

## ABNE Technical Advisory Committee Holds Annual Meeting in Addis Ababa



*Group picture of the members of NEPAD Agency ABNE's TAC*

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NEPAD Agency ABNE's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) held its annual meeting from 15 to 16 November, 2017 at the African Union Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The meeting was officially opened by the TAC Chairman, Dr Dave Keetch and with Mr. Hambani Masheleni, Senior Policy Officer, Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union (AU), Mr. Lawrence Kent, Senior Programme Officer from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and Dr Douglas Buhler, Director of AgBioResearch and Assistant Vice President of Research and Graduate Studies at Michigan State University (MSU) also in attendance.

In his opening remarks, Dr Keetch expressed his gratitude to the AU for hosting this year's meeting and stated it was a privilege to once again meet with TAC members to assess the progress made by ABNE in the year 2017 and to provide the necessary guidance going forward. Mr Hambani Masheleni, on behalf of Dr Mahama Ouedraogo, Ag Director of the AU Human Resources, Science and Technology, welcomed his guests and assured the gathering that the AU would continue working closely with ABNE and would provide the continental policy platform support required by the ABNE programme for the implementation of functional biosafety regulatory systems in Africa. Mr. Lawrence Kent stated that the BMGF appreciates the impact made by the NEPAD Agency ABNE on the ground and values the strong commitment of the NEPAD leadership to ensure sustainability of the ABNE programme. Dr Buhler, affirmed MSU's support for the ABNE initiative and expressed the University's commitment to strengthen this partnership and continue providing technical support, through training courses and international study tours.

During the meeting, TAC members had the opportunity to review ABNE's 2017 annual report and make recommendations for the upcoming year 2018. Following two days of review and discussions, TAC commended the efforts of the ABNE management and

staff for progress made in 2017. Support provided by ABNE to African countries for the implementation of functional biosafety regulatory systems was very much appreciated especially in countries like Cameroun, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Swaziland, Uganda, and Zambia.

Among the key recommendations made by TAC members was the need to remain focused on impact-oriented activities in 2018 and to partner with other biosafety service providers to ensure synergy and to leverage limited resources. TAC particularly supported the implementation of Experts' networks across the continent to help extend ABNE's support to African countries and encouraged ABNE to find the best ways to facilitate the contribution of these networks for a better impact on the ground.

Among other recommendations, TAC commended ABNE for the great work done to support the participation of African countries in during negotiations for the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Protocols. TAC further urged NEPAD Agency ABNE to continue working closely with AU Human Resources, Science and Technology to better optimize the participation of African countries to such important international negotiation fora.

## Strengthening Stakeholders' Capacity in Biosafety Communications in Cameroon



*A view of part of participants after the official opening of the workshop*

NEPAD Agency ABNE, in partnership with Cameroon Ministry of Environment, Protection of Nature and Sustainable Development, organized a training workshop on Biosafety Communication from 29 – 30 November, 2017 in Yaounde. The workshop was officially opened by Mr. DAMOU LAMTOING Antoine, Technical Advisor to the Minister of Environment. On behalf of the Minister, he welcomed participants and presented the status of biosafety in Cameroon: “I thank NEPAD Agency ABNE for the technical support provided to Cameroon in the biosafety area in general and regarding the organization of the present workshop in particular”, he added. Dr Silas Obukosia, ABNE Principal Program Officer, on behalf of ABNE Director, thanked Cameroon government for inviting NEPAD Agency ABNE to the workshop and assured Cameroon authorities of ABNE’s availability to provide continuous technical support in the development and implementation of biosafety regulations in Cameroon.

Around 100 regulators and stakeholders from relevant ministries, civil society organization, the cotton industry and the media took part in this workshop. ABNE experts and local biosafety specialists made presentations on various topics including the biosafety status in Cameroon, food safety basics, biosafety administration, biosafety communications principles and strategies, dealing with the anti-GM activism, the Biosafety Focal Point activities and the Biosafety Clearing House activities in Cameroon. Profusion of questions and comments from participants reflected their high interest in the topics developed and they openly expressed their gratitude to NEPAD Agency ABNE for this capacity building initiative. At the end of the meeting, participants initiated a local biosafety communications group that included mainly science/environment communications experts, and a WhatsApp platform was subsequently set up to facilitate information sharing in the country.

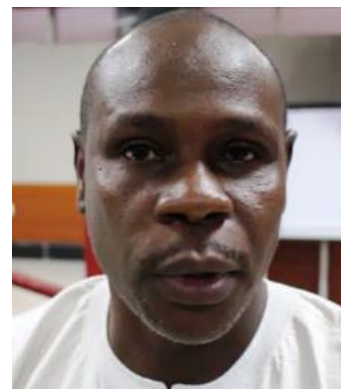
## Some participants share their views on the workshop

### **M. Abdoulaye Abou Abba, Director of Agricultural Production at SODECOTON**

«This training workshop was very useful as it allowed us to demonstrate that the process of testing genetically modified cotton variety, with our partner Bayer, was done in compliance with the regulatory framework, with the support of relevant institutions, including the National Biosafety Committee.

