

African Union Development Agency - NEPAD opens office in Nairobi



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African Union Development Agency opens office in Nairobi

The African Union Development Agency – NEPAD officially opened a Regional office for Eastern Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, on 16 September, 2019.

This follows a decision by the African Heads of State and Government, who during the 31st Ordinary Session of the African Union Summit held in Mauritania in 2018, approved the transformation of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) into the African Union Development Agency (AUDA).

the 31st Ordinary Session of the Assembly of African Union Heads of State, an official decision was taken and approved to establish “African Union Development Agency” (AUDA-NEPAD) as the technical body of the African Union with its own legal identity, defined by its own statute. The current reforms at the AU are an affirmation by Member States of their commitment to the NEPAD Agency as the Union’s own instrument established to champion catalytic support to countries and regional bodies in advancing the implementation of the continent’s development vision – as articulated in the Seven Aspirations and 20 Goals of Africa Union Agenda 2063. A core aspect of the current reforms is to streamline and improve effectiveness and efficiency in delivery in the implementation of AU decisions, policies and programs across all AU organs and.

As the African Union’s legitimate technical and implementation support Agency, the AUDA-NEPAD mandate highlights five key areas, namely: To coordinate and execute priority regional and continental projects to promote regional integration towards the accelerated realisation of Agenda 2063 ; to strengthen the capacity of AU Members States and regional bodies; Advance knowledge-based advisory support to AU Member States; Undertake the full range of resource mobilization; and Serve as the continent’s technical interface with all Africa’s development stakeholders, and development partners.

The new Nairobi office will implement the AUDA-NEPAD mandate in Eastern Africa, extend to other 55 members states as needed and work in close collaboration and synergy with the role played by the NEPAD / African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) Kenya Secretariat in Kenya and in Eastern Africa. The purpose of AUDA-NEPAD’s Regional Office for Eastern Africa Nairobi is to bring the services, activities and impacts AUDA-NEPAD undertakes closer to AU member states in Eastern Africa and regional bodies



From left to right are Mr Daniel Osiemo, CEO of NEPAD/APRM Kenya and Prof. Aggrey Ambali, AUDA-NEPAD Director in charge of Resource Mobilization, cutting the symbolic ribbon during the opening ceremony.

such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

Since its inception, NEPAD provides unique opportunities for African countries to take full control of their development agendas, to work more closely together and to cooperate more effectively with international partners. NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency (NEPAD Agency) was established in February 2010 as an outcome of the integration of NEPAD into the AU’s structures and processes. During the past decade, the Agency has managed several programmes and projects in four investment portfolios, namely Natural Resources Governance, Youth and Skills Development, Regional Integration, Infrastructure and Trade, and Industrialization, Science, Technology and Innovation. The Africa Union Member States approval to elevate NEPAD to Africa Union Development Agency will certainly strengthen the capacities and mandate of NEPAD to fully implement the AU development programmes and effectively address any new development challenges facing the continent.

Niger Parliamentarians' Technical Seminar on the country biosafety bill

African Union Development Agency – NEPAD, in partnership with the Ministry of Environment, the *Centre National des Études Stratégiques et de Sécurité (CNESS)* and the Parliament organised a technical seminar to discuss the biosafety bill provisions on 30 September, 2019, in Niamey. This workshop follows previous meetings organized by CNESS and the Ministry of Environment with the support of AUDA-NEPAD to sensitize stakeholders on biosafety issues.

50 participants attended the seminar including members of the Parliament Select Committee for Rural Development and Environment. The opening ceremony was chaired by Honourable Iro Sani, First Vice-President of the National Assembly.



From left to right are: Dr Moussa Savadogo, Principal Programme Officer, representing AUDA-NEPAD, Hon. Maman Rabiou Maina, Chairman of the Select Committee for Rural Development and Environment, Hon. Iro Sani, Vice-President of the Parliament and Colonel Major Ali Harouna, Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of Environment.

