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**“IMPLEMENTING THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON  
BIOSAFETY IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:  
EARLY LESSONS LEARNED FROM CAMEROON”**

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**ABSTRACT**

The international community is faced today with the responsibility of implementing and enforcing more than 500 MEAs, of which approximately 300 are regional and nearly 60 per cent have been in existence only since the Stockholm Conference in 1972

This growing body of MEAs suffers from the inability or unwillingness to implement and enforce them. Implementation and enforcement in developing countries are often made difficult by a lack of financial and human resources, the sheer volume and complexity of associated obligations and responsibilities, inconsistency in implementation regimes between countries, and occasionally a lack of political will. One of the most important MEAs in the area of biotechnology today is the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. Parties to this protocol have clear cut obligations that can be organized in the following categories:

- Administrative tasks (initial and future)
- Legal requirements and/or undertakings
- Procedural requirements (AIA and Article 11)

There is the urgent need to for developing countries to share experiences and lessons learned in their implementation efforts so as move forward.

Cameroon is one of the richest countries in the Congo Basin in terms of biodiversity. As an independent sub-Saharan African country, it is faced with the challenge of balancing economic development with the conservation of her rich biodiversity. Cameroon is peculiar in the sub-region not only for its biodiversity, but also for the rich cultural diversity. As an independent African country Cameroon has been active on the international arena in negotiating and signing many Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Cameroon ratified the Cartegena Protocol in January 2002. This ratification was followed by LAW NO 2003/006 OF APRIL 21 2003 ON BIOSAFETY. This law is based on the Precautionary Principle and it governs the

safety, development, use including contained use, manipulation and cross border movement, including the transit of any genetically modified organism that may negatively affect human and animal health, biodiversity and the environment.

The key highlights of this law are that, it is based on the precautionary principle and it equally takes into consideration the socio-cultural concerns as far risk assessment is concerned. One thing that is very obvious in Cameroon today is that the Cartagena Protocol is one of those MEAs that Cameroon has actively participated in its negotiations as well as implementation efforts. However it is clear from her experience that, there are still many issues that need to be addressed for its effective implementation. The efforts that have been made so far are an indication of the political will that is present for its effective implementation. As the only country in the Central African sub-region that has gone this far in implementing the Cartagena Protocol, Cameroon has faced some practical challenges and has learned some lessons that will be useful for her neighbours that are still in the early stages of putting in place their biosafety frameworks. The issues that have to be addressed include the nature of the National Biosafety Committee, the Biosafety Clearing House, Public Education and the need to avoid the abuse of the Precautionary Principle.