

## Africa Biosafety Watch ABNE NEWSLETTER (April-June, 2015)

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### NEPAD Agency ABNE facilitates a biosafety workshop in Sudan

NEPAD Agency ABNE organized in collaboration with Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA) /COMESA a biosafety training workshop for regulators and other stakeholders, from June 2 to 4, 2015 in Khartoum, Sudan. The main objective of this workshop was to strengthen the capacities of Sudanese Regulators in functional regulatory systems and especially in risk assessment, inspection and compliance monitoring of GMOs, food and feed safety considerations and international regulations.

The workshop was opened by the Minister for Environment, Forestry and Physical Construction of the Republic of the Sudan, His Excellency Dr. Hassan A. Hilal.



Group photo of part of participants

It was facilitated by NEPAD Agency ABNE's experts with the support of a Senior Biotechnology Advisor from COMESA and local resource persons.

Sudan approved commercial release of the first Bt cotton variety in 2012 and is one of the three countries in Africa that have been producing genetically modified crops at commercial scale. The country developed its biosafety framework in 2005 and issued its National Biosafety Law to regulate agricultural biotechnology in June 2010.

From the outset, Sudan works toward creating an enabling legal environment to access safe and economically useful modern agricultural biotechnology for economic development. Research work on Bt cotton in the Sudan started in 2009 in compliance with the national biosafety framework and the draft biosafety law that was already in place. The work was carried out under the close scrutiny of the Biotechnology and the Biosafety Research Center of the Agricultural Research Corporation at Shambat.

Although all the precautionary measures were taken, it was important to help Sudanese regulators to have in depth knowledge of African Union's NEPAD Agency requirements as regards functional biosafety regulatory systems. Supporting the biosafety process in the Sudan while helping the country advance the safe development and deployment of modern biotechnology, will serve as an experience shopping ground for other African countries that aspire the safe adoption of biotech for agricultural development.

Participants appreciated NEPAD Agency and ACTESA/COMESA for conducting this workshop in the Sudan and acknowledged that the training has considerably improved their understanding of the biosafety regulatory process. The workshop created an opportunity for participants to appreciate the repertoire of biosafety resources available at the NEPAD Agency for further partnership as Sudan moves forward to enhancing functionality of its biosafety system.

This workshop illustrates the growing demand for biosafety services of NEPAD Agency ABNE by African countries including those who have already embraced the technology. Successful collaboration with ACTESA/COMESA indicates the importance of synergies with regional bodies in delivering vital biosafety services to national programmes.

## Biosafety needs assessment workshop in Tanzania





NEPAD Agency ABNE in collaboration with Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology organized a biosafety needs assessment workshop in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, from 16 to 18 June, 2015. 20 participants from Government Agencies, research institutes, the biosafety service and the biotechnology industry in the country took part in this workshop.

The biosafety needs assessment interaction with various stakeholders in Tanzania has come at the heels of recent developments in the country. This follows the amendment of the country's biosafety regulation early this year by removing the strict liability clauses for all research activities in GMOs. The needs assessment visit was with the view to identify and take stock of the biosafety regulatory needs of the country for possible intervention by

ABNE and other service providers. This is aimed at supporting the country to establish a functional biosafety regulatory system.

At the conclusion of the workshop, stock was taken of the country's biosafety needs, which was categorized according to their urgency. NEPAD Agency ABNE team was accorded an opportunity to meet with the Permanent Secretary to the office of the Vice President, and also meet with the Director General of country's Agricultural Organization. These meetings yielded very valuable outcomes. The Vice President's office is also the office of the Biosafety focal point in the country. These courtesy visits yielded valuable promises of collaboration by government to NEPAD Agency ABNE to provide services towards strengthening biosafety regulatory systems in Tanzania.