In his opening remarks, Hon. Iro Sani highlighted the importance of this meeting as it will “open discussions on the biosafety principles and their relevance for a country like Niger.” He added that “the Parliament will pay special attention to the outcomes of the meeting, hoping that they will serve as a basis for constructive discussions on the biosafety bill during the parliamentary session coming soon.”

Dr Moussa Savadogo, AUDA-NEPAD Principal Programme Officer, on behalf of the Head of AUDA-NEPAD West Africa Regional Office, recalled that Niger is party to the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety and he congratulated the country for its active participation in the international negotiations that led to the adoption of protocol and in the subsequent meetings.

He further stated that AUDA-NEPAD highly appreciates the efforts made so far by Niger Ministry of Environment and the whole Government to table to the Parliament such a draft biosafety bill that is modern and well balanced.” He stressed that the adoption of the biosafety bill has been long awaited and now needed to allow the country comply with its obligations vis-a-vis the international agreement on Biosafety.

During the meeting, Participants got insight on the global and regional context that must shape the Niger biosafety bill, especially the status of the biosafety governance at the global and regional levels, and the progress made so far, globally, to ensure effective applications of modern biotechnology tools to improve agricultural productivity and food systems as well as in the health sector.

They were also provided detailed information on the ongoing process led by the CNESS to develop a national biosafety / biosecurity strategy as well as the detailed steps followed by the Ministry of Environment to develop the current biosafety bill.



Group picture of part of participants

During discussions, participants raised a few concerns pertaining to the availability of resources needed for an effective implementation of the biosafety law once it is adopted, especially challenges associated with human capital, material and financial resources. They were assured that the biosafety policy being finalized through CNESS will take good care of the concerns raised.

Parliamentarians expressed their high appreciation for the opportunity given to them to improve their understanding of the biosafety / biotechnology landscape, and they commended the Ministry of Environment, CNESS and AUDA-NEPAD for the quality of the information shared with them and the relevance of the bill that has been prepared.

Participants' views on the meeting

Hon. Maman Rabiou Maina, Chairman of the Parliament Select Committee for Rural Development and Environment.

'We have been well informed about the bill that is important for the protection of biodiversity in Niger. This meeting has equipped us with good knowledge and will facilitate the examination of the bill by the Parliament until its adoption by the plenary of the National Assembly. Niger is among the countries that have become aware of climate change and steps are being taken to ensure the protection of the environment in the country. "



Hon. Souleymane Hamed, Member of Parliament Select Committee for Rural Development and Environment

"Our impressions on this meeting are positive given the interest that all participants have shown in this biosafety bill. We have been very impressed by the content of the bill and we have noticed that all the members here are adhering to it. The biosafety law will solve a number of issues. Countries bordering Niger already have such a law and if we do not take measures, we risk the consequences of our inaction. We can say that this bill is really timely."



Biosafety Capacity Building Needs Assessment in Zimbabwe

AUDA-NEPAD ABNE carried out a mission to assess the status of biosafety in Zimbabwe from 15-16 August 2019 in Harare. The mission was led by Dr. Tinga Jeremy Ouedraogo, Director of ABNE, accompanied by Dr. Woldeyesus Sinebo, ABNE Senior Programme Officer. This mission is a follow-up of an official request from the National Biotechnology Authority (NBA) of Zimbabwe for technical support from AUDA-NEPAD to explore, introduce and adopt modern biotechnology in order to enhance agricultural productivity, encourage biotech-based business development and stimulate sustainable socio-economic development in the country.



ABNE delegation with Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for Higher & Tertiary Education, Science & Technology (HTESTD); representative of the Ministry of HTESTD; Board Chairperson of NBA; CEO & Registrar of NBA; and staff of NBA.

