

Project Overview

The 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) prohibits the acquisition or retention of biological weapons. It has become established practice for States Parties to the BWC to meet every five years to review the operation of the Convention, taking into account new S&T developments relevant to the Convention. The next Review Conference is in December 2011.

Especially in the last ten years, concerns about the rapid progress of S&T and changes in the security environment are leading to calls to reform the current way in which S&T change is taken into account.

This project seeks to understand the current processes used to review S&T developments relevant for the BWC and how reviewing S&T relates to the operational effectiveness of the regime. The project will assess existing proposals on how to improve the S&T review process, assessing their acceptability with members of relevant networks to see whether any could feasibly be employed to improve the process. The project will end in April 2012.

Project Methods

- A 5-country comparative case study mapping the current processes used at the national level to author papers for the BWC Review Conference on S&T developments relevant to the Convention;
- Bibliometric analysis of the scientific and technical networks of 5 marker technologies of particular concern to BWC States Parties;
- Interviews with government scientists; policy makers and diplomats, scientific leaders, industry colleagues;
- Questionnaire to ~200 science and technology leaders and members of BW policy networks to gain views on how S&T should be reviewed within the BWC context;
- Mismatch analysis of actual vs intended vs desired role for S&T reviews with the BWC context.

The Team

The project is being conducted by an interdisciplinary team of researchers based at SPRU, University of Sussex.

The team is being led by Caitríona McLeish and Paul Nightingale with support from two Postdoctoral Fellows, James Revill & Kai Ilchmann.

Project Phases

Phase One

Conduct a comparative case study of the processes used in five countries to author papers for the BWC Review Conference on S&T developments.

Phase Two

Produce case studies of marker technologies. Engage with authors of national S&T review papers. Compare and contrast authors' perceptions of key technologies with the views of other stakeholder groups.

Phase Three

Assess proposals and other options for improving the S&T review. In-depth interviews with members of policy community and distribute questionnaire to relevant stakeholders.

Phase Four

Refine findings from the project through further stakeholder engagement. Disseminate analysis of review options and other results through workshops hosted by team and other conferences.

Deliverables

Briefing Notes tailored to the policy community on marker technologies and options for reform.
Peer reviewed articles on the role of scientific advice; accommodation of technical change in international law etc
Conference papers and presentations.