

## Africa Biosafety Watch – ABNE NEWSLETTER (May 2020 - July 2020)

### ABNE New Technical Advisory Committee held its inaugural meeting in early June 2020

As AUDA-NEPAD ABNE embarks on the third phase of its programme starting from June 2020, new Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members have been appointed to replace the former committee whose term came to an end in December 2019.

The new TAC members convened for their first meeting from 4 – 5 June 2020. Since face to face was not possible because of restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic management measures, the meeting was conducted using a virtual platform.

TAC members comprise eminent experts selected from AU Commission, AUDA-NEPAD, partner institutions in Africa and outside, private sector and international organizations.

The objectives of the meeting were to install the new TAC members and adopt the TAC guidelines manual, to review and adopt the technical progress report on implementation of the programme, and to update and adopt the annual workplan in line with the strategic objectives of the programme.



The meeting was chaired by Dr Dave Keetch from South Africa.

### In this Issue

- ❖ ABNE New Technical Advisory Committee held its inaugural meeting in early June 2020
- ❖ West Africa Integrated Vector Management Steering Committee Adopted Workplan and Recommendations for the Year 2020
- ❖ The National Biosafety Management Agency initiates drafting of a national biosecurity policy in Nigeria
- ❖ CBD African Group of Negotiators Meet to Prepare for Upcoming International

The meeting started with opening remarks by the representatives of partner institutions and AUDA-NEPAD. They welcomed participants and commended ABNE for the achievements and progress made in the past decade in supporting AU member states building biosafety regulatory systems to safely harness modern biotechnology for agricultural transformation and socio-economic development. For the phase III of the programme, ABNE team was encouraged to ensure focus in order to make a difference with respect to safe access to technology by smallholder farmers for sustainable livelihood and socio-economic development.

During the meeting, TAC members were taken through AUDA-NEPAD ABNE mandate, vision and mission, the organizational structure, and the service delivery approach. ABNE workplan for the first year of this new phase (June 2020 – May 2021) was also presented to TAC. The presentations were followed by exchanges and discussions with ABNE staff and then between TAC members exclusively.

This resulted in a series of recommendations expressed by TAC to improve ABNE workplan and refine the implementation strategy on the ground.

Following the transformation of the NEPAD Agency into the African Union Development Agency- NEPAD (AUDA-

NEPAD), the ABNE project is now a programme serving as a Centre of Excellence under the Directorate for Knowledge Management and Programme Evaluation.

The year 2019 marked the end of the second phase of the ABNE project's phase II. To sustain the program's activities, a proposal was prepared and submitted for financial support. This was approved for the next five years (2020-2024).

In his opening remarks, Dr Dave Keetch welcomed participants and commended the ABNE team for the preparation of the meeting and for the activities carried out in 2019. Welcome remarks were also given by Mr. Lawrence Kent, on behalf of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, major donor of the programme, and by Dr. Doug Buhler, from Michigan State University, technical partner of the ABNE programme.

The opening ceremony was followed by the presentation of ABNE Director's Report and the Annual Technical Progress Report. A presentation of ABNE 2020 work plan, followed by discussions and comments, closed the first day sessions.

## West Africa Integrated Vector Management Steering Committee Adopted Workplan and Recommendations for the Year 2020

Members of the West Africa Integrated Vector Management (WA-IVM) Steering Committee, held a two-hour online meeting on June 26, 2020 to examine the impact of COVID-19 on their activities and discuss the way forward for the year 2020. The meeting brought together thirty biosafety and health regulators from ECOWAS countries, as well as AUDA-NEPAD staff serving as members of the programme Secretariat.