The mission started with a meeting with NBA representatives to understand NBA's mandate, vision, mission, organizational structure, current state of things and future expectations and to look into the National Biosafety Framework. A meeting was also held with delegates of Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for Higher & Tertiary Education, Science, Technology and Development (HTESTD).

The Director of ABNE shared information on the mandate of the institution, which was followed by discussions. The Parliamentary Committee after raising a few questions appreciated the initiative by AUDA-NEPAD/ABNE and made a plea for ABNE to deepen its engagement in Zimbabwe and to increase its visibility in the country. The Parliamentarians assured their support to ABNE to make ABNE's intervention in Zimbabwe effective.

ABNE team also met with government officials from the Department of Research and Specialist Services (DR & SS) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanization & Irrigation Development; officials from the Ministry of Environment, Tourism & Hospitality Industry; and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of HTESTD. Topics discussed during these meetings included previous experiences of Zimbabwe with GM crop testing, the existing legal framework and political dispensation that could allow the introduction and trialing of GM crops under close monitoring and confinement in the country and the importance of engaging stakeholders including civil society to sensitize and create awareness on biotechnology and its regulation. The team also visited the GMO detection laboratory at the NBA premises, furnished with modern equipment acquired through funds from EU-SPS project. This mission was an opportunity to have a close look into the biosafety system in Zimbabwe. The country has a biosafety framework that includes the National Biotechnology Authority Act of 2006 that provides a legal framework for application handling and decision making, and the NBA authorized and staffed to administer the day-to-day handling of biosafety matters. Zimbabwe has been a party to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) since 2005. The NBA serves as the Competent National Authority and the National Focal Point for CPB in Zimbabwe. The NBA has a board that gives an overall oversight, control and direction for

the NBA. The Board is appointed by the Minister of HTESTD in consultation with the Head of State, the President.

The NBA Act confers mandates on the Board and the NBA on matters of biotechnology development and regulation including authorization of GMO activities and issuance of guidelines and standards for GMO undertakings. The overall policy direction on modern biotechnology is given to the Board by the Minister of HTESTD.

A brief examination of the National Biotechnology Authority Act (Chapter 14:31) indicated that the Act is comprehensive detailing the responsibility of the NBA Board, the CEO, and the Committees. The Act also provides for the establishment of Institutional Biosafety Committees chaired by Biosafety Officer in institutions that conduct biotechnological activities. Examining the contents of the Act, as also noted by the NBA, it was acknowledged that a number of guidelines including guidelines for the conduct of confined field trials (CFTs) and general release may need to be produced at a future date in a manner that ensures the co-evolution of technology development with the availing of the required regulatory tools.

In a concluding meeting, ABNE delegates and the staff of the NBA identified and prioritized needs, and planned interventions for the remaining part of the year in order to enhance the functionality of biosafety regulatory system in Zimbabwe. In line with its mandate, AUDA-NEPAD ABNE will continue to provide the necessary technical support to Zimbabwe to amplify the country's effort towards building a workable biosafety regulatory system.

Inauguration of a biosafety laboratory in Burkina Faso

The Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, Prof. Alkassoum MAÏGA chaired the inauguration ceremony of the National Biosafety Laboratory on Monday, September 02, 2019 at the INERA-Kamboinsé premises in Ouagadougou. He had at his side two other Ministers namely Mr. Maurice Dieudonne BONANET, Minister of Urban

Planning and Housing, Mr. Salif OUEDRAOGO, Minister of Agriculture and Hydro-Agricultural Development and Dr. Urbain Ibrahim COULIDIATI, Deputy Minister for Scientific Research and Innovation as well as high ranked officials including the CEO / DG of the National Scientific and Technology Research Centre and the DG of the national Biosafety Agency. Also were present

Hon. Larlé Naba Tigré, MP and traditional chief, other honourable Members of the National Assembly and representatives of international and inter-African organizations, including the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD). Dr Moussa Savadogo represented AUDA-NEPAD at this

important ceremony. In his opening remarks, Prof. Alkassoum MAÏGA, said that this jewel was fully financed by the State of Burkina Faso to the tune of 565,817,869 FCFA (~1,001,448 USD) through a loan agreement with the World Bank and equipped by the State with the support of WAEMU to the tune of 825,094,692 FCFA (~1,460,345 USD).



