



## Africa Biosafety Watch

ABNE NEWSLETTER (January-March, 2014)

### A Message from the Director of ABNE

Dear colleagues and friends,  
 The year 2013 was an exciting yet a challenging year. Commendably, several African countries made remarkable progress in achieving a functional regulatory system. In 2013, ABNE offered a broad range of biosafety capacity building services aimed at 1) creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment in our focus countries, 2) building a critical mass of regulators with enhanced competencies in biosafety regulation, and 3) enhancing capacities for effective biosafety communication and facilitate effective public participation in biosafety decision making in Africa. We are therefore pleased to share highlights of these activities with you, our stakeholders. Our services are demand driven and we encourage African Union (AU) member states to approach us with their training needs. Together, let us work to ensure that the continent acquires adequate capacity to safely harness the potentials of biotechnology for Africa's development as envisioned by African leaders and captured in the "Freedom to Innovate". We owe a duty to our dear continent and it is our collective responsibility. On behalf of my team, please accept our heartfelt appreciation for your support over the years. Together, we look towards an exciting year 2014. With compliments of the season.

– Diran Makinde (Director, NEPAD-ABNE)

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### NEPAD CEO Pays a Working Visit to ABNE Node in Burkina

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA), Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki paid a one week working visit to the Burkina Faso node of the African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE) in July 2013.



This was to help the CEO familiarize himself first-hand with the operations, successes, and challenges of the ABNE node. In a meeting with staff at the node, the CEO stated that ABNE's activities are vital for two reasons: 1) Stimulating innovation and 2) reducing inequalities. Commending the ABNE team, the CEO said;

***"ABNE exhibits one of the characteristics of NEPAD; i.e. small but effective. This means that the team is efficient and this has to be commended"***

The CEO also took the opportunity to pay courtesy visits to various diplomatic

missions and Government agencies in Ouagadougou to show appreciation for their support over the years, including the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation, the WAEMU Commission, and ambassadors of African countries in Burkina Faso.

# Biosafety Short-Course for African Regulators – Partnering with African Universities



With the aim of building a critical mass of African regulators, policy, and decision makers with improved knowledge and understanding of biosafety and biotechnology matters, NEPAD Agency, African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE) has been working to develop and institutionalize Biosafety training courses for regulators using African Universities as platforms.

In line with these efforts, a pilot course was launched in November 2013 in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso. The Biosafety Short Course for African Regulators was held from November 4-8 in partnership with the Polytechnic University of Bobo-Dioulasso (PUB) and Michigan State University (MSU), USA. This course is the first in a series of training programs to be offered in 2014 with other African Universities including University of Ghana and Makerere University in Uganda. The overall objective of the ABNE biosafety short course program is to gradually integrate a science-based approach to biosafety.

in African universities' curricula. This is critical to ensure sustainability in building critical mass of trained African regulators for a safe use and deployment of biotechnology crops. It is expected that in the near future such short courses will be offered through local universities in Africa on a regular basis.

More than 40 participants from 11 countries including Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and Togo were represented at course.



*Field visit to a Bt cotton farm*



*Participants in interactive discussions during lectures and field visits*

They were selected from biosafety regulatory bodies (biosafety agencies, national biosafety committees, Institutional Biosafety committees and plant quarantine services), agricultural research institutes and university faculties.

The course lectures were delivered both in English and French languages in order to transcend any language barrier, emphasizing once more the pan-African nature of the NEPAD- ABNE.

The one week intensive course program covered a broad area of biosafety and agricultural biotechnology related topics of great interest to the participants. This ranged from introduction to agricultural biotechnology and biosafety to risk assessment principles and international/ national regulations. Key take home messages were drawn and highlighted for each of the topics presented.

In addition, participants had the unique opportunity to visit small-holder Bt cotton fields and also a seed quality control lab, which was a first time experience for many.

