



## Africa Biosafety Watch

ABNE NEWSLETTER (July - September, 2016)

## First African biosafety leadership summit

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The Association of National Biosafety Agencies in Africa (ANBAA) is a regional network of Government Biosafety regulatory agencies in Africa, established in 2015 under the auspices of NEPAD Agency ABNE, with a mission to “Collaborate, share and enhance safe, and Responsible Work with biotechnology” in Africa.

Clearly, the Association seeks to unite all regulatory agencies in Africa with the aim of serving as and/or strengthen the African voice on biosafety issues regionally and internationally; enhancing Pan-African collaboration, networking and joint implementation of programmes in biosafety and support compliance to international agreements in Africa; conducting international work to reduce biosafety risks by collaborating with governments and other institutions to explore mechanisms and policies that are consistent with international guidelines, norms and requirements; continuing outreach to other Agencies in Africa to establish a critical mass of NBAs with determination to



*Group photo of participants during the meeting*

facilitate safe management and use of biotechnologies; reducing hurdles in sharing data and information on biotechnology and biosafety between countries; initiating regional and local training, exchange and mentorship programmes; working towards development of regional policies and promote a common approach to regulatory systems acceptable to most countries in the region to reduce trade barriers, facilitate transboundary movements and strengthen expertise across Africa.

ANBAA, in partnership with NEPAD Agency ABNE and the Kenya National Biosafety Authority (NBA), organized the first African biosafety leadership summit in Nairobi, Kenya, from 15 to 16 August, 2016. This two-day summit brought together biosafety agencies and leading biotechnology and biosafety stakeholders to share experiences and analyze the key capacity

building needs for member countries regarding new and emerging challenges in the development and implementation of workable regulatory frameworks at the national and sub-regional levels as well as identify action steps and responsibilities.

One of the key issues discussed was data portability. This was identified as a very important focus of the association, especially in the face of regional harmonization efforts under the various regional blocs. This effort by the association is to ensure that member countries are able consolidate and leverage their combined biosafety regulatory capacities through the sharing of common best practices and expertise. Other issues such as gene drive, synthetic biology and compliance with other international agreements other than Cartagena Protocol were also discussed.



**ABNE Program Officer, Godwin Lemgo – on left – with members of the Association of National Biosafety Agencies in Africa (ANBAA)**

At the end of the summit, a communique was adopted by member countries present with the pledge to;

serve as and/or strengthen the African voice on biosafety issues regionally and internationally;

enhance the Pan-African collaboration, networking and joint implementation of programmes in biosafety and support compliance to international agreements in Africa;

conduct international work to reduce biosafety risks by collaborating with governments and other institutions to explore mechanisms and policies that are consistent with international guidelines, norms and requirement;

continue outreach to other Agencies in Africa to establish a critical mass of NBAs with determination to facilitate safe use of biotechnologies;

reduce hurdles in sharing data and information on biotechnology and biosafety between countries;

initiate regional and local training, exchange and mentorship programmes;

work towards development of regional policies and promote a common approach to regulatory systems acceptable to most countries in the region to reduce trade barriers, facilitate transboundary movements

and strengthen expertise across Africa;  
for more information on the activities of the

association, please visit the website:

[www.anbaafrica.org](http://www.anbaafrica.org)

## Third training for African Biosafety Lawyers network



*Group photo of part of participants*

NEPAD Agency ABNE organized the 3<sup>rd</sup> training for the African Biosafety Lawyers under the Biosafety Lawyers Network, from 26 to 28 September, 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This third meeting of African Biosafety Lawyers in Addis Ababa was to enhance the capacities of the lawyers in Biosafety and further the network following the successful ones held in Accra, Ghana and Nairobi. This time, the training targeted the lawyers from East and Southern Africa. It aimed to catalyze the on-going positive regulatory processes on the continent and further consolidate NEPAD Agency ABNE's efforts in supporting countries on the continent in building functional biosafety systems.

The training attracted 24 participants from Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Various aspects of Biotechnology, Biosafety, Intellectual Property Rights, Regional Economic Groupings and Litigations around GMOs on the continent were ably delivered to the participants who were throughout very attentive and engaging.

In addition to experts from overseas and resources persons from NEPAD Agency ABNE, the meeting had resource experts who are members of the lawyers' network. This was a testimony that they have become trainers of trainees, as it was the founding mission of the network. With the NEPAD Agency support, there is optimism that they will continue to offer such training in their countries in partnership with their government institutions.

There is need to continue growing the network of Biosafety lawyers on the continent and NEPAD Agency/ABNE is to play a pivotal role in that regard.

The participants from the host country, Ethiopia, felt more than honored to have hosted the training.

Together with all members of the network, they expressed high gratitude to NEPAD Agency ABNE and other partners for mobilizing the resources and involving them in the biosafety agenda on the continent. They pledged to keep the network active and as a sign of commitment, the group set action points to pursue to in order to make the network a formidable establishment.