From left to right are Hon. Minister Maurice Dieudonne BONANET, Hon. Minister Alkassoum MAÏGA, Prof. Chantal Zoungrana and Hon. Larlé Naba Tigré during the cutting of the symbolic ribbon marking the inauguration of the laboratory.

He expressed his gratitude to the partners and paid tribute to the first authorities of the country for this important initiative. This laboratory ambitions to cover the sub-region and it is called to "provide quality services to countries who need it. To guarantee its independence, the laboratory is placed under the governance of the National Biosafety Agency. Given its technical platform, we are convinced that this is an innovative instrument that will contribute to accelerating the economic and social development of our country and also of the sub-region", Minister Maiga continued.

According to specialists including Prof. Chantal Zoungrana, Director General of the National Biosafety Agency (ANB), the National Biosafety Laboratory can

meet the needs of anyone who wants to evaluate and assess the safety of living organisms and their products thereof as well as any other organisms and products. The laboratory may also measure the level of pesticides and assess the presence and content of pesticides in food products.

Established in 2005 as the biosafety competent authority, the National Biosafety Agency is responsible for assessing potential risks associated with modern biotechnology applications. There is no doubt that with this new reference laboratory which complements ANB's technical tools, the Agency has greatly strengthened its capacity to assess and monitor modern biotechnology applications in Burkina Faso.

Capacity Strengthening Workshop on Emerging Technologies in Malawi

African Union Development Agency – NEPAD ABNE, in partnership with the Environmental Affairs Department of Malawi organized a capacity strengthening workshop on biosafety of conventional and emerging biotechnologies for members of the National Biosafety Regulatory Committee (NBRC) from 16 – 17 July 2019 in Salima, Malawi.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Benon Yassin, Deputy Director of the Environmental Affairs Department, highlighted the important role AUDA-NEPAD ABNE is playing in catalysing biosafety services in Malawi. He also emphasized the significance of the current training to enhance regulatory capacity of NBRC on emerging biotechnologies, in particular genome editing applications.



Group picture of ABNE experts and Malawi NBRC members during the workshop.

During the workshop, a number of presentations on the science and regulatory aspects were delivered. Each presentation was accompanied by active discussion over the two days. During the last day, the participants were divided into groups and cases of technologies developed through genome editing were given for each group, for regulatory determination and decision.

The groups' presentations on their decisions on the cases in the exercises depicted the reality that

participants have well captured the essence of the training.

The meeting ended with discussion on some important issues such as the need for adequate public biosafety communication and information sharing, and the importance of opportunities for regulatory study tours and experience sharing for the NBRC.

Capacity building in Uganda on the Development of Biosafety Regulations for the implementation of the Genetic Engineering Regulatory Act

A two-day consultative and training Workshop was held from 23rd-24th July, 2019, in Kampala, Uganda to enhance the safe development, transfer, application, importation and utilization of genetically engineered materials.

The Government of Uganda established a Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI) on recognizing Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) is key to the country's socio-economic growth and transformation.

Premised on the resolve that Technology and

Innovation development is an important determinant of progress and transition, the Ministry is mandated to provide over all Policy Guidance and Coordination for scientific research, development and the whole National Innovation System in Uganda. Its establishment came in at a time when the Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill was ready for presentation before parliament for discussions and subsequent passage into law. A process which the ministry managed throughout up to the passage and now it lays before the President for the final assent.