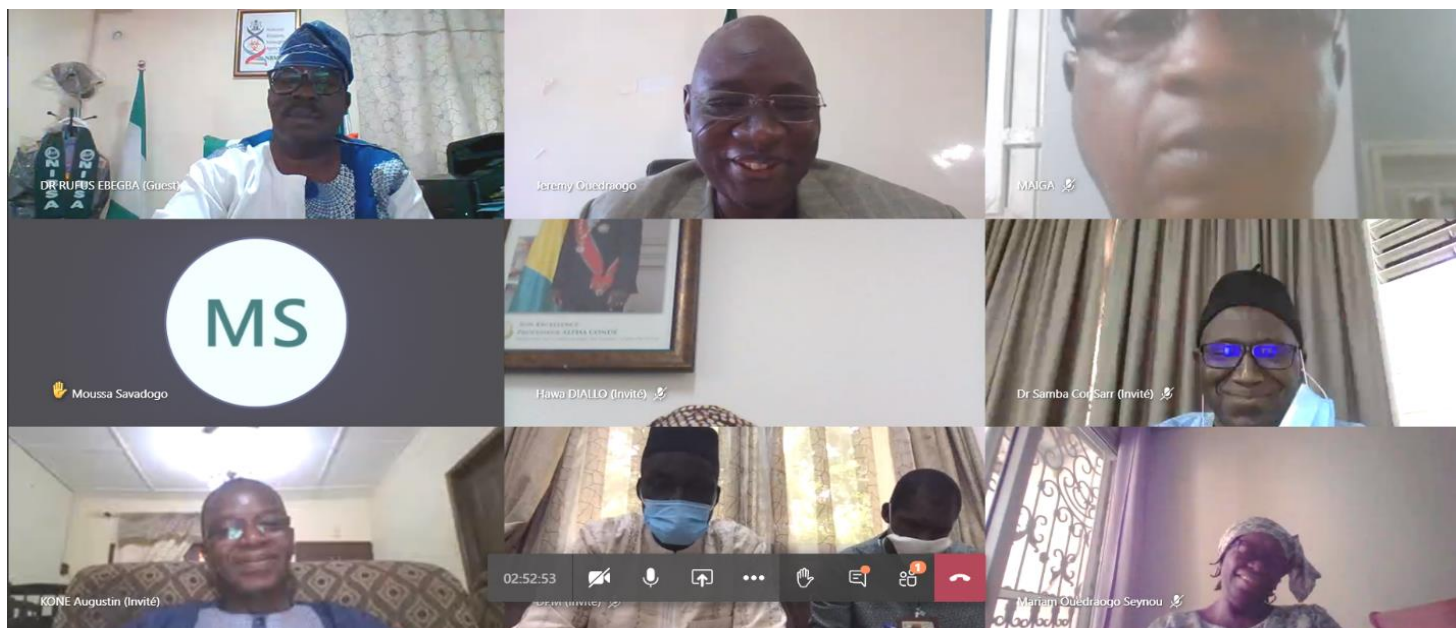
In his opening remarks, Dr Rufus Ebegba, Vice-Chairman of the Steering Committee (SC), who presided over the meeting, welcomed participants and noted that "the COVID-19 pandemic has unexpectedly changed the course of activities over the world as the pandemic has demystified scientific discoveries and research hence it is important to take the project seriously so as to ensure that malaria is safely eradicated in Africa".

Dr Jeremy Ouedraogo, Head of AUDA-NEPAD West Africa Regional Office in Dakar and Head of ABNE programme, in

his presentation on the achievements of the IVM program since its inception in 2017, and the output/outcomes for year 2020-2024 stated that "a first set of five IVM guidelines have been so far developed and validated by the different technical working groups. And the next steps are now to consolidate progress in West Africa and scale up the initiative to continental process while enhancing international engagement".

Subsequently, Dr Moussa Savadogo, ABNE Principal Programme Officer, made a presentation focusing on the initial workplan for the year 2020 and then the new workplan which has been revised taking into account the COVID-19 pandemic context. All activities requiring face to face meetings for stakeholders' consultations and deliberations are postponed until the pandemic situation is improved and lockdowns are lifted. In the meantime, the program will be

running with desktop activities including development of guidelines and other technical documents, as well as trainings and technical assistance in COP-MOP preparatory activities through webinar sessions. Time was then allocated for SC members to deliberate on the best ways to catch up with delayed activities in order to meet the anticipated targets.



**A screenshot view of some of the participants during the online meeting. Upper left is Dr Rufus Ebegba, Vice-Chairman of the SC and Dr Jeremy T. Ouedraogo, Head of ABNE.**

At the end of the meeting, SC members came up with a series of recommendations to sustain the steady progress of the programme. The recommendations unanimously adopted included:

- The SC allowed Secretariat to share the draft guidelines with partners for their inputs before final adoption
- Additional guidelines on ethics and risk assessment will be reviewed by the Ethics TWG through a Webinar by July 15, 2020
- The Secretariat is tasked to plan for Webinars on training materials derived from the developed guidelines
- The Secretariat is also tasked to plan for Webinars to prepare for COP-MOP agenda items
- SC and secretariat will advise on face to face meeting when travel ban is lifted in the West African countries.

## The National Biosafety Management Agency initiates drafting of a national biosecurity policy in Nigeria

The National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) of Nigeria inaugurated a committee for the drafting of the National Biosecurity Policy on July 14, 2020 in Abuja.

