



Africa Biosafety Watch

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NEPAD Agency ABNE's Technical Advisory Committee meeting in Kampala



A view of ABNE TAC, Management committee and Programme Officers

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Members of ABNE's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) held their 8th annual meeting from 17 to 19 November, 2016 in Kampala, Uganda.

On the eight members of the ABNE's TAC, six attended the meeting chaired by Dr David Keetch from South Africa. They scrutinized ABNE reports and work plans and made recommendations. This year, the meeting was organized in Kampala and TAC members had the opportunity to visit two local biotechnology research centers and to assess progress made in the biotechnology and biosafety sector in Uganda.

Every year, NEPAD Agency ABNE prepares annual technical and financial reports and submits them to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for accountability and effectiveness purpose. Workplans and budget for the upcoming year have to be also approved by TAC before implementation.



TAC members with ABNE management team and Programme Officers during a visit to ABNE's Kampala office

TAC members amended ABNE reports and workplans as planned and made clear recommendations. They first commended ABNE for the successful implementation of the recommendations made for the year 2016. They particularly appreciated the improvement of the financial and administrative arrangements, the smooth transition of leadership, the progress made in activity implementation in 2016 and the particular efforts made in countries like Ethiopia.

Among the key recommendations made for 2017, TAC members highlighted the need for continued focus on 10 African countries that need particular assistance for the GM crops confined field trials or commercial release process they have engaged in. While focusing on these 10 countries, ABNE should continue to be responsive to emerging opportunities in other interested AU member states, taking into consideration the geographical balance.

TAC members also insisted that ABNE strengthens its partnership with other service providers in the biosafety sector in Africa and also reinforces its resource mobilization initiatives to ensure effective and sustainable action across the continent.

Visit to Bt Cotton Confined Field Trials in Ethiopia

A team from NEPAD Agency ABNE and Michigan State University carried out a field visit to Bt cotton confined field trials at Werer, in the Afar region, East Ethiopia, on November 21, 2016. Here, in a zone of vast plains in the Rift Valley and its endless chains of mountains, the country is testing its first Bt cotton seeds in the field concomitantly with 5 other sites across the country.

Agriculture in Ethiopia employs around 85% of the population and the country strives today to cope with periodic droughts and soil degradation caused by overgrazing, deforestation, and high population density.

The Government of Ethiopia has seen cotton as a strategically important commodity crop to supply raw material for the rapidly growing textile sector. However, the cotton sector is undermined by pest attacks, and the production of conventional cotton, despite intensive use of pesticide, could not meet the needs of the flourishing textile industry.

Ethiopia, therefore, has been looking at other production methods in the last few years and is particularly interested in plant breeding techniques and biotechnology solutions experimented in other parts of Africa and the world.



Dr. Endale Gebre and his team taking the visitors through the Bt cotton CFT site at Werer.

“Cotton is becoming very important in Ethiopia because of the expanding textile industry. However cotton production is facing a major problem due to pest attacks mainly by the African bollworms and other sucking insects” affirmed Dr. Endale Gebre, Director for agricultural biotechnology research in the Ethiopian Institute of Agriculture Research (EIAR). “Bollworms being the major threat on cotton production in the country, we are now trying to screen varieties that are resistant to this pest thanks to the Bt trait incorporated in the plant. We are doing that under rain fed and irrigated conditions across the country. We are trying to see how the insect resistance is effective under field conditions here at Werer. It will be very important because if we can have good efficacy in the Bt trait incorporated varieties and hybrids, it means it will be possible to significantly reduce insecticide use,” he added.

NEPAD Agency ABNE has been engaged in the biosafety process in Ethiopia. ABNE especially partnered with Ethiopian stakeholders and other organizations on biosafety capacity building and because of these joint and successive efforts, the

country has revised its biosafety proclamation and worked on improving its biosafety directives.