Group picture of participants

With the conclusion of that process, it is almost certain that it is the ministry to be the competent Authority in regard to GMO development, and regulation. With a team of nearly new staff as a reason of its infancy, the ministry faces the challenge of lack of capacity in matters of Biotechnology, and other emerging technologies especially in the field of Biosciences and their Regulation. This challenge would also present difficulties in the development of implementing regulations to the law once the President assents to it. This lack of adequate capacity prompted the ministry to ask of AUDA-NEPAD/ABNE to support the enhancement of the capacity of its staff in the aspects of Biotechnology and other emerging technologies especially in the field of Biosciences such as Synthetic Biology, and Genome Editing. Which ABNE very much obliged and designed a training in the field Biotechnology and Genome Editing and how to develop regulations for their regulation, and how the regulations are implemented. Experiences from Africa and elsewhere were also shared in the two-day residential training workshop.

In fulfilling this mandate, ABNE contributes to AU Agenda 2063 Aspiration “A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development” and also aligns with Aspiration 1 area 11 of focus that have identified key elements for spurring Africa’s growth to

be- job creation, increasing agricultural production; investments in science, technology, research and innovation and provision of basic services including nutrition, education, shelter, water and sanitation. Also Aspiration 1 area of Activity 13 that states- “Africa’s agriculture will be modern and productive, using science, technology, innovation and indigenous knowledge (Africa Union, 2014).

Support rendered to Uganda will create an enabling environment and the country would certainly overcome its food insecurity challenges, increase agricultural productivity and better its food nutrition. This would support to enhance programmatic performance that will enable AUDA-NEPAD Agency to fulfil its mandate, and fast track delivery of Africa’s transformation as encapsulated in Agenda 2063. It is expected that the just concluded meeting will help staff of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and other stakeholder to create an enabling environment that would bring the successful research outcomes the country registered in Agricultural Biotechnology over the years out of the laboratories and confined fields to the producers on the ground and thus contribute to increase agricultural productivity and better food nutrition of the nation.

Information Sharing and Sensitization Seminar on Biotechnology and Biosafety for Members of Parliament in Senegal

The National Biosafety Authority of Senegal, “Autorité Nationale de Biosécurité (ANB)”, in partnership with AUDA-NEPAD African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE) organized an information sharing and sensitization seminar on biotechnology and biosafety for the Senegalese Members of Parliament (MPs), from 6 – 7 July, 2019, at Saly Portudal, M’bour region. ABNE communication Officer, Mr Jean Kebere and Dr Moussa Savadogo, Principal Program Officer, responsible for the ABNE program in Senegal, participated in the seminar. The seminar aimed to equip the MPs with science-based information on modern biotechnology and biosafety and to provide an opportunity for them to hold preliminary discussions on the provisions on draft revised biosafety law that will be soon presented before the Parliament for adoption. We recall that the Government of Senegal, with the support of AUDA-NEPAD ABNE, started in 2015 the process of revising its 2009 biosafety law that was found to be limiting the functionality of the country biosafety system.



From left to right are: Mr. Kasse Ousseynou, ANB Executive Director, Hon. Yero De, Chairman of the ANB Board, Hon. Mr. Cheikh Seck, MP, Chairman of the Parliament Select Committee for Development and Land Management, and Hon. Aissatou Sow Diawara, MP, Vice-Chair of the National Assembly.

Up to forty (40) MPs effectively attended the seminar. In his opening remarks, Hon. Cheikh Seck, Chairman of the Select Committee stressed that “the precautionary principle which should have encouraged measured actions in the area of biotechnology has finally proven to be a principle of inaction. However, in order to face uncertainties, it is compelling to develop research programs in order to provide answers and lessen doubts. It is obvious that scientific evidence only remains the sources for relevant answers to unknowns. Therefore, we should not hinder science for the sake of the comfort of maintaining status quo situations. It then appears necessary, if not urgent, to revisit the Senegalese biosafety law in order to make it operational,

implementable and efficient.” Scientists and biosafety experts from national institutions and from AUDA – NEPAD ABNE introduced key topics including key aspects on modern biotechnology, relevant provisions of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, risk analysis principles, key provisions of the Senegalese draft revised biosafety law, and a summary of the biosafety and biotechnology related initiatives going on in the continent and within the West Africa region. Very enlightening discussions followed the introductory presentations, using mostly the locally commonly spoken languages, which allowed for active and effective participation from all MPs present. Relevant



Group picture of workshop participants

views were shared, that covered various areas of concerns. Special reference was made on the Bt cotton status in Burkina Faso and the country experience in dealing with modern biotechnology crops.

