



NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency  
Agence de Planification et de Coordination du NEPAD

# ABNE | African Biosafety Network of Expertise

A science-based biosafety resource network for African regulators

Newsletter 5: July 2013

## Director's message

It gives me great pleasure to present this new issue of the ABNE Newsletter. The AU/ NEPAD Agency African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE)'s mandate is to build functional biosafety systems in Africa. The ABNE biosafety services are growing each year. We received commendation by our midterm reviewers and our mid-review confirmed the fact that we maintained our credibility through fact-based neutrality.

The newsletter is one of the many ways we communicate about our services with stakeholders and partners. This issue of the ABNE Newsletter provides information on how "seeing-is-believing" or study tours to small-scale holdings with genetically engineered crops have impact on our policy makers, regulators and other stakeholders. In addition, this newsletter includes the progress in Malawi on the confined field trial of insect-resistant transgenic cotton; the coordination meeting of biosafety service providers in Africa held in Ghana; the kick-off event for the John Templeton Foundation grant to ABNE; photo gallery; ABNE new staff and upcoming events.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter –  
*Diran Makinde, Ph.D., ABNE Director*

## Uganda members of Parliament participate in "seeing-is-believing" tour of biotech farms in South Africa

Policymakers from Uganda's Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology participated in a "seeing-is-believing" tour of biotech farms in South Africa in March 2013. The delegation comprised of 20 honorable members of Parliament (MPs) and 5 technical staff members were led by the chairman, Hon. Obua

Denis Hamson and his vice-chairman Hon. Eng. Kafeero Ssekitoleko Robert. Also accompanying the team in this benchmarking trip were Dr. Maxwell Otim Onapa, deputy executive secretary, UNCST; and ABNE's staff members, Dr. James A. Okeno, business manager; Ms. Betty Kiplagat, senior program officer of legal aspects of biosafety; and Ms. Oumou Barry, programme assistant.

The objectives of the tour were to provide a platform for the MPs to gain knowledge and experience from the functional and robust South African regulatory system, provide an opportunity for the MPs to interface with small scale farmers who are benefiting from growing biotech crops, and empower MPs with relevant information to support the debate on Uganda's biosafety bill.



*Chairman Hon. Obua Denis (second right) flanked by farmers Motlatsi Musi and Alfred Skhosana (third and fourth right), Dr. James A. Okeno of ABNE (center), Dr. Nompumelelo Obokoh of AfricaBio (left) and other delegates in a Bt maize field in Pretoria, March 2013.*

During presentations, the MPs raised a number of public health-related concerns with regard to biotechnology, and further asserted biotech is the preserve of multinational companies, and the proposed biosafety bill would simply promote their interests. Responding to some of the concerns and misperceptions, Dr. Raphesu Mamabolo, President of the African Farmers Association of South

Africa (AFASA) stated that some people have not only ignored the truths about biotechnology, but also opted for false propaganda. He made a passionate appeal to the legislators asking them to seek the welfare of Ugandans, *especially those producing food to be given a chance to apply scientific innovations.*

While at the Bt maize fields, the legislators were overwhelmed not only by the sight of maize cobs lined up with healthy-looking kernels (seeds), but also hearing the farmers declare it is no longer a question of safety but of choice for them to grow biotech crops in South Africa. This pronouncement seemingly resonated powerfully in the ears of the delegates in that a number of them, including those in doubt, not only *put their hands on the cobs to touch and believe*, but also put kernels into their mouths to taste and believe.

The team also visited a Bt cotton farm in Matlerekeng village, in the Limpopo Province. The farmer, Mr. Francis Malela, gave a detailed account of growing Bt cotton, starting from a 6ha field and upscaling to 74ha. Asked to state in a nutshell why he grows Bt cotton, Mr. Malela responded, *“Reduced labor expense ... reduced number of sprays (only twice against sucking pests), reduced time spent in the field, and better yield, at times it doubles.”*

He informed the delegates that conventional cotton is no longer planted except as refuge. He explained he plants 95 percent of his fields with Bt cotton and 5 percent refuge. Pressed by the delegates to state his profit margin (i.e., after taking care of the cost of seed, labor and other production inputs), Mr. Malela revealed that the profit margin per ha, depending on good management practices, could range from 3000-5000 Rands (approximately US \$330 to 550). An MP, who had not been hiding his displeasure with the technology from the start of the tour insisting it is promoting a multinational agenda, joined a colleague in a ‘thumbs-up’ approval for Bt cotton. Admitting his conversion, he remarked, *“Seeing this Bt cotton, I think this is the way to go, even for Uganda ... it will result in increased income for our farmers.”* He further pronounced, *“What convinces me most is the high yield on the whole cotton crop, which seems less prone to insect attack.”*

He divulged that increased income for farmers will lead to a reliable and sustainable development, which is linked to government policy.