As these biosafety instruments have been put in place, now Ethiopia has been able to introduce Bt cotton technology from different sources and has started testing the technology in six different agro-ecological zones.

“We can say that NEPAD Agency ABNE has a productive partnership with Ethiopia and this has started bearing fruit. It is amazing that Ethiopia has made so much progress in such a short period of time,” said Dr. Woldeyesus Sinebo JINORE, Senior Program Officer at NEPAD Agency ABNE.

At the Werer agricultural research center, seven cotton varieties are being tested; two from Ethiopia as local checks, three from Sudan with Bt gene, and two from India also with Bt gene. NEPAD Agency ABNE and MSU have been working together to build the capacity of Ethiopian experts to effectively conduct the CFTs following international norms and standards.

“This has been a great partnership between the government of Ethiopia and Sudan and also the

private sector from India. We believe in south-south collaboration.

This is a perfect example of how countries in Asia and countries in Africa are working together, with also the support of institutions like the NEPAD Agency,” said Karim Maredia, Director of World Technology Access Program at Michigan State University.

If the CFTs show good results, Ethiopia plans to release Bt cotton in the near future. “We have started this activity for about five to six months now. So we will analyze our records on the different sites to understand what has happened and how good are those parameters we are interested in, in terms of yield, in terms of resistance,

in terms of lint quality and so on. If the data show good results in the different research centers, we might apply for release in the next year but if there is a need for additional re-testing of the variety, we might go for another season of multi locations trials,” said Dr. Endale Gebre.

NEPAD Agency ABNE and its partners will continue to build stakeholders’ capacities in the country especially in the safe technology release process to support the country in its attempts to effectively harness opportunities from science, technology and innovation for the development of the country.

ABNE Programme Officers’ training workshop on resource mobilization and proposal development

NEPAD Agency ABNE, in partnership with Michigan State University, organized a training workshop on resource mobilization and proposal development from 13 – 15 November in Kampala, Uganda.



Participants ready to secure additional funding through improved project proposals

In his opening remarks, The Head of NEPAD Industrialization, Science, Technology and Innovation Hub, Prof. Aggrey Ambali, highlighted the importance of such a training that would enable staff to effectively mobilize additional funds to implement science, technology and innovation activities on the ground especially in the sector of biosafety.

Dr. Jeremy Ouedraogo, Director of NEPAD Agency ABNE, also insisted that no one is too old to learn. “This training is an opportunity to learn new things or to better understand what we might already know”, he added.

The training addressed topics such as writing scientific grants, finding funding, putting together a proposal, budget considerations and overview etc.

All participants had the opportunity to concretely contribute to the development of an important funding proposal to be submitted in late November for the ABNE programme.

Africa Region Preparatory Meeting for the 8th Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

NEPAD Agency ABNE organized a preparatory meeting for the 8th Conference of Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties (COP/MOP) from 26 – 27 October in Accra. 30 participants from 18 African countries took part in this meeting.

The objective of the meeting was to prepare the upcoming COP/MOP in Cancun, Mexico, in December 2016. In the past COP/MOPs, Africa delegates could not speak the same voice and this was detrimental to the image and the interests of the continent. Harmonizing views and positions on the agenda of the next meeting was thus deemed necessary and NEPAD Agency took the lead on this with the special mandate of the African Union



Group photo of part of participants

to coordinate the preparation of the meeting.

Key presentations on the Cartagena Protocol and also the Kuala Lumpur supplementary protocol were presented to the participants followed by extensive debate on African views on the provisions of these two international instruments that regulate the area of biodiversity and biosafety. It was pointed out that countries which are parties to the Cartagena Protocol are expected to ratify the Kuala Lumpur protocol which is a supplement to the first one.

Among key issues raised by the participants were the needs to continuously reinforce the capacities of the focal points for them to be more conversant to the subject and adequately fulfill all the Biosafety Clearing

House requirements.