Answers provided by the experts greatly contributed to change positively the initial perceptions that most of the participants had on modern biotechnology and its applications.

The seminar ended on a very positive note with the MPs expressing their gratitude to ANB and AUDA-NEPAD for such a great opportunity given to them, for the first time,

to interact and share views on this important subject matter.

The general feeling was the readiness of the group of Parliamentarians to receive the draft revised biosafety law for examination. They have strongly recommended that the ANB and its partners namely AUDA-NEPAD make additional efforts to provide the same opportunity to the rest of MPS to benefit from the same level of information, so that the vast majority of the MPs gets ready to make informed decisions with respect to the passage of the revised biosafety law.

Consultative stakeholder meeting on review of biotechnology policy and biosafety legal instruments in Rwanda

African Union Development Agency – NEPAD, in partnership with the Rwandan Environment Management Authority (REMA), organized a consultative stakeholder meeting on the review of biotechnology policy and biosafety legal instruments (Law and regulations), from 9 – 11 July, 2019 in Kigali, Rwanda.

The meeting aimed to deliberate on feedbacks received from stakeholders following a previous consultation held in last April, and to finalize the policy and legal instruments.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources of Rwanda has reiterated the need to commence confined field trials of genetically modified crops in the country towards attaining improved food security and socio-economic development. However, this cannot be feasible without the biosafety legal framework being in place. To achieve this, and in response to the request from the Competent National Authority, REMA, consultative stakeholder meetings to review and validate the draft policy, law and regulations were planned to ensure stakeholder consultation and ownership of the outcomes.



Focal point for the CPB and the rapporteurs finalizing the meeting report

During this second meeting, feedbacks received from stakeholders were considered and where relevant, incorporated into the draft policy and law. The policy was reviewed to ensure alignment with official format and to address existing gaps. The law was also reviewed to ensure alignment with international instruments and national laws, as well as reflect current knowledge and experience in biosafety regulation. Stakeholders noted the need

for additional technical inputs and recommended that AUDA-NEPAD should work closely with REMA to finalize the legal instruments. AUDA-NEPAD team will continue to provide technical guidance to REMA and key stakeholders in Rwanda to ensure finalization of the draft law, policy and regulations and also to enable them draft the Ministerial Orders that will serve as accompanying legal documents.

Burkina Faso Parliamentarians Sharing Information on India's Biotech and Biosafety Experience

The Burkina Faso Parliamentarians' Network on Biotechnology and Biosafety organized a workshop in Ouagadougou on Tuesday, August 6, 2019, to share their learnings about the India experience on biotechnology and biosafety. This follows a study tour to India that was organized early this year by AUDA-NEPAD / ABNE in collaboration with international partners, in which Hon. Henriette Zoumbaré Zongo, Coordinator of the said network was sponsored to participate.

In her opening remarks, Hon. Henriette Zoumbaré Zongo, upfront indicated that her knowledge on biosafety of biotechnology applications was greatly improved from the interactions she had in India.

She added that the knowledge gained must be shared with all the network members and with all the parliamentarians at the national Assembly and even with the Members of the Government. Those policy makers, if adequately equipped with evidence - based and balanced information, will be able to support and advocate for the adoption of agricultural biotechnology for food security. She concluded that Burkina Faso and other African countries can learn from India which is compelled to provide food for a population reaching more than one billion six hundred thousand inhabitants by 2050.

