



**AUDA-NEPAD**  
AFRICAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

# African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE)

## Africa Biosafety Watch Newsletter

March - June 2021



**Managing Editor:**

Dr Jeremy T. Ouedraogo



**Editorial Team:**

Mr Samuel Timpo  
Dr Moussa Savadogo  
Mr Jean W. Kebere



[abne@nepad.org](mailto:abne@nepad.org)



+221 (0) 33 859 18 79

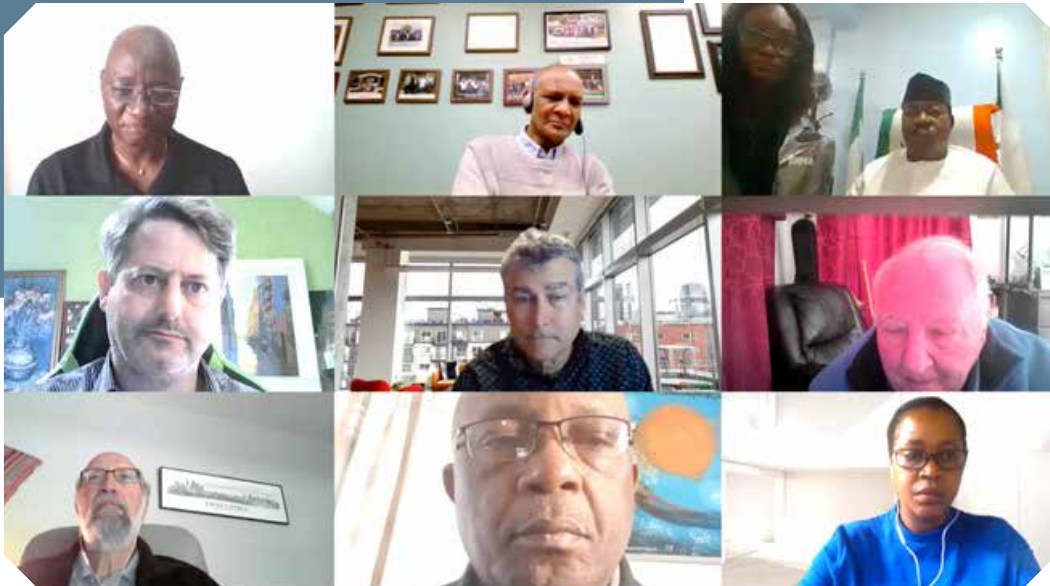


<https://www.nepad.org/programme/african-biosafety-network-of-expertise-abne>

### In this Edition

- Technical Advisory Committee Approves ABNE Annual Reports and Work Plan 2
- Innovative Biosafety E-learning Platform for African Union Member States 3
- AUDA-NEPAD and Michigan State University's Innovative Global Virtual Tour to Argentina, India, USA and Bangladesh 5
- United States Department of Agriculture Courtesy Call on the Head of AUDA-NEPAD Office in Dakar 7
- ABNE and IVM programmes' staff retreat in Accra 8

## Technical Advisory Committee Approves ABNE Annual Reports and Work Plan



*From left to right are: Dr. Jeremy Ouedraogo, Head of ABNE, Dr. Karim Maredia from MSU, Dr. Rufus Ebegba from Nigeria, Dr. Martin Lema from Argentina, Mr. Lawrence Kent from BMGF, Dr. David Keetch from South Africa, Dr. Douglas Buhler from MSU, Mr. Martin Bwalya from AUDA-NEPAD and Ms Betty Kiplagat from Kenya, during the online meeting.*

Expertise (ABNE) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) met from June 2021, 3 – 2, to review reports on the first year of ABNE's Phase III programme and the work plans for second year. The meeting took place online just like in the past year, due to the COVID pandemic and travel restrictions in Africa and overseas.

In his opening remarks Mr Martin Bwalya, on behalf of AUDA-NEPAD management welcomed participants and reiterated the full support of AUDA-NEPAD to the ABNE programme.

"We are very well aware about our responsibilities, and the need to demonstrate real impact in response to the challenges that African countries are having in implementing their national development plan. ABNE is an important flagship with AUDA-NEPAD and when we meet like this, we want to share our views both in what is happening but also how to continue to go forward. We want to have a conversation so that together we continue to deliver very relevant and appropriate responses to the needs of African Union Member States," he said.