## Capacity building for Biosafety Regulators and Inspectors in Tanzania

NEPAD Agency ABNE in partnership with the National Biosafety Focal Point from the Tanzanian Ministry of Environment organized a training workshop for biosafety regulators and inspectors from 19 to 20 September, 2016 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.



*A view of part of participants*

In March, 2016, the Minister of Environment inaugurated the Tanzania National Biosafety Committee (NBC) to begin to receive and review biosafety applications. Not long after this inauguration, the committee received an application for the conduct of a Confined Field Trial (CFT) in the drought tolerant maize and it successfully reviewed and issued a permit for the conduct of the same. As the country is now set to start confined field trial of drought-resistant GMO maize this year, NEPAD Agency/ABNE had to intervene by conducting an Inspection and Compliance monitoring training to regulators and inspectors to ensure that the country has adequate biosafety regulatory preparedness in the management of CFTs.

The training was successful as it was well appreciated by the participants. It clearly won the support from the

Government as testified by both the Director and Deputy Director of Environment who officiated the opening and closing ceremonies respectively.

The entire training content about Compliance monitoring and inspection of CFTs and aspects of risks was very much appreciated.

The Deputy Director and head of the focal point requested NEPAD Agency/ABNE to return soon to conduct a workshop on Risk Assessment and Risk Management as time was not enough to comprehensively deal with it the particular training. The newly inaugurated National Biosafety Committee will need technical backstopping as they have begun to receive Biosafety Applications for review and decision making so NEPAD/ABNE should remain handy.

## Biosafety Policy Roundtable for Stakeholder Institutions in Nigeria

NEPAD Agency ABNE in partnership with the Nigerian National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), organized a Biosafety Policy Roundtable for Stakeholder Institutions in Nigeria, from 1 to 5 August, 2016, in Abuja.

The objectives of this meeting were to provide a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement and interaction on managing biotechnology and stimulate a policy debate for increased awareness among key actors on their roles and responsibilities. The meeting also aimed at providing opportunity and context for expert-dialogue on policy options and to develop consensus action steps for policy development and implementation.

Stakeholders drawn from several government ministries, agencies and parastatals involved in biotechnology and biosafety participated in this policy roundtable. Among the key outcomes from the meeting, the role of the NBMA vis-à-vis other government agencies in biosafety were highlighted to ensure effective collaborations, avoid mandate overlaps and delays resulting in duplication of duties while ensuring a holistic biosafety

regulation in Nigeria. The NBMA gained increased visibility as the mandated competent authority due to media reportage. This will contribute to increased confidence in the biosafety regulatory system. The policy roundtable provided a networking platform for key actors who discussed issues that would foster inter-agency collaborations and increased participation in biosafety processes.

Suggestions were made as to how to improve biosafety implementation mechanisms within the country. Communication was identified as the weakest link in the biosafety system particularly with the ongoing increased campaign of biosafety misinformation by some entities opposed to the technology. There is therefore a need to finalize the national biosafety communication strategy to support the day-to-day communication activities of the NBMA. It would also be helpful to institutionalize the biosafety roundtable as a periodic policy dialogue platform for stakeholder engagement and for fostering inter-agency collaborations.

## Mission towards providing technical support to the Competent National Authority for Biosafety in Namibia

NEPAD Agency ABNE in partnership with The National Commission for Research, Science and Technology (NCRST)

of Namibia organized a mission towards providing technical support to the Competent National Authority for Biosafety from 10 to 13 July, 2016 in Windhoek, Namibia.

NCRST is the competent authority for biosafety in Namibia. The NCRST is mandated by law to regulate activities involving the research, development, production, marketing, transport, application and other uses of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and specified products derived from GMOs. The safe use of biotechnology is considered as one of the key issues in Namibia's quest for sustainable development through biodiversity conservation. Noting ABNE's pivotal role in biosafety capacity strengthening efforts in AU member states, the NCRST requested for a visit that would be a precursor for cooperation on biosafety capacity building

interventions in Namibia.

This mission was an opportunity to pay courtesy calls on the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation; Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; and Ministry of Environment and Tourism. NEPAD Agency ABNE team also participated in a stakeholders' biosafety capacity building needs assessment workshop that would help initiate steps towards formalizing cooperation for implementing biosafety capacity building interventions in Namibia.

NCRST is to propose a prioritized list of needs and a plan of action which will inform a draft memorandum of understanding on modalities of cooperation. The draft will then be shared for ABNE's consideration.

## Capacity Building for New Members of Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBCs) in Kenyan Research Institutions

NEPAD agency Africa Biosafety Network of Expertise (NEPAD/ABNE) in Kenya in conjunction with the Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) and the National Biosafety Authority (NBA) of Kenya organized Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) training in Nairobi, Kenya, from 29 to 30 June, 2016.

Twenty- two Kenyan participants benefited from this hands-on training. This is the third meeting of this type after a first training held from May 29 to June 3 and a second one from October 5 to 6, 2015 in Kenya.