It was also pointed out that many countries have sent their reports on the application of the Cartagena Protocol but were not supported as agreed while other countries did not produce any report but received funds. There is a clear need for the funding institutions to follow this up and harmonize the support mechanic and coordination.

NEPAD Agency ABNE was asked to lead a fundraising initiative to support countries to effectively participate in the COP/MOPs and make significant impacts. ABNE was also encouraged to pursue and reinforce the establishment of networks of experts' technical support to countries and help them deal with the challenges they might face.

Participants share their views on the meeting

Mr Kadiom Amidou, from Chad Ministry of Environment and Fishing, President of the African group for the COP/MOP 2017

“This meeting was very important because any time Africans go to COP/MOPs they come back with diverse opinions. This meeting will help us harmonize our views and talk with one voice during the COP/MOP in Cancun, Mexico. I liked the discussions on biosafety implementation in our different countries. Some African countries do have biosafety laws while others are lagging behind. Things must change positively. We discussed also the issues of public participation, which is very important also.”



Ms. Caroline Theka, Biosafety Registrar, Cartagena Protocol Focal Point, and BCH Focal Point at the Environmental Affairs Department, in Malawi

“This meeting went very well because it brought up issues that we need to consider in preparation of the COP/MOP but also to come up with a unified stand for contentious issues that are going to be discussed at the COP/MOP. What I liked most was the opportunity to discuss in a calm manner and as Africans. Sometimes we fail to discuss issues with other people from other regions. We are afraid to discuss issues in case others might enter and find our house is not in order. This meeting gave us an opportunity to discuss issues and to come up with one position that we are going to advance when we go to the MOP.”



Mr. Rufus E. Ebegba, Director General of the National Biosafety Management Agency in Nigeria

“This meeting was very vital for African countries to make meaningful contributions during the COP/MOP. In the African continent, there is a lot of gap of information apart the fact that most African countries do not really have the financial capability to attend this COP/MOP. And sometimes we realize that those who attend are not the right people who are able to defend the position of Africa and even the position of their country. With the preparatory meeting, it is an opportunity to identify the right people who attend the COP/MOP and also be able to contribute meaningfully. We are already synthesizing the issues on the agenda that will be discussed in Cancun. This will give Africans the opportunity to take a formidable position that will help African to safely adopt the technology.”



Dr. Martha Kandawa-Schulz, Senior Lecturer in Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of Namibia

The meeting was very good. I just think the topics were too many to be covered all in two days but the organizers did well to get all the topics discussed and I hope that is to the benefit of everyone.

I had wished that we could discuss more on synthetic biology and also public awareness and how to deal with that, and how to enhance the capacity building. For Africa to have the same voice at the COP/MOP, all the points raised here must be shared with the other African members. And the person who is speaking on behalf of Africa needs our assistance on the points discussed here and our support as well.

Biosafety training workshop for select lawyers from West Africa

NEPAD Agency ABNE 's African Biosafety lawyers Network organized an interactive workshop with the support from other partners' to provide participants with knowledge to understand and implement sound biosafety regulatory decision-making in their countries.

The training workshop took place from 17 – 19 October, 2016 in Ouagadougou. 16 lawyers from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo took part in this meeting.

The primary mechanism of passing this knowledge to the participants was through presentations and practical exercises besides sharing knowledge and experiences.

The overall object of the workshop was to boost the knowledge of African lawyers on Biosafety regulation and matters such as Intellectual Property related to GMOs. This meeting was supported by NEPAD Agency ABNE in partnership with the Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) and Croplife.



16 lawyers from 6 West African countries took part in this meeting

Participants share their views on the training workshop

Anté Jonas Komi, Lawyer at the Ministry of Environment and Forest Resources, Togo

This training gave us a lot. It helped us to strengthen the ties between lawyers from different countries in order to create synergy and share experience and knowledge especially on this subject that is new, to be able to ensure better regulation in our countries. I enjoyed the experiences of different countries in biosafety and especially in Burkina Faso with the National Biosafety Agency.