Through the interactions with farmers and representatives from the national cotton growers union as well as from the local cotton company, participants could learn that ***“A good partnership between farmers, cotton companies and technology developers is a key factor for the safe adoption of agricultural biotechnology”***

They were also informed that:

***“60 percent of Bt cotton adoption in Burkina Faso is a proof that farmers actually reap a substantial gain from growing Bt cotton and that the benefit gained is not only monetary but needs to be considered within an integrated economic system. For example: time gained from the reduction of pesticides treatment is utilized for other activities including food crop production”.***



*Dr Daudu O.A. Yusuf from the Department of Biological Sciences (Plant Breeding and Genetics) at Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria, stated “ --- this course has equipped me with answers to the common questions that are raised against Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)”*

# ABNE's side event at the World Food Prize (WFP) in Des Moines, Iowa, USA - Broadening Partnerships

In an effort to broaden and expand partnerships with other service providers and development agencies, ABNE organized a special side event in conjunction with the World Food Prize Symposium in Des Moines, Iowa on October 17, 2013. The side event was organized under the NEPAD-MSU partnership to share information on the achievements and impacts of ABNE service network.

The side event was Co-chaired by Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki, CEO of NEPAD Agency and Dr. Steve Pueppke, Associate Vice President and Director of Strategic Global Initiatives at Michigan State University. They both presented their perspectives on ABNE service network and vision for the future.

Prof. Aggrey Ambali, Director of NEPAD Agency's Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Hub welcomed the participants and introduced the co-chairs. More than 20 stakeholders were invited and attended this side event. The organizations represented at the side event included African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), International Food Policy Research Institute - Program for Biosafety Systems (IFPRI-PBS), Ghent University, Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Cotton Incorporated Inc., Monsanto Company, Biosciences for Farming in Africa (B4FA) and Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).



*The NEPAD Agency CEO, Dr Mayaki giving the Opening Remarks at the Side event in Des Moines*

Prof. Diran Makinde, Director of ABNE highlighted the key achievements and impacts of ABNE biosafety services since the network was launched in 2010.

This followed an interactive open discussion with stakeholders on various issues and mechanisms related to broadening partnerships.

After the side event, the ABNE team met with Mr. Chris Elias, President of Global Development and Mr. Lawrence Kent, Senior Program Officer of BMGF to discuss common goals towards building functional biosafety systems in Africa.



*From left to right: Mr. Rolf Dietrich, Senior Director of Development, International Studies and Programs -MSU; Prof. Aggrey Ambali, Head of Policy Alignment and Programme Development Directorate - NEPAD ; Prof. Karim Maredia, Principal Investigator of ABNE - MSU; Dr Yemi Akinbamijo, Executive Director- FARA; Prof. Steve Pueppke, Associate VP and Director of Global Studies - MSU; Dr Ibrahim Mayaki, CEO - NEPAD; Dr Hashini Galhena, Research Assistant Professor - MSU; and Prof. Diran Makinde, Director - ABNE.*

# South – South Collaboration: High-level Policy Makers Visit to Small-holder Cotton farmers in India



Visit to a Bt Cotton Field

ABNE successfully completed a 10-day biotechnology and biosafety study tour to India from October 20 - 30, 2013. Thirteen regulators and senior policy makers (including 3 Ministers) participated in the study tour representing 6 countries in Africa, namely Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. The study tour was co-organized by the BejoSheetal Biosciences Foundation in Jalna and The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in New Delhi, India.

The emphasis of the study tour was on the success of Bt cotton in India where 93% of cotton acreage is under the Bt cotton production. The African delegates were impressed with the success and positive impact of Bt cotton in India, especially on small holder farmers.

During the study tour, the delegates had active interactions with Indian regulators, policy makers, scientists, local farmers, and seed industry

representatives at three locations in India (New Delhi, Jalna/Aurnagabad, and Hyderabad).

The African delegates were able to see the Bt cotton in the field and ask all the relevant regulatory and technology related questions from various stakeholders. The delegation also visited six seed companies in India:

1. Rasi Seeds Company (near New Delhi)
2. ProAgro/Bayer Seed Company (near New Delhi)
3. BejoSheetal Seed Company (Jalna, Maharashtra)
4. Nath Seed Company (Aurangabad, Maharashtra)
5. Kaveri Seed Company (Hyderabad)
6. Advanta Seed Company (Hyderabad).