“The ultimate aim of this initiative is to have a healthy environment and healthy citizens so that the productivity of the nation can be properly harnessed and actualized”, said Dr Rufus Ebegba, Director General/Chief Executive Officer of the NBMA. While inaugurating the committee, Dr Ebegba said “there are measures in place to ensure that Nigeria responds promptly to organisms that may pose a threat to our environment and human health”. The DG reiterated commitment of the NBMA in developing a sound and holistic Biosafety and Biosecurity system in



**Dr Rufus Ebegba, CEO of the NBMA**

Nigeria and Africa.

The Head of the West Africa Office of the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and Head of the African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE), Dr Jeremy T. Ouedraogo, who together with his team joined the meeting virtually, commended the Agency and the DG for their commitment to Biosafety and Biosecurity capacity development both in Nigeria and Africa.

Dr Ouedraogo said the African Union is working with the World Health Organization to develop regional biosafety policies and platforms, for the implementation of functional regulatory systems across the continent. He pledged AUDA-NEPAD's support to Nigeria through the drafting process.

"NBMA has a duty to serve West Africa and you are doing



**Dr Jeremy T. Ouedraogo, Head of AUDA-NEPAD Regional Office**

that very well. We will make our team available to support the drafting team in any capacity", he assured. Dr Jeremy also congratulated the committee members and commended the DG/CEO for his leadership.

The Chair of the Committee and Director of the Biosecurity department of the Agency, Ms. Chinyere Nzeduru, spoke on behalf of members of the committee and thanked the DG/CEO for the confidence reposed in them. She gave the assurance

that the committee will work expeditiously to develop the draft policy within the timeframe.

Immediately after the inauguration, the committee held an inception meeting to begin work on the national biosecurity policy with a view to submit a draft by the 17th of July 2020.

## **CBD African Group of Negotiators Meet to Prepare for Upcoming International Meetings**

African Union and AUDA-NEPAD supported the organization of an online meeting of African Group of Negotiators (AGN) to prepare upcoming international meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This meeting, held on 22 July 2020, was chaired by Ms Wadzanayi Mandivenyi, Chief Director of Biodiversity Monitoring and Specialist Services at the Department of Environmental Affairs in South Africa. Forty (40) members of AGN participated in the meeting and had the opportunity to interact and agree concerns and issues to be addressed

during the next CBD meetings as well as at the upcoming summit on biodiversity in New York, in September 2020.

In her opening remarks, Ms Wadzanayi emphasized that “it is time to make African position stronger in international meetings. If Africa speaks with one voice, we can influence decisions that don’t necessary serve Africa interests.”

During the meeting, a presentation was made on

Africa priorities pulled together from previous meetings. These key priorities were adopted by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (**ACMEN**) in November 2019 and focus mainly on biodiversity conservation issues, access and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources as well as advocating for resource provision and resource mobilization.



From the discussions, issues such as how countries should adequately fill in CBD monitoring and baseline documents on the Global Biodiversity Framework were highlighted and addressed. Suggestions were also made on how the CBD Secretariat could improve the documents for the responses to be more Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely (SMART). It was also agreed that one of the key challenges the continent is facing is the lack of data on biodiversity. Countries were encouraged to gather the needed information that would be reflected in the baseline reports. Another key issue raised was the need for capacity building on important areas like Digital Sequence Information (DSI) within the global benefit sharing mechanism.

The CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) meeting is scheduled for November, 2020. The key objective of this meeting

will be to update parties on the progress made by the Subsidiary body on the preparation of the next Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Protocol of Cartagena (COP-MOP) scheduled for May 2021 in China. The November meeting will also be a platform for parties to amend the documents and raise the key concerns they expect to be addressed during the COP-MOP.

At the end this preparatory meeting, a core group was constituted to draft post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework indicators that would be validated by the AGN before submission to the CBD Secretariat. Participants also propose that the representatives of the continent in the Secretariat raise the issue of the date of the next SBSTTA meeting in November that could challenge the participation of African countries that have not yet even reached the pick of COVID-19 disease. It was suggested that the Secretariat postpone the meeting to next year to make sure that all African parties have the opportunity to participate.



### African Biosafety Network of Expertise

**Managing Editor:** Dr Jeremy T. Ouedraogo  
**Editorial Team:** Mr. Samuel Timpo, Dr Moussa Savadogo, Mr. Jean W. Kebere  
**Contact:** Email: [info@nepadbiosafety.net](mailto:info@nepadbiosafety.net); Tel: (221) 33 859 18 79; Web: [nepad-abne.net](http://nepad-abne.net)

© AUDA-NEPAD ABNE, 2019