## Participants share their views

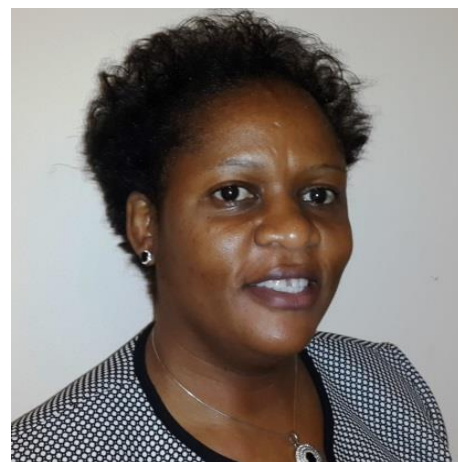


**Ms. Gloria Wapalila, Biosafety Inspector and Research Officer based at Tropical Pesticides Research Institute which is a Plant Biosafety Centre of Excellency**

*“This workshop was very informative on biosafety and GM technology issues worldwide. I particularly like the down-up approach used by NEPAD ABNE which come to discuss biosafety needs from Tanzania representatives. They need to closely follow up to ensure what is agreed is in place concerning the biosafety issues.”*

**Ms. Lilian Lukambuzi, Senior Environment Management Officer working with the National Environment Management Council (NEMC)**

*We have got very informative and educative information provided through the presentations on the Cartagena Protocol, regulatory framework requirements for biotech and biosafety issues, case studies of the biotech adoption and processes taken by various countries. I particularly liked the case studies of the biotech adoption in African countries which can be a learning point for other African countries to adopt the technology. It is important to support the awareness raising to farmers, consumers, and decision makers in biosafety for future adoption.*





**Mr. Moses Urio, Senior Research Officer at Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre in the Department of Food Science and Nutrition**

*This workshop was timely because of the need of having in place a functional Biosafety Regulatory Authority in Tanzania. The presentations were good, clear and easy to follow. I particularly like the socio-economic and environmental impacts of GM crops. It would be good that NEPAD ABNE assists in building the capacity of biosafety inspectors in risk assessment and application evaluation for GM activities.*



**Mr. Gasper Shao, Lawyer at the Vice President's Office.**

*This workshop was very useful especially for us as regulatory body for biosafety in Tanzania. Coming from different professional backgrounds, we managed to share with scientists, lawyers and others on biosafety benefits and challenges involved and the way forward. I have been moved by efforts taken at national, regional and global levels to ensure science is used safely to health and environment but maximizing the benefits to all the people.*

*(Information collected with the support of Dr. Olalekan Akinbo, ABNE Biosafety Programme Officer)*

## Enhancing Regulatory Capacity of Institutional Biosafety Committee members in Kenya





NEPAD Agency ABNE in partnership with the Programme for Biosafety Systems (PBS) and the National Biosafety Authority (NBA) of Kenya organized a biosafety workshop for institutional biosafety committee (IBC) members, on 29 June, in Machakos County, Kenya.

The workshop aimed at technically capacitating the regulatory body of IBCs in Kenya and reviewed the guidelines that established the IBC. Kenya NBA was established through Biosafety Act of 2009 for general supervision and control over the transfer, handling and use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) by regulatory supervision of research and commercial activities of GMOs.

The amended Biosafety Regulatory Act of 2011 of Kenya provides that a research institute undertaking contained or confined field trials GMOs shall

establish Institutional Biosafety committee to monitor compliance and report to the national biosafety committee or authority. Through the workshop, the guidelines for the establishment of IBCs were reviewed for understanding of their roles and responsibilities and to enhance the functionality of the IBCs in Kenya.

All participants welcomed the workshop and said it would fill a training gap and help IBCs become more functional with a better understanding of their role within the Kenyan Biosafety system.

In her word, the PBS country lead for Kenya Ms Doris Wangari said, this is a good collaboration between PBS and ABNE which will enabled better resource management and achieve common goals together in building functional biosafety system in Africa.

## Participants' testimonials

**Ms. Rose Mayoli, Research Officer, Head of Crop Physiology Unit at Coffee Research Institute at Kalro.**

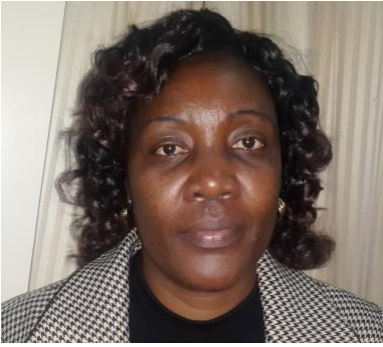


*“This workshop gives guidelines to IBCs on how they should operate. It also helped understand the rules and good regulations provided for in the law that should be adhered to while dealing with biosafety issues and GMOs. Topics such as the clarification of the role of IBCs in an institution, challenges and experiences from other participants were also interesting. Further awareness and sensitization of IBCs is still needed so that we can comply with the provided law and regulations.”*