As part of the study tour program, a special forum on Africa-India Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation was organized by the Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS), TERI, and Michigan State University. Overall, it was a great experience for the African regulators and policy makers to get first-hand experience on the success of Bt cotton and the tremendous growth of seed industry in India.



Visit to Indian Seed Companies

# ABNE Launches Biosafety Short-course for Lawyers



Many countries in Africa are currently developing new biosafety laws and regulations and some countries are revising existing policies and regulations. Majority of the lawyers and legal personnel involved in developing and implementing legislations do not have any scientific or technical backgrounds in biotechnology and biosafety.

As more African countries develop biosafety laws and regulations, there is an immediate need for both government and non-government lawyers and legal officers to understand biotechnology and biosafety.

Well informed lawyers can help support the development of effective biosafety regulations and guidelines as well as counsel scientists and companies who will need permission from the governments to develop and release GMOs. In addition, as governments move toward the approval of GMOs for commercial planting by farmers, the likelihood of administrative and judicial challenges will also increase.

In this context, the ABNE Network organized a one-week short course from July 27 - August 2, 2013 on the campus of Michigan State

University. The main objective of this course was to assist African lawyers and legal officers in understanding the scientific aspects of biotechnology and biosafety as well as international treaties and agreements on to biosafety and biotechnology. Twelve lawyers and legal officers from 10 countries in Africa were invited to this program. The countries represented include: Burkina Faso, Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda.

The topics covered in the short course included: global overview of agricultural biotechnology, food and environmental safety of GM crops, risk assessment and risk communication, standard operating procedures (SOPs), legal issues in biotechnology, international treaties and agreements, intellectual property rights (IPR) and socioeconomic considerations. Along with interactive presentations and group discussions, the lawyers interacted with local farmers and visited biotech research laboratories and research field trials at MSU.

During the final session of the short course, the participants strongly recommended regular interactions between scientists and lawyers at a national and regional level. In addition,

they pointed that lawyers from other jurisdictions should be invited to gain a broader perspective issues related to biosafety and biotechnology. The participants indicated that they would like to have a more in depth coverage of IPR issues. They asked MSU and ABNE to help them organize an African Legal Association on Biosafety and Biotechnology and ensure ongoing participation through networking and regular updates. With the success from the first pilot program, the plan is underway through the ABNE Network to offer this course in Africa using case studies of African crops and regulatory systems. Ms. Betty Kiplagat will continue to assist the ABNE Team to help institutionalize this course in Africa.

**ABNE**  
A science-based biosafety  
resource network for  
African Regulators

# Multi-location Trials of Bt Cotton in Ghana

## Useful Lessons for the Region

When the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Ghana, approached Ghanaian regulators with plans to conduct multi-locational trials of Bt cotton in Ghana, it looked like a near impossible task. The intriguing question was how Ghana could consider going multi-locational for the trials of this Bt cotton even when Confined Field Trials (CFT) have not previously been conducted.



### ***So how did Ghana surmount this challenge to successfully conduct its first ever multi-location trials which are currently nearing completion?***

Let's begin by exploring the reasoning behind this request by SARI. The Bt cotton event in question has been successfully tried in confinement in Burkina Faso, Ghana's Northern neighbors. Since the cotton growing area of Ghana shares the same agro-ecology with that of Burkina Faso, there was clearly an opportunity to port regulatory data from Burkina Faso, where the confined field trials of the Bt cotton event were conducted for several years. However, this was a precedent in Ghana, and indeed the sub-region and the Ghanaian regulators wanted to set the right example. At the request of Ghanaian biosafety competent authority, the ABNE was tasked to provide technical assistance and to build on the competence of regulators in Ghana to be able to handle and make a determination on applications for multi-locational trials. ABNE responded with a series of activities with the following broad objectives; firstly, to assist regulators determine the feasibility of a possible porting of data from Burkina Faso for a multi-location trial in Ghana; secondly to boost the capacity of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the National Biosafety Committee (NBC) to be able to respectively conduct a science-based decision making on this and subsequent applications for multi-location trials; thirdly to train a pool of Biosafety Inspectors that would provide inspection services of field trials in Ghana, and finally to train the Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBCs) of the research institutions involved in this and other field trials in Ghana to be able to ensure effective monitoring during the trials.



