

CONCEPT NOTE

AATF AND AUDA-NEPAD CONSULTATIVE ROUND-TABLE ON AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES FOR AFRICA'S RURAL ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

28 OCTOBER, 2020

Introduction

For Africa to achieve the Agenda 2063 aspiration for “A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development” (Aspiration 1) the continent needs to invest in modern agriculture for increased proactivity and production as well as exploit the vast potential of Africa’s blue/ocean economy. The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) is one of the continental frameworks under Agenda 2063 and it aims to help African countries eliminate hunger and reduce poverty by raising economic growth through agriculture-led development as well as promoting increased national budget provision to the agriculture sector. In July 2003 in Maputo, Mozambique, the Heads of State and Government launched the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), an agriculture-led integrated framework of development priorities aimed at reducing poverty and increasing food security on the continent by committing to spend at least 10% of their national budget on agriculture (AU-NEPAD, 2003).

The commitment to CAADP was renewed at the Assembly of the AU in 2009 in Sirte, Libya, and reaffirmed in 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, with the adoption of the *Malabo Declaration on Accelerated African Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihood*. Other key stakeholders such as the private sector and development partners also committed to aligning to CAADP accordingly with, for example, the launch of the Grow Africa initiative for private sector enterprises (Grow Africa, 2016) as development partners committed to tying their assistance to progress in implementing CAADP.

Clearly, the vision to end hunger would be realized through doubling of the current productivity level by embracing technological innovations to drive agricultural transformation coupled with necessary appropriate policy and institutional conditions and support systems that facilitate sustainable and reliable production and access to quality and affordable inputs.¹

¹ <https://www.nepad.org/caadp/publication/malabo-declaration-accelerated-agricultural-growth>

In 2007, African Heads of State and Government adopted a report on *Freedom to Innovate* in which they undertook to build the required capacity to harness and apply biotechnologies to improve agricultural productivity, public health, industrial development, economic competitiveness, and environmental sustainability (including biodiversity conservation) in Africa. This was bolstered in 2018, when AU considered emerging technologies as having the potential to hasten agricultural and public health benefits. The technologies considered were gene drive, micro-grids, and drones. The AU further called on member states to leverage these technologies for socio-economic development and rural transformation. Thus, for Africa to realize the aspirations of the Malabo Declaration on ending hunger and ensuring nutrition, Governments and non-state actors in the agriculture sector should fully integrate biotechnology into Africa's vision on agricultural development.

The *Freedom to Innovate* report highlighted recommendations needed to be undertaken by African Governments and their entities to address biotechnology issues for economic development.² The report challenged Africa's Heads of State and Government to prioritize the importance of a coordinated approach in the promotion and development of technological innovations on the continent. The report underscored the urgency that African Heads of State and Governments needed to place on the strategic role that technological innovation plays in driving economic transformation with a call on governments to strengthen capacity on biotechnology, enact and resource the regulatory frameworks and improve knowledge and application of intellectual property rights.

Nearly a decade and a half since the adoption of *Freedom to Innovate* Report by African Heads of State and Government, some notable progress in agricultural biotechnology has been witnessed on the continent. For instance, there has been a progressive growth in biotechnology R&D with over half a dozen transgenic crops and other products in the pipeline; with a few others, such as Bt cotton advanced to commercial release and cultivation. The continent has also invested commendable resources in building capacities for biotech R&D in their national agricultural research systems (NARS) including the establishment of centres of excellence such as the BECA hub and the African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE) and mounting of public awareness and biotech advocacy platforms such as the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa (OFAB). Significantly, several African countries have established national biosafety regulatory frameworks to oversee testing and deregulation of biotech products. The passage of biosafety policies, laws and regulations in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria and Ghana in the last five years best serves to illustrate this point. However, less than 30% of

² <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/freedom-innovate-biotechnology-africas-development>

African countries have functional biosafety frameworks and the number of biotech products getting to farmers is still very low with a glaring mismatch between investment and progress.

African leaders resolved to promote programs that will generate a critical mass of technological expertise in targeted areas that can exploit high growth potential from biotechnology to develop Africa's rich biodiversity, improve agricultural productivity and develop healthcare products through the then New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) framework³. One avenue was through capacity building and strengthening through continent-wide service network that has buy-in from African governments.