Commenting later on the success of the farm visits, Hon. Obua stated that as a nation Uganda has no choice but to adopt biotechnology. He reiterated that the role of his committee is not to defend the science of biotechnology, but rather to ensure that the biosafety bill is enacted by Parliament. He further explained that his committee’s role after the tour is to write a comprehensive report, present it on the floor of Parliament and stress the importance of passing the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill 2012 for regulating biotechnology. He hoped scientists from NARO, UNCST, UBBC and other like-minded institutions would assume their rightful responsibility and take a proactive approach to communicate the relevance of biotechnology to positively influence debate on biosafety.

At the end of the tour, Hon. Obua remarked, *“We have come, seen and believed.”* He deemed the mission successful and thanked the NEPAD Agency/ABNE for sponsorship. Dr. Otim Onapa said the enactment of the biosafety bill is very dear to UNCST and called the success of the tour a pointer in that direction. Dr. Okeno thanked the delegates for their availability and applauded Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, CEO NEPAD Agency and Prof. Diran Makinde, Director ABNE for approving the trip despite the short notice. Dr. Obokoh, CEO AfricaBio thanked the delegates for choosing South Africa and hailed ABNE for partnering with AfricaBio and Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) in facilitating the tour.

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## Malawi commences confined field trials with transgenic cotton and joins other African countries growing biotech crops

Malawi passed its Biosafety Act in 2002, developed Biosafety Regulations and Guidelines in 2007 and approved a national Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy in 2008. The first Bt cotton application for confined field trial (CFT) was submitted in early 2009 and approved for CFT in 2011. However, it was not until Jan. 4, 2013 that the first CFT at Bunda College was planted with transgenic cotton.

ABNE, in collaboration with the Environmental Affairs Department (EAD) of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Management, organized a training

workshop in Lilongwe from February 26-28, 2013 for strengthening competencies of inspectors in biosafety, monitoring and compliance of CFTs. The workshop provided an overview of best practices in site and facility monitoring, inspection and compliance of crops, offering hands-on training on the safe conduct and management of CFTs, and identifying areas of technical cooperation and mapping out systems for effective technical backstopping for Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBCs) in the conduct of CFTs. Overall, 23 participants were trained through this workshop.



*A section of participants at inspectors' training visit Bt cotton CFT site at Bunda College, Lilongwe, Malawi, February 2013.*

At the official opening of the workshop, the director of environmental affairs, Dr. Aloysius Kamperewera, thanked the NEPAD Agency/ABNE for their financial and technical support. He opined that the training was timely, enabling Malawian inspectors to acquire the required expertise for effective inspection and monitoring of the CFT at Bunda College. Dr. Kamperewera further explained that Malawi is currently promoting cotton production to enhance its economy and challenged the scientists conducting the CFT to expedite the process to enable Malawi to commercialise Bt cotton as soon as possible. He further indicated that the National Biosafety Regulatory Committee (NBRC) was not only eager to see the CFTs concurrently being done across the country in research stations in cotton-growing belts, but also diversifying into other crops.

Moses Kwapata, principal Bunda College of Agriculture, revealed that Bunda College is considering engaging in CFTs for other crops. While acknowledging ABNE's support for the inspectors' training, Kwapata beseeched ABNE for more capacity building opportunities, especially for IBCs and other scientists engaged in CFT. Responding to the request, Dr. James A. Okeno, ABNE business manager, representing Diran Makinde, ABNE Director, disclosed that ABNE has lined up several regulatory capacity building activities to support Malawi in the responsible and safe

use of modern biotechnology. He further lauded the cooperation between ABNE and EAD, which made the inspectors' training a reality.

An inspection visit to the CFT site afforded participants a hands-on opportunity in conducting an inspection. At the exit meeting, the inspectors commended the research team on aspects they had excelled in and, where they fell short of expectations, recommended corrective measures to ensure regulatory compliance to the terms and conditions.

*For more information, contact James A. Okeno (james.okeno@nepadbiosafety.net) and Samuel Timpo (sam.timpo@nepadbiosafety.net)*

## **A coordination meeting held on biosafety capacity development in Africa**

ABNE organized the 2013 Partners and Stakeholders' coordination meeting on biosafety capacity development in Africa to discuss achievements from collaborative efforts based on previous action plans and to identify specific capacity-building needs for evolving regulatory frameworks and how to address these. The meeting, held in Accra, Ghana from March 5-6, brought together representatives from biosafety service providers such as IFPRI's Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS), CropLife International, International Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), Africa Harvest, African Biotechnology Stakeholders Forum (ABSF), International Service for the Acquisition of Agribiotech Applications (ISAAA) and crop biotech industry (Monsanto, Pioneer, and BayerCrop Science). Altogether, 50 individuals from 16 countries attended the meeting. Ten of those countries were African and nearly 30 percent of the delegates were women.