These interventions by ABNE provided the Ghanaian regulators with competence and confidence as well as vital impetuses needed to move the process forward. Subsequently, the TAC successfully reviewed the application and gave the necessary conditions under which the trial should be permitted and successively recommended the application for approval in April 2013. Having empowered them with a guidance document developed by ABNE, the NBC successfully made a decision on the trial in May 2013. Planting commenced late in June 2013 and the trial has since been successfully monitored by the IBC and Biosafety Inspectors from the National Competent Authority.

Ghana's first multi-locational trial is currently nearing completion with commercialization on the horizon. One vital lesson here is the need for data portability among African countries with similar agro-ecology.



A Section of Ghanaian Regulators in a hand-on breakout exercise during the follow-up training on application review for multi-location trials in Accra, April 2013

## Towards Building Functional Biosafety Systems in Africa: AU/NEPAD ABNE's Achievements and Impacts in 2013

The NEPAD Agency African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE) together with its international partner Michigan State University (MSU) is actively working with regulators and policy makers towards building functional biosafety systems in Africa. From the onset, ABNE has been proactive in offering appropriate services to members of National Biosafety Committees (NBCs), Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBCs), and Plant Quarantine Officers (PQs) based on the needs and gaps identified and the stage of development and/or deployment of biotechnology crops and products in countries in Africa. Following is a brief re-cap of the ABNE's impacts and achievements in year 2013.

ABNE offered 24 programs (workshops, short courses, internships, study tours and other professional development activities) within and outside the continent in 2013 and trained 479 regulators, 29% of which were women. In addition, to avoid duplication and bring synergy to biosafety training in the continent, ABNE provided leadership in coordinating the activities of various biosafety service providers in Africa.

Furthermore, recognizing the increasing need for Biosafety training and capacity building as countries were creating enabling environments for adopting GE crops, ABNE used a Training of Trainer (ToT) approach to institutionalize Biosafety training in local Universities. The first of its kind was institutionalized at the Polytechnic University in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso in 2013 and provided training to regulators primarily in Francophone West Africa. Similar programs will follow in Ghana for the Anglophone West Africa and in Uganda for East Africa in 2014.

As biosafety laws are currently being developed and reviewed in a number of countries in the continent, ABNE also took an initiative to train a team of lawyers and legal advisors from eight countries in Africa focusing on science and regulations of biotechnology. As a result of tireless and continuous efforts since its official launch in April 2010, ABNE observed countries benefiting from the training and capacity building activities. Some examples of impacts in selected countries are as follows: (*continue next page*)

### **"...Restrictive policy environments discourage the responsible use of biotechnology" – Africa Academies of Science (AAS)**

This year's Annual Meeting of the African Science Academies (AMASA-9) held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 10-12 November, 2013 focused its deliberations on the relevance of biotechnology for development in Africa.

In a 12 point declaration, AMASA-9 observed that *"..the overwhelming global scientific evidence shows that plant products, which are Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), are as safe as their non-GMO counterparts..."*

The meeting encouraged African leaders to facilitate research on and utilization of GMOs *"as long as norms articulated in the existing international protocols and conventions such as the Biodiversity Convention, Cartagena, and Nagoya Protocols are adhered to"*.

The meeting finally called on African Union (AU) to show leadership and coordinate the implementation of Africa's biotechnology agenda.