Dr. Moussa Savadogo, Coordinator of ABNE node in Burkina Faso, representing AUDA-NEPAD at this important gathering, regretted that controversies have sometimes led to confusion and unnecessary fears about



From left to right are: Hon Henriette Zoumaré Zongo, Coordinator of the Burkina Faso Parliamentarians' Network on Biotechnology and Biosafety, Hon Moussa Zerbo, Chair of Parliament Select Committee for Environment and Dr. Moussa Savadogo, Coordinator of AUDA-NEPAD ABNE node in Burkina Faso.

some useful and proven advanced technologies. He indicated that Burkina Faso showed courage and determination in being the second country after South Africa in Sub-Sahara Africa to commercially approve biotech crops some years ago. He referred to Bt cotton that allowed the country to save the national cotton sector from collapsing due to the development of pest resistance in the 90's. He commended the Burkina Faso scientists and regulators for the ongoing efforts in trying to use the latest biotechnology tools to overcome malaria. For Dr Savadogo, a strong political will, scientific capabilities and a sound regulatory system constitute the necessary conditions for a safe and sustainable use of modern

biotechnology tools for socio-economic transformation.

The representative of the President of the National Assembly, Hon. Moussa Zerbo, highly appreciated the outcomes of the workshop while recalling that Burkina Faso understood very early that modern biotechnology has great potential to contribute to the country socio-economic development. That is why, "Burkina Faso has ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety" he said. He expressed the National Assembly's appreciation of the support provided by AUDA-NEPAD/ABNE to the national system.

Policy dialogue on labelling of foods derived from modern biotechnology

Progress has been made in establishing functional biosafety regulatory systems in a few African countries. More so, approval for commercial release of biotech crops have been granted in some African countries (eSwatini, Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria) while some others are moving towards commercial release (Ghana, Kenya). This progress and the rising call by consumers to exercise their right of choice underscore the need for appropriate labelling regulations. In line with the mandate of AUDA-NEPAD, to provide knowledge-based

advisory support to member states, a 3-day policy dialogue on labelling of foods derived from modern biotechnology was organized by AUDA-NEPAD. This was aimed at enhancing better understanding of the principles of labelling as provided by the Codex Alimentarius, identification of gaps or deviations in existing labelling provisions, and improved knowledge of the required tools for implementation of labelling regulations. The participants were regulators from the biosafety and food control authorities of Ghana, Kenya,



Cross section of participants during the policy dialogue on labelling of foods derived from modern biotechnology

Malawi, Namibia and Nigeria.

Participants were empowered to adopt best practices in establishing and implementing labelling regulations for foods derived from modern biotechnology. Following extensive dialogue and sharing experiences of member states and global practices, the objectives of labelling foods derived from modern biotechnology were determined. The fundamental principle of labelling, “labelling shall not be misleading” was also well understood.

Various gaps and deviations from Codex principles of labelling were identified in the labelling regulations in place or being developed in the respective countries as well as other labelling regimes on the globe. Several factors that need to be given due consideration in establishing GM labelling policy were enumerated and discussed, including justification for threshold determination and implementation in the informal food market, typical of Africa. The need to develop and implement national communication strategies, strengthen communication on food safety and collaboration towards its management, and ensure youth engagement in biosafety awareness through educational curriculum, was highlighted. Importantly,

there was a clear consensus to harmonize labelling policy in Africa in order to enhance trade. Other topical issues on streamlining import procedures, coexistence and glyphosate safety were also discussed and concerns were adequately addressed.

The participants resolved to proffer intervention(s) towards addressing identified gaps in their national labelling regulations for foods derived from modern biotechnology. Furthermore, they requested for sustained dialogue, consultation and negotiation with a common Africa position, hence the need to engage more member states in order to facilitate harmonization.