*Participants at the partners' and stakeholders' coordination meeting on biosafety capacity development in Africa held in Accra, Ghana, March 2013.*

The meeting specifically aimed to provide a platform for leading biotech and biosafety stakeholders and service providers to share experiences and explore capacity building needs and emerging challenges in Africa, to strengthen the alignment of these stakeholders to future collaborative efforts in biosafety capacity development, and identify action points and roles to move the biotech and biosafety agenda in Africa forward.

The meeting resolved to “move from competition to collaboration” and urged respective stakeholders to vigorously pursue the modalities to attain this goal. A significant outcome of this meeting was the development of a draft consolidated matrix of activities for coordination and

collaboration in countries like Ghana, Kenya and Malawi. The draft was to be finalized by the steering committee and circulated to all partners for implementation. There was overwhelming consensus that coordination at the country level is a more feasible option than at the regional level and should, therefore, be explored.

ABNE was tasked to provide leadership in the finalization and implementation of the in-country consolidated matrix of activities to ensure efficient service delivery.

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### News briefs in pictures



**Participants at the regional training on the roles and responsibilities of IBCs held in Lome, Togo, June 25-27, 2013.**



**Participants at the CFT inspectors training held in Kumasi, Ghana, June 26-28, 2013.**



**ABNE-sponsored, long-term trainees in biosafety at Michigan State University, USA.**



**Participants at the CFT inspectors training held in Abuja, Nigeria, July 2-4, 2013.**



*A delegate from Uganda's Parliament gives a 'thumbs-up' approval for Bt cotton during a tour to South Africa in March 2013.*



*Members of the ABNE-sponsored Training-of-Trainers program at Michigan State University (MSU), developing biosafety short courses for African universities.*

## **ABNE Management and Technical Advisory Committees hold meetings**

ABNE successfully held its Management Committee (MC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings in January 2013 in Abuja, Nigeria. Both the MC and TAC meetings were graced by Mr. Lawrence Kent, senior program officer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, who opined that agricultural biotechnology remains the Foundation's strategy for sustainable crop production in Africa. He mentioned that ABNE is a success story; the partnership with MSU coming up very well and further revealed the Foundation's plan for continued funding support. On his part, Aggrey Ambali, director NSTIH and coordinator of NEPAD Agency's regional offices, emphasized that MSU's visibility in the continent through the partnership with NEPAD Agency in the ABNE project is



*Mr. Lawrence Kent of BMGF (5<sup>th</sup> right) with Prof. Karim Maredia (4<sup>th</sup> right), Prof. Diran Makinde (5<sup>th</sup> left) and other delegates during MC and TAC meetings in Abuja, Nigeria, February 2013.*

providing a template on how to partner for socio-economic development. He further alluded that Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, NEPAD Agency CEO, found ABNE's midterm review report very good, detailed and positive and that, based on its recommendations, ABNE should emerge much stronger.

Karim Maredia of Michigan State University (MSU) and ABNE's PI reiterated MSU's support for sustainable biosafety capacity building in Africa. He highlighted the work involving training of African regulators through short courses and the training-of-trainers (ToT) programme for offering biosafety courses in African universities and long-term trainee services. Diran Makinde, director ABNE, in delivering his director's report appreciated the financial support from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the MSU partnership as well as NEPAD Agency's administrative support and technical platform for service delivery.

The TAC, led by its chairman, Prof Mohamed Elyes Kchouk, commended ABNE staff and management for the achievements presented in the midterm review report as well as the progress report. The TAC fully endorsed long term support to sustain ABNE service network as a permanent resource for African regulators while re-emphasizing the importance of ABNE maintaining its cardinal values of neutrality, trust, accessibility and relevance in biosafety capacity building in addition to being guided by the mandate of the NEPAD Agency.

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## John Templeton Foundation project kicks-off

ABNE's John Templeton Foundation-funded, two-year project entitled "Analysis of biotechnology regulatory systems in Africa and implications for food security and improved rural livelihoods," kicked-off with a planning meeting for project implementation in Accra, Ghana in March 2013. The project aims to obtain empirical information that explains variations and constraints that have impacted regulatory decision-making processes in six African countries selected from West Africa (Burkina Faso and Ghana), East Africa (Kenya and Uganda) and Southern Africa (Mozambique and South Africa), through literature review, informant surveys and focus group discussions with various stakeholders. The kick-off meeting was subsequently followed by surveys in Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and South Africa between March and June 2013. Stakeholders interviewed included regulators, scientists, farmers, policy makers, civil society organizations and industry practitioners.



