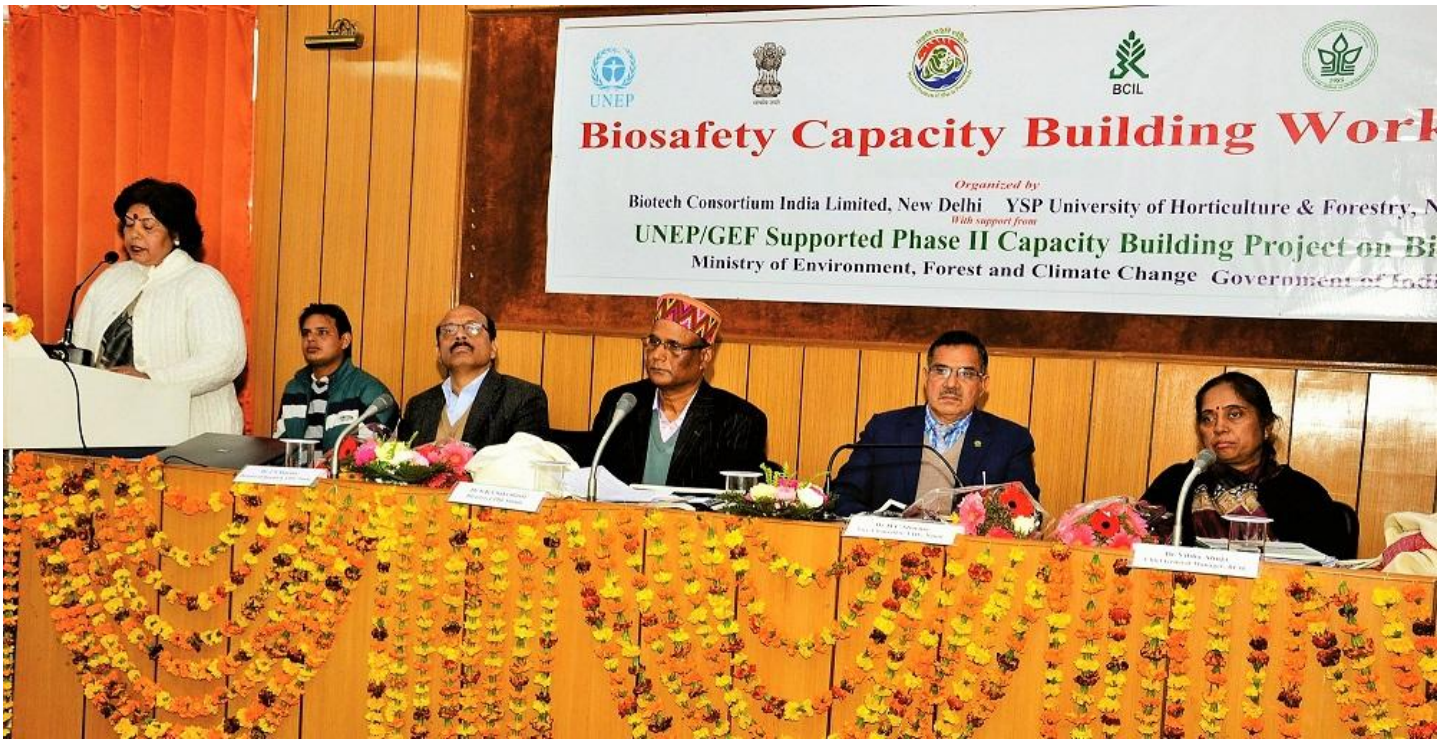
State Level Biosafety Capacity Building Workshop

• Over 100 attend State Level Biosafety Capacity Building Workshop

A 'State Level Biosafety Capacity Building Workshop' was jointly organised by the Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry (UHF) and Biotech Consortium India Limited (BCIL) at the university campus at Nauni. The event was held under the UNEP/GEF supported Phase II Capacity Building Project on Biosafety, being implemented by Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC), GOI.

Dr HC Sharma, Vice Chancellor of UHF, inaugurated the workshop. Various technical sessions on topics related to introduction to GE plants, biosafety regulations, safety aspects and detection of LMOsetc. were taken up by experts during the event. Some eminent speakers including Dr SK Chakrabarti, Director CPRI; Dr B. Dinesh Kumar, Head of Department of Drug and Toxicology Division, NIN Hyderabad; Dr OP Govila, Former Professor of Genetics IARI; Dr AjitDua, CEO Punjab Biotechnology Incubator and Dr Murali Krishna, Joint Director MoEFCC addressed the participants. Over 100 students, researchers and extension specialists from all departments of the university attended the workshop.



Dr Vibha Ahuja, Chief General Manager, BCIL explained that the workshop is aimed at disseminating project outcomes developed under the Capacity Building Project on Biosafety implemented by MoEFCC. She informed that several resource documents and outreach material have been developed under the project, some of which has also been translated in local languages with copies of Biosafety Resource Kit distributed among the participants.

In his address, Dr Chakrabarti opined that Biotechnology was a most powerful tool for meeting the food security needs of the nation. However, biotech products have to be subjected to biosafety regulations before their commercial exploitation. He added that India has an active biotech research and effective biosafety regulations in place and it was extremely important for all stakeholders to be aware of biosafety regulations in order to harness the benefits of the technology in a safe and sustainable manner.

“Genetic modification is the basis of evolution. The modern-day genetics has a wide application in healthcare and agriculture. Commonly used products such as insulin, Hepatitis B vaccines, several bio drugs are produced by genetically modified organisms. The products derived from GE crops have been widely consumed all over the world for more than 20 years without any report of adverse effects. India has also greatly benefitted from the introduction of Bt. Cotton,” said Dr HC Sharma.

He emphasized on the need for communication by scientists for creating awareness about their research and towards facilitating acceptance of GM crops in the country.

“Research and development initiatives in agriculture biotechnology need to be continued and safety ensured at every stage as per regulatory requirements for acceptance within the society,” added Dr Sharma.

Dr JN Sharma, UHF Director of Research, also spoke on the important issues related to the topic. Other speakers at the workshop also felt that there was a need for continuous capacity building initiatives for scientists to be able to adhere to the regulatory framework towards commercialization of biotech products. They believed that there are some concerns among the public in accepting GM crops specifically for human consumption and the scientific community needed to come forward to allay these fears. Such initiatives would help in providing factual information for addressing these concerns.