With the rising call by consumers to exercise their right of choice and trade implications of labelling or not labelling foods derived from modern biotechnology, the need for harmonized labelling policy in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Based on requests in the past, AUDA-NEPAD has been supporting harmonization efforts in biosafety regulations in ECOWAS and recently, the African Union Biosafety Regulators’ Forum (AU-BRF) established in Addis Ababa. The issue on labelling of foods derived from modern biotechnology should be considered on the agenda of such continental body to give policy direction to member states.

Training workshop for the establishment of Institutional Biosafety Committees

The Burkina Faso *Agence Nationale de Biosécurité (ANB)*, in partnership with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) organized a training workshop for the members of the Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBC) from 19 – 23 August, 2019 in Bobo-Dioulasso, in Western Burkina Faso.

The workshop aimed at familiarizing a select group of scientists and lecturers with the national biosafety regulations. Participants were selected from research institutes and Universities engaged in programs involving modern biotechnology, as the national regulations require that each of such institutions establish its own institutional biosafety committee.

A total of 25 participants from the Institute of the Environment and Agricultural Research (INERA), the Nazi Boni University (UNB), the International Center for Research and Development on Livestock in Sub humid Zone (CIRDES) and the Health Research Institute (IRSS), benefited from the program.



View of participants receiving their certificates at the end of the training - Bobo-Dioulasso, August 23, 2019.

Prof. Chantal Zoungrana, DG of the Burkina Faso ANB and Dr Moussa Savadogo from AUDA-NEPAD officially opened the workshop.

The program mainly covered three topics including 1) how Burkina Faso regulate modern biotechnology related research activities, 2) what provisions in the Biosafety Act are relevant to Institutional Biosafety

Committees and 3) how to use the implementing decrees of the act in establishing and managing Institutional Biosafety Committees? The IBC guidelines developed under the West Africa Integrated Vector Management (WA-IVM) program was used to some extent in this training, but will be more useful in sequent sessions that will focus in specific risk assessment, inspection and monitoring.

High-level consultation to stablish institutional biosafety committees and a national biosafety communication platform in Burkina Faso

Further to the technical training on IBC held in Bobo-Dioulasso in August 2019, African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) supported the Burkina Faso National Biosafety Agency (*Agence Nationale de Biosécurité* (ANB) to convene a policy dialogue session to engage with the top leadership of the National Scientific Research and Technology Center (CNRST) on a number of issues.

The consultation aimed (i) at building a consensual understanding of what the scope of Institutional Biosafety committee so as to fast-track the effective establishment of IBCS in relevant institutions, and (ii) to initiate consultations



towards the establishment of a national platform where scientists and regulators will play the major role in shaping national policy and communication on biotechnology and biosafety.

The meeting took place in Loumbila on September 26, 2019 and brought together 10 participants. The Research community was represented by the vice-CEO of the *Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques et Technologique (CNRST)*, and the Directors General of the *Institut de l'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles (INERA)*, the *Institut de Recherche en Science de la Santé (IRSS)*, the *Institut National des Sciences des Sociétés (INSS)* and the *Institut de Recherche en Sciences Appliquées et Technologiques (IRSAT)*. The regulatory competent authority was represented by the

DG of the *Agence Nationale de Biosécurité (ANB)* and other high-ranking officers including the Director of the National Biosafety Laboratory.

Opening remarks were made by Prof Chantal Zoungrana, DG (ANB), Prof Oumar Sanogo, Vice-CEO (CNRST) and Dr Moussa Savadogo (AUDA-NEPAD).

Discussions centered on the obligations for relevant research institutions to establish IBCS, the challenges experienced by IRSS and INERA in complying with the IBC requirements, progress made in conceptualizing the national platform for biosafety and biotechnology.

At the end of the meeting, Pr. Chantal Zoungrana, urged INERA and the IRSS in particular to take immediate actions for the effective implementation of their IBCs in order to allow the ANB continue its capacity building program.



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