*The John Templeton Foundation project's team (Mr. Samuel Timpo, Dr. Hashini Galhena, Mr. Godwin Lemgo and Dr. Joe Guentner) during the kick-off meeting held in Accra, Ghana, March 2013.*

Anticipated outcomes from this study include better comprehension of biosafety issues; enhanced policy dialogue resulting in more workable regulations; more impactful interventions by biosafety capacity building initiatives; empowered member states with enhanced regulatory capacity for informed and timely decision-making. The study is envisioned to be an invaluable

resource and a catalyst of change, increasing the number of functional regulatory systems across Africa. This effort would ensure equitable access to good technology and benefit-sharing while safeguarding the interests of farmers, consumers and the environment; a contribution to the NEPAD Agency's thematic programme on agriculture and food security.

The project team is comprised of Mr. Samuel E. Timpo (senior programme officer for socioeconomics, NEPAD

Agency ABNE), Mr. Godwin N. Y. Lemgo (programme officer for food safety, NEPAD Agency ABNE), Dr. Hashini G. Dissanayake (agricultural economist and research assistant professor, Michigan State University) and Dr. Joseph Guentner (agricultural economist and professor, Idaho State University). The team brings extensive experience in socio-economic issues in biosafety; socio-economic impacts of innovations and technologies on smallholder agriculture; food safety of both conventional

and genetically modified foods/feed; biotechnology and biosafety capacity building; science, policy and institution building; and extensive research and field work on food security and livelihood enhancement in many developing countries, including several sub-Saharan African countries and Asia.

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## New staff: Dr. Woldeyesus Sinebo – Programme Officer for Agricultural Biosafety



**Dr. Woldeyesus Sinebo**, an Ethiopian national, has joined ABNE as programme officer for Agricultural Biosafety. He joined the ABNE Kampala node in April 2013. Dr. Sinebo is an agronomist with a PhD from the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria, an MSc (Crop Physiology) from the University of Reading and a BSc in Plant Sciences from Addis Ababa University. In addition, he also obtained a master's degree in Biosafety in Plant Biotechnology from Università Politecnica Delle Marche, Ancona, Italy. Prior to joining ABNE, Dr. Sinebo was the director of crops research at the Southern Agricultural Research Institute in Ethiopia. Dr. Sinebo also worked at the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research from 2003 to 2005 as a senior researcher and head of Agricultural Technology Intellectual Property Management Office. Dr. Sinebo was a JSPS-UNU postdoctoral fellow at the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies, Yokohama, Japan. Dr. Sinebo has researched policy issues pertaining to agricultural biotech transfer to Africa, intellectual property rights, access to genetic resources and benefit sharing, biosafety and the interplay among biosafety, trade and intellectual property rights.

For more information on Woldeyesus Sinebo, visit <http://www.nepadbiosafety.net/about/abne-team>

### ABNE Upcoming Events (July – September 2013)

- **July 9-11, 2013:** CFT regulatory review and communication training, Lilongwe, Malawi. For more information, contact: [w.sinebo@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:w.sinebo@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Confirmed)
- **July 15-20, 2013:** ABNE's participation in the 6<sup>th</sup> FARA General Assembly, Accra, Ghana. For more information, contact: [diran.makinde@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:diran.makinde@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Confirmed)
- **July 27-Aug 3, 2013:** International short course on biotechnology and biosafety for lawyers, E. Lansing, Michigan, USA. For more information, contact: [b.kiplagat@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:b.kiplagat@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Confirmed)
- **July 30-Aug 2, 2013:** Biosafety draft law validation and sensitization workshop for Parliamentarians on the draft law, Lomé, Togo. For more information, contact: [moussa.savadogo@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:moussa.savadogo@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Tentative)
- **August 17-28, 2013:** ACCPAC Implementation and data entry for ABNE finance unit including HR matters, Midrand, South Africa. For more information, contact: [vincent.tiendrebeogo@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:vincent.tiendrebeogo@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Tentative)
- **August 24-26, 2013:** In-country sensitization seminar/open forum on biosafety issues for improved understanding of biosafety and biotechnology. For more information, contact: [sam.timpo@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:sam.timpo@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Tentative)
- **September 17-18, 2013:** Training workshop for the National biosafety committee on roles and responsibilities, Yaoundé, Cameroon. For more information, contact: [moussa.savadogo@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:moussa.savadogo@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Tentative)
- **September 24-25, 2013:** Workshop on biosafety needs and gaps, biosafety administrative oversight and the application review in collaboration with USDA office in Dakar, Dakar, Sénégal. For more information, contact: [moussa.savadogo@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:moussa.savadogo@nepadbiosafety.net) (Status: Tentative)

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