Beneficiaries of the training sessions were mainly staff from



**Capacity Building of institutional Biosafety Committees from Kenya for ten institutions Kenya IBCs**

IBCs such as The International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Kenyatta University (KU), Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO), Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Mount Kenya University (MUK).

This third training built on knowledge gained from the preceding two training sessions and covered important topics including risk assessment, completing applications and internal/external review of application for containment and confined field trials.

This training was important as IBCs act as internal reviewers of all applications for GMO from containment to confined field trials before they forward applications to the NBA for the final approval and permit. Poorly developed applications are usually rejected and returned by NBA or referred back to IBCs. Building capacity of competent internal review system of applications by IBCs would therefore ensure a more secure and efficient approval process of applications.

## Training Workshop on Genetically Modified Crop Confined Field Trial Regulatory Handling in Ethiopia

NEPAD Agency ABNE organized a training workshop on genetically modified (GM) crop confined field trial (CFT) regulatory handling from 28 to 29 July, 2016 in Addis Ababa. 23 people attended this training workshop, delivered by three ABNE Programme Officers and four local resource persons.

Ethiopia has officially started conducting Bt cotton CFTs. Training regulators on CFT regulatory handling would help enhance competence of the country's regulators in areas such as application review, decision making, risk assessment, inspection and compliance monitoring.

Topics addressed during the training included: advances in agricultural biotechnology and its regulation; strategies to ensure coherence among national Biosafety Proclamation, Biosafety Directives, Biosafety Regulation and international biosafety regulatory standards; preparation and completion of application formats for Special Permits and environmental release; drafting permit letters for CFTs and environmental release including specifying terms and conditions; introduction to confined field trials of GM crops.

The participants appreciated the training offered but noted that, since biotechnology regulation is knowledge, more intensive training is required for them to be able to deliver up to the standard expected from them. This year ABNE has made the maximum effort to help quality management systems for confined



*Group photo of part of participants*

field trials; principles of confined field trials inspection and compliance monitoring; principles of risk assessment for GM crops; environmental risk assessment of GM crops; socio-economic impacts of GM crops.

This year ABNE has made the maximum effort to help Ethiopia by committing its expertise and resources for the review of the Biosafety Directives and also for training regulators on the regulatory handling of CFTs. As resources permit, ABNE will continue to monitor and technically backstop with the conduct, inspection and compliance monitoring of the Bt cotton CFTs.

## Capacity Building of Regulatory Agencies involved in testing and commercial release of improved seeds

NEPAD Agency ABNE in collaboration with partners- Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) and Kenya NBA developed a two-day training and information sharing workshop for Kenyan regulatory agencies from June 27-28, 2016. Twenty five staff from these agencies were trained in National Biotechnology and Biosafety and procedures governing National Variety Release (NVR) and National Performance Trials (NPT).

The outcome of the review process of Bt maize by Kenya's National Biosafety Authority (NBA) review committee recommended that Bt Maize event Mon810 go through the procedure of National Performance Trials (NPT) under supervision of the National Performance Trial Committee (NPTC) of Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Services (KEPHIS) before consideration for commercial release.

After successful fulfillment NPT evaluation, the Essentially Derived Varieties (EDV) will be registered, gazetted and officially released by the National Variety Release Committee (NVRC) under auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).

In addition, the National Biosafety Authority requested that the EDV should be analyzed to provide one

additional food safety data called composition analysis under its supervision. It was considered vital that the different agencies involved in the preceding at different steps in the pathway to commercial release approval establish platform of dialogue to facilitate synchrony and harmony in their decision making process to allow these crops to be objectively be considered for commercialization.

NEPAD/ABNE in partnership with Program for Biosafety Systems contribute to building capacity of the various inter-agency and inter-ministerial involvement in Mon810 evaluation including -KEPHIS, NBA, NPTC NVRC, MoA) and help develop close collaboration and a common understanding of their specific evaluation procedures to harmonize their decision making for objectivity in evaluation of GM crops and commercial release for cultivation on farmers' fields. This was a challenging task because the agencies have no passed history or experience of working together and making decisions in tandem given that this is the first GMO in Kenya to reach consideration for general release.



**Capacity Building to Agencies involved in National Performance Trials Committee, National Variety Release**

## Upcoming events

- **15 – 18 October:** Training workshop on GM crop environmental risk assessment and risk management strategy in Khartoum, Sudan
- **Late October:** High level Policy mission to Nairobi, Kenya
- **17 – 19 October:** Biosafety lawyers training in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- **25 – 28 October:** Planning meeting for the African group towards the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP MOP 8), in Accra, Ghana
- **12 – 15 November:** NEPAD/ABNE Program officers workshop on Resource Mobilization in Kampala, Uganda
- **15 – 19 November:** NEPAD/ABNE -Technical Advisory Committee Meetings in Kampala, Uganda
- **02 – 18 December:** The eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (COP MOP 8) in Cancun, Mexico
- **05 – 08 December:** Training workshop on GM crop environmental risk assessment and risk management strategy, in Lilongwe, Malawi.
- **13 – 18 December:** Training for Judges in Accra, Ghana



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