I also appreciated a lot the presentations on the various litigations in countries that have already started biotechnology. This allows us to know the possible problems that can happen, the position of civil society, the government's position etc. This makes us understand that in our countries, it important to involve all stakeholders so that they understand the topic well. When a state attorney for instance masters the topic well there are no arguments that could mislead him or her.



Harouna Ouedraogo, Lawyer at Agence Nationale de Biosécurité, Burkina Faso

This meeting was welcome; it allowed those dealing with texts to better understand the situation because it's not always obvious that lawyers are aware of the different cases that happen abroad. With this training and the sharing of experience, we were able to realize the realities in other countries.

The debates were interesting and the training will allow me to be a little more insightful about all aspects related to biotechnology.



Boniface Cacheu, lawyer at the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Senegal

The training was very rewarding and achieved sound results that we will not fail to enhance at our country level. Biosecurity issues are relatively recent and these are issues that are also changing very fast. It is important to update African lawyers to allow them to properly represent the interests of African countries and above all make it possible to derive all biotechnology-related profits.

I particularly appreciated the dynamic aspect of the workshop and the discussions that have happened between the different participants. The presentation of cases in other countries have allowed us to know that from the legal point of view, there is still much work to do because the first security is to have a reliable regulation that helps to derive benefits from biotechnology without incurring potential risks. I hope that such meetings can continue because you never know enough and the more there will be meetings of this kind, the more we will be better equipped to effectively represent our countries at international meetings.



Mrs. Grace Mbrokoh-Ewoal, Principle State Attorney, Ministry of Justice, Ghana

This meeting has been an eye-opener for me especially because before I came to this meeting and the previous one, my knowledge about biotechnology was very limited. Here I have learnt a lot of things especially concerning intellectual property rights (IPR). I would encourage that a lot more lawyers on the continent can attend and so the network will continue to expand.

Ms. Habibatu Udonma Chime, Civil litigation department, Federal ministry of justice, Abuja, Nigeria

This meeting was a good initiative and was very educative for us. I particularly liked the aspects on IPR and especially patents rights. That is a new area I have never done before. In future, it might be useful to get the views of the companies themselves and actually see these things done live because whatever you see remains in your memory and can never go. A lawyer can only defend so much as he knows so the practical experience is also necessary.



Capacity building for staff from NEPAD Industrialization, Science, Technology and Innovation Hub

NEPAD Industrialization, Science, Technology and Innovation Hub (NISTIH), organized a capacity building meeting at NEPAD headquarters in Midrand from 9 – 12 November, 2015.



Group photo with NEPAD Agency CEO (standing in the middle, in blue jacket and white shirt)

NISTIH is one of the four Branches of NEPAD, along with Natural Resource Governance and Food Security, Regional Integration, Infrastructure and Trade, and Human Capital Development.

Staff from the various units of NISTIH, including the Science and Technology Innovation Unit, the Communications Unit, the Health and Well-being Unit and the Education Unit attended the meeting.

This meeting aimed to introduce all staff to the different units and programmes of NISTIH and enhanced staff capacity in organizational development as well as security at the workplace and at home.

In his opening remarks, Prof. Aggrey Ambali, Head of NISTIH highlighted the importance of such meetings to forge and consolidate the team spirit. “All staff of the NSTIH hub belong to the same group and we must make sure that nobody feels as left behind”, he insisted.

Joining the group later for a short address, NEPAD CEO, Dr. Ibrahim Hassane Mayaki, reaffirmed the necessity to build an organizational culture with harmonized and efficient practices. “As NEPAD is growing, we all have to make sure we don’t stay in our comfort zones. As soon as we have achieved a result, we need to think about the next challenge to make sure we stay effective and responsive to the growing needs on the continent,” he added.

NISTIH, plans to hold such a meeting every year to pursue the staff capacity building and the teambuilding initiative that is necessary to achieve better results in programme implementation across the continent.



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