**[See full declaration here](#)**

**<http://www.eas-et.org/AMSA9-Doc/English%20Declaration.pdf>**



# AU/NEPAD ABNE's Achievements and Impacts in 2013



## Ghana

ABNE's continuous presence in Ghana since 2010 providing training to regulators played a key role in the review of four biosafety applications of GE crops including rice, cowpea, sweet potato, and cotton. As a result, for the first time, confined field trials for rice and cowpea were conducted in Ghana in addition to multi-location trials for Bt cotton.



## Burkina Faso

Further to providing technical assistance for the passing of an improved biosafety law in the country in 2012, ABNE has worked to initiate its ever first biosafety short course in an African University, the Bobo-Dioulasso Polytechnic University. This will obviously contribute to strengthen the Burkina Faso leading position within the West African Francophone sub region.



## Nigeria

With the approval of the biosafety law pending, ABNE is currently working with Nigerian regulators and policy makers to facilitate the adoption of workable regulations and best practices for regulatory decision-making.



## Togo

Following the signing of the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress by the Government of Togo last year, ABNE is providing the necessary assistance to the Ministry of Environment to review the biosafety law so as to ensure a better alignment with the provisions contained in this international protocol. A draft revised text is waiting for stakeholder's validation before it is taken to the national assembly.



## Malawi

As the Bunda College in Malawi was stepping into conducting the country's first confined field trial of Bt cotton, ABNE took the initiative to train regulators that served as inspectors for monitoring and compliance.

Details of ABNE's achievements are summarized in the "ABNE in Africa" publication. You may request a copy of this publication by email: [abne@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:abne@nepadbiosafety.net)

# Nigerian Farmers request a speedy passage of the Biosafety Bill



In 2013, the Federal Government of Nigerian collaboration with international partners continued to strengthen the biosafety regulatory system in Nigeria and engaged with gatekeepers on biosafety issues through an all-inclusive approach to the regulation of agricultural biotechnology.

To round off an eventful year and at the behest of the Competent National Authority (CNA) on Biosafety in Nigeria (the Federal Ministry of Environment), ABNE provided assistance in conducting of a series of activities from December 3 – 6, 2013.



These included a one-day biosafety seminar for farmers aimed at communicating the current status of biosafety in Nigeria and providing an opportunity to engage them in public consultations; the review of a draft of the National Biosafety Communications Strategy (by a task team); the review of guidelines on socioeconomic considerations in biosafety (by stakeholder institutions); and the presentation of equipment to the Ministry of Environment to augment the functionality of the biosafety office.



From left to right are Prof Makinde, Mr Salisu Mohammed Dahiru, Mr R. A. Usman

The highlight of the biosafety seminar for farmers was a call through a communiqué to the executive and the legislative arms of government for assent to the biosafety law to ensure safe access to technologies that will benefit local communities. In reviewing the communications strategy, participants discussed inputs received from stakeholders and were of the view that the strategy when finalized will provide the platform for enhanced public understanding on issues of biosafety and also help improve the quality of public participation in decision making and policy development regarding issues of biotechnology management and biosafety.

Stakeholders who reviewed the guidelines on socioeconomic considerations in biosafety were of the view that the provisions needed to be aligned with the biotechnology/biosafety policy and charged the drafting team to work with ABNE in revising the document for the next round of stakeholder consultations. Overall, the capacity of 94 regulators, scientists, farmers, and policy and decision makers were strengthened in the aforementioned areas of biosafety. The climax of the activities was the presentation of office equipment to the biosafety office at the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry noted ABNE's all-encompassing approach to capacity building and that the intervention will ensure that the national biosafety secretariat efficiently administers biosafety.

## Study Underway to Understand the Differential Functionality of Seven (7) Regulatory Systems in Africa

Last year, ABNE secured a research grant of \$240,570 from the John Templeton Foundation (JTF), USA, for a study titled "Analysis of Biotechnology Regulatory Systems in Africa and Implications for Food Security and Improved Rural Livelihoods." The study is aimed at understanding the issues that impair the functionality of biosafety systems in Africa and seeks to adopt an issues-based approach in distilling policy issues and specific strategies that will ensure decision-making on biosafety applications.