**Dr. Justus Onguso, Senior Research Fellow, JKUAT, Nairobi.**

*“This workshop shed more light on how to move on as and IBC member. All the presentations and discussions especially on contained field trials were interesting. It would be good if NEPAD ABNE could bring together all the IBCs to develop common IBC regulations”.*





**Ms. Ephy Khaemba, Environment Occupational Health & Safety Manager at ILRI**

*“This workshop helped the IBCs to speak to one another and also share experiences and learn from each other. I particularly found the relationship between the international treaties and national regulations interesting, and also IBC role in ensuring this compliance”.*

*(Information collected with the support of Dr. Olalekan Akinbo, ABNE Biosafety Programme Officer)*

## Biosafety workshop for general stakeholders in Swaziland



*Group photo of participants*

NEPAD Agency ABNE, in collaboration with the National Biosafety registrar’s office of Swaziland, organized a biosafety workshop for general stakeholders on 2 July, 2015 in Ezulwini.

The key objective of this workshop was to assist the effort of Swaziland regulatory body to engage stakeholders on key issues on biosafety.

The Kingdom of Swaziland has passed the Biosafety Act of 2012. The custodians of the Act (SEA) has a Biosafety registrar’s office to implement the Act with National Biosafety

Advisory committee (NBAC) which has given approval for the conduct of confined field trials of Bt Cotton in six location across the kingdom. However, technical expertise in the critical areas of biosafety and compliance to the rule of biosafety is still needed and the country requires continued technical support by partners to Swaziland regulators body.

Through this workshop, NEPAD Agency ABNE contributed to increase the knowledge base on Biosafety regulation for key stakeholders and especially the competent authority.



## Biosafety short course at Makerere University for African Regulators

NEPAD Agency African Biosafety Network of Expertise and Makerere University, Uganda, in collaboration with Michigan State University, USA, organized a biosafety short course for African regulators from 13 -17 July, 2015 at Makerere University in Kampala.

In the short course, 40 participants took part including biosafety regulators, agricultural researchers and university faculty drawn from nine countries (Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Swaziland) in Eastern and Southern Africa.

The objective of the short course was to build the capacity of regulators for science-based risk analysis and decision making in order to facilitate the development, testing and release of genetically modified crops in a manner that ensures safety to biological diversity and human health. This is hoped to contribute to CAADP objective of harnessing Technological opportunities to enhance agricultural production and ensure food, nutrition and income security in the NEPAD Agency ABNE's focus countries.



*From left to right are: Dr. Jonny Mugisha, Principal of College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, Dr. Woldeyesus Sinebo, NEPAD Agency ABNE, Dr Teresa Sengooba, Board Chair of Uganda National Council for Science & Technology, Honorable David Bahati, State Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Dr. Peter Ndemere, Executive Secretary of Uganda National Council for Science & Technology and Prof. Opuda Asibo, Chair of Uganda National Biosafety Committee.*

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Twenty eight presentations divided over eight sessions were delivered in the five days of the workshop and addressed various biosafety topics such as socio economic and environmental implications of agricultural innovations; basics of biosafety/biotechnology science, policy and regulation;

Genetically modified (GM) crop confined field tests (CFT) management; GM crop environmental and food safety risk assessment, management and post market monitoring; GM crop technology stewardship; comparative assessment of major biosafety regulatory systems; liability and redress regimes; and biosafety communication for building trust. In addition, experiences of GM crop technology regulation and adoption in India and the USA were shared by experts invited from these two countries. A field visit was also made to Kawanda Research Institute near Kampala to see GM banana under confined field trials.

This course being only the second of its kind at Makerere University and the third in Africa organized by NEPAD Agency ABNE, offered an opportunity to make further strides towards institutionalization of biosafety short courses in African universities. The course also largely tapped into local biosafety expertise in Uganda, drawing on 13 local resource persons for delivering various modules. This, once again, is hoped to enhance local capacity which is vital in sustainable mainstreaming of the course at Makerere University in Uganda.



*Sudanese delegates at the short course*

## Upcoming events

- **2-4 September:** Information sharing and awareness creation workshop for Senegal Parliamentarians, Dakar, Senegal.
- **5 September:** Media briefing on Biotech/biosafety, Ada, Ghana.
- **7-8 September :** Training Workshop on “Post Release Monitoring of GM crops”, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- **7-9 September :** Training workshop on regulatory handling of confined field trials for the members of the national and institutional biosafety committees, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- **17-18 September:** ABNE management committee meeting, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.



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