The meeting also allowed us to show that one can work on GMOs while following the safety requirements that are recommended. And the public must be sensitized and must understand the validity of the tests on this technology and how decisions are made based on scientific evidence to the benefit of the country.

Today, 80% of the world’s cotton is derived from genetically modified material and there is an economic benefit to our producers. And the demonstration has been made elsewhere that there are no risks related to human and animal health and Cameroon has undertaken similar tests to analyze these same risks”.



### **Mrs. Adrienne Engono, journalist at Mutations, member of the scientific journalists’ network in Cameroun.**

« This meeting comes just at the right moment, especially since biosafety issues in Cameroon still remain unknown because scientists who can give the right information are always suspicious. They think journalists will distort their statements. This meeting brought together journalists and scientists and helped set up a platform even if it is not quite formalized yet. This platform will allow better collaboration between scientists and journalists for a better dissemination of scientific information. The platform is for the moment virtual; we will start with a WhatsApp group and so together we will be stronger.



The presentations were very interesting, very explicit. I particularly liked the experience in other African countries. Seeing how other colleagues are already organizing in other countries, we wonder why not us in Cameroon. Since Africa cannot develop without science, we can also do our best as journalists to make our small contribution to Africa’s development.”

## NEPAD-led Biosafety Study Tour to India for a Delegation from Africa

From February 26 to March 7, 2018, NEPAD Agency ABNE in partnership with Michigan State University, organized a study tour to India for high level officials from Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia.

This study tour aimed to share information on biotechnology and biosafety developments in India with special emphasis on regulatory experiences of Bt cotton and other food crops that are in the research and development pipeline. The visit was also to provide opportunities for regulators and policy makers from Africa to interact with biosafety regulators, and seed companies representatives from India.



**Group picture of participants with some of their Indian hosts**

The visit brought together high level official from Nigeria, including the Minister of Environment, Senators, Members of Parliament, and a special adviser to the minister; participants from Senegal and Zambia were top scientists and regulators.

All the delegates were exposed to the issues of biosafety framework in India, the regulatory reforms and the challenges faced and how they were handled by the government of India.

The seeing is believing experience with some seed companies was a value-added to the meeting sessions held with the regulatory body.

Participants showed much interest and engaged in questions during the laboratory visit at ICRISAT, site visits of the seed processing plants in Kalash, breeding site of hybrid for Cotton with JKseeds in Hyderabad, hybrid field of maize and vegetables in Ajeet seed company. The questions from participants were mostly on regulation, and collaboration opportunities between India and African countries.

The study tour provided participants with hands-on background on modern biotechnology and biosafety.



**Visit to Kalash seed processing plant**

This will certainly help them better assess the needs for their countries and especially take the right decisions on the safe use of emerging technologies to overcome agricultural and health challenges.

## **A New Strategic Plan for Improved Technology Regulatory Support Services on the Ground**

From 17 – 21 March 2018, ABNE staff held their annual meeting in Accra. The objective of this meeting was to assess the progress made and the needs for improvement in project implementation on the ground. The meeting also aimed to develop and adopt a robust and effective strategy plan to address all the needs and fill the gaps as to the provision of technical expertise for implementing functional biosafety systems in Africa.

The meeting was opened by Prof Aggrey Ambali, Head of

NEPAD's Industrialisation, Science, Technology and Innovation Hub alongside with Dr. Jeremy Ouedraogo, Head of the NEPAD Regional Office in West Africa and Head of ABNE. Prof. Ambali welcomed all staff and especially the new ones, i.e. Ms Modupe Adeyemo, Food Safety Programme Officer, based in Dakar and Ms Agnes Amakie Gidimadzor, Administrative Assistant-Finance, based in Ouagadougou. He encouraged staff to make this meeting a success and come up with a sound strategy plan that will inform



***ABNE Director with POs during the meeting***

ABNE's action for the coming years.

During the meeting, clear vision, mission and values of ABNE were identified along with strategic objectives and priority areas of intervention. As an African-led program

with a sound African Union mandate, NEPAD Agency ABNE, with this new strategic plan, ambitions to better serve the interests of African countries and the people in providing effective technology regulatory support services towards Africa's socioeconomic development.

## Upcoming events

- **24 – 25 April;** African Biosafety Coordination Initiative meeting, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- **6 June;** NEPAD Agency Side Event at the African Union Summit in Kigali, Rwanda.



### NEPAD Agency – African Biosafety Network of Expertise

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