Seven African countries are involved in this study including Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda. So far, the project team has successfully collected data in six of these study countries with the exception of Uganda, which will be covered in the first quarter of next year.

The study results are expected to provide useful support to national regulatory systems in the review of policies, regulations, standard operating procedures, and guidelines as well as provide valuable inputs to ABNE's model guidance documents for member states.

For more information, contact Samuel Timpo.  
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## NEW STAFF



**Nina Konaté** is the ABNE Finance Officer. She earned a Master of Management Science degree in Accounting, Auditing & Management Control from the “Institut Supérieur d’Informatique et de Gestion

- ISIG International Business School of Ouagadougou”. Before her recruitment to this position, Ms Konaté served as ABNE Finance Assistant (Intern) during a year. She brings to ABNE a wealth of experience and exposure in management, accounting and finance, having worked in several companies in Burkina Faso. Prior to joining the ABNE team, Ms Konaté was a Site Manager at “Africaine des Travaux Publics (ATP)” and provided leadership in accounting for funds and administering a road construction project. She also worked at AFRIPAGES Burkina as a Business Manager with oversight responsibilities for service delivery and customer portfolio management.



**Jean Keberé** is the Communications Officer of ABNE. He earned a Master’s degree in Arts and communications from the University of Ouagadougou in 1998 and benefited from vocational training in Public Relations and Multimedia from the University of

Maryland, College Park from August 2002 to June 2003.

He joined ABNE in December 2013 with more than 17 years of experience in communications having worked with several international organizations including Oxfam, Christian Children’s Fund of Canada, Tree Aid West Africa and the national office for employment. Prior to joining ABNE, Mr Keberé was in charge of Media and Communication at Oxfam in Burkina Faso. Among his achievements in this organization, he produced information materials for Oxfam regional and international publications and developed key documents including a quarterly newsletter and an annual report to increase Oxfam visibility in the country.

### Up-Coming Activities

- **January 23 – 24, 2014:** ABNE Technical Advisory and Management Committee Meetings, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (Status: Confirmed)
- **February 3 – 6, 2014:** African Innovation Summit. Praia, Cape Verde. February 1 – 2, 2014: NSTIH side-event on STI Indicators and Measurement of Impacts of Human Development Programmes. (Status: Confirmed)
- **February 6 – 13, 2014:** 28<sup>th</sup> OECD BIO Working Group Meeting workshop on new plant breeding techniques. (Status: Confirmed)
- **February 13 – 14, 2014:** National biosafety communication strategy review meeting. (Status: Tentative)
- **February 15 – 20, 2014:** ABNE–John Templeton Foundation Survey on the Biosafety System in Uganda. (Status: Confirmed)
- **February 24 – 26, 2014:** Training to strengthen regulatory capacity of Institutional Biosafety Committees for biosafety monitoring and compliance for on-going confined field and multi-location trials. Abuja, Nigeria. (Status: Tentative)
- **March 3 – 7, 2014:** 7<sup>th</sup> African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) International Conference. Yaoundé, Cameroon. (Status: Confirmed)
- **March 10 – 14, 2014:** Regional Food/Feed Safety Workshop. Accra, Ghana. (Status: Confirmed)
- **March 10 – 11, 2014:** Stakeholders’ meeting for the validation of the draft revised law. Lome, Togo. (Status: Tentative)
- **March 17 – 18, 2014:** Africa Biosafety Coordination Meeting. Lilongwe, Malawi. (Status: Confirmed)
- **March 19 – 21, 2014:** Training on review, decision-making, and inspection and compliance monitoring of Bt cotton multi-location trials. Lilongwe, Malawi. (Status: Confirmed)
- **March 24 – 28, 2014:** Training for new members of the National Biosafety Committee on administrative procedures and biosafety decision-making. Kampala, Uganda. (Status: Tentative)
- **March 31 – April 2, 2014:** Training workshop on the key regulatory considerations for confined field trials. Bamako, Mali. (Status: Tentative).



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