The AUDA-NEPAD's African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE) is a biosafety resource network for African regulators and policy makers with the overall goal of enhancing the capacity of African countries to build functional biosafety regulatory systems. This will enable these countries to harness modern agricultural biotechnology support for improved food security, income and livelihoods while minimising potential risks to the environment and human health. It was conceptualized under the NEPAD Agency's Consolidated Plan of Action and fulfils the recommendation of the High-Level African Panel on Modern Biotechnology – Freedom to Innovate, by Juma and Serageldin. ABNE's biosafety capacity building services target the members of National Biosafety Committees (NBCs), Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBCs), Plant Quarantine Officers (PQs), and policy makers. Science-based biosafety information is shared with these groups and with farmers and the media so that informed decisions can be made on the adoption of biotechnology crops. The network draws on available expertise, resources and infrastructure, and develops capacity and linkages with institutions within Africa and globally.

Rationale

Despite the identified potential of biotechnology and other innovation and emerging technologies to address socio-economic development challenges, the uptake and use have been painfully slow. Investment in agricultural biotechnology research and development has been unpredictable, with the majority of countries lagging behind and only a few crops advancing to commercialization. Efforts through the African Union (AU), AUDA-NEPAD, AATF and others are helping to strengthen biosafety systems, raise awareness and address misconceptions, misinformation and propaganda on agricultural biotechnology. The demand for agricultural biotechnology for food security and economic development is growing and there is need for concerted efforts and

³ <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/freedom-innovate-biotechnology-africas-development>

programs to support governments towards harnessing innovations and emerging technologies such as biotechnology for agricultural growth.

Objectives of the Consultative Roundtable Meeting

AATF and AUDA-NEPAD have a history of collaboration, which is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to leverage on each other's comparative advantage to advance areas of mutual interest. The Consultative Roundtable will be organized on the platform of the Calestous Juma Executive Dialogue (CJED). The executive dialogue aims to strengthen the knowledge and capacity of African executives, senior officials, decision and policy makers, researchers and academia on innovation and emerging technologies. The CJED will further enable them to provide evidence-based policy choices for African leaders in making informed decisions in harnessing innovation and emerging technologies for various sectors of the economy.

The Consultative Roundtable will promote the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations. It will aim at appraising the progress that Africa has made towards utilization of biotechnology and innovation and emerging technologies on the continent and explore opportunities to address challenges affecting technological development on the continent particularly agricultural biotechnology.

The Consultative Roundtable will be held on 28 October, 2020 under the theme: **Enhancing Political Will towards harnessing Agricultural Biotechnology, Innovation and Emerging Technologies for Africa's Rural Economic Transformation.**

The following are specific objectives of the Consultative Roundtable Meeting:

1. Evaluate the current status, especially progress on development and application of agricultural biotechnology
2. Identify challenges confronting the development of the technology and prioritize opportunities for leveraging resources to promote adoption of innovation, modern biotechnology and emerging technologies in agriculture and health care
3. Develop a roadmap in support of the advancement of crop biotech projects to product commercialization in African countries
4. Explore potential collaboration opportunities for education and awareness creation and policy harmonization on innovation and emerging technologies.

Desired Outcome

The Consultative Roundtable will culminate in the development of a joint framework for enhancing collaboration between AUDA-NEPAD, AATF and member states to support the realization of Africa's rural economic transformation through the application of agricultural biotechnology, innovations and emerging technologies.

About AUDA-NEPAD

At the 31st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of African Union Heads of State and Government in Nouakchott, Mauritania, June 2018, a decision was taken to transform the NEPAD Planning and Coordination Agency into the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD). The establishment of AUDA-NEPAD is part of the global reforms geared at improving the Union's impact and operational efficiency.

The mandate of AUDA-NEPAD is to: a) Coordinate and Execute priority regional and continental projects to promote regional integration towards the accelerated realization of Agenda 2063; and b) Strengthen the capacity of African Union Member States and regional bodies, advance knowledge-based advisory support, undertake the full range of resource mobilization and serve as the continent's technical interface with all Africa's development stakeholders and development partners.

About AATF

African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) is an African-led entity, not-for-profit organization that is empowering smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa with agricultural innovations that contribute to food and nutrition security and generate health and wealth for their families and communities. Established in 2003, AATF works with public and private partners across the full food value chain to get agricultural innovations and knowledge that bring a meaningful change of Africa's agriculture into the hands of farmers. AATF's work contributes to capacity strengthening that builds efficient delivery and commercialization of innovative technologies that will increase income for the benefits of the farmers with enhanced impact and emphasis on youth, women and children.