Dr Douglas Buhler, Director of AgBioResearch and Assistant Vice-President of Research and

Innovation at MSU highlighted the fact that ABNE was one of MSU high-priority projects. "We are really pleased we can continue to be part of this and provide the necessary support. We all should be proud of what we were able to accomplish despite the COVID19- situation," he said.

TAC Chair, Dr David Keetch pointed out that "The current developments happening in the continent on biotechnology and biosafety are very encouraging and the sustained efforts of ABNE staff during Phase I and Phase II programme contributed to this significant progress. Much work is still to be done as we start Phase III and we look forward to further progress and achievements." During the two-day meeting, TAC members perused and discussed the report of the Head of ABNE, as well as the detailed Year I report. They also reviewed the Year II work plan and made the necessary suggestions for improvement.

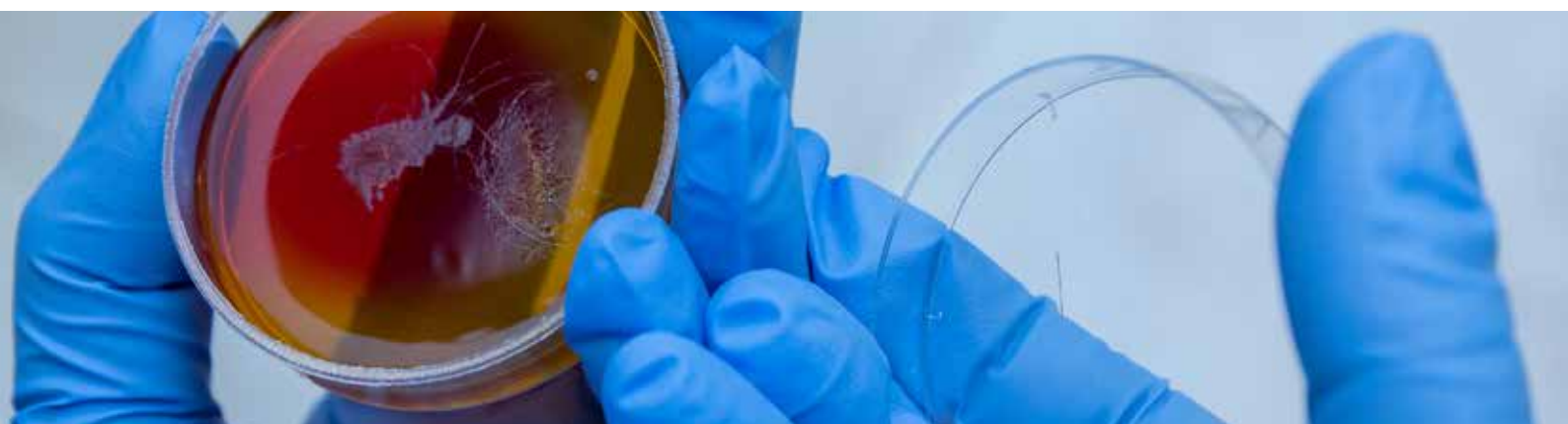
In their final remarks, TAC commended the management and staff of ABNE for the good progress that has been made since the last TAC meeting in 2020 despite the limitations imposed by the COVID pandemic and was pleased to note the continued strong leadership of the Head of

ABNE, Dr Jeremy Ouedraogo. They emphasized key recommendations for more impact of ABNE work on the ground, including strong collaboration with other international biosafety services providers in Africa, and a better follow-up and support for the regulation of new breeding techniques initiatives in the various African countries.

Seven TAC members participated in the meeting including Dr David Keetch from South Africa, Chair of the Committee, Ms Betty Kiplagat from Kenya, Mr Lawrence Kent, from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Dr Douglas Buhler from Michigan State University, technical partner of the programme, Dr Martin Lema, External Expert from

Argentina, Dr Rufus Abegba from Nigeria, and Mr Martin Bwalya representing AUDA-NEPAD. The eighth member, Dr Mahama Ouedraogo from African Union Commission could not join the meeting due to other continental urgent duties.

In response to TAC comments, Dr. Jeremy Ouedraogo thanked the TAC for their positive feedback and guidance and acknowledged the great contribution and commitment of ABNE staff that were instrumental to the successes and achievements on the ground. He pledged to continue the hard work with the team and take account of TAC's suggestions toward achieving greater results.



## Innovative Biosafety E-learning Platform for African Union Member States

AUDA-NEPAD ABNE held an online meeting with Mozambique biosafety team on May 6th, 2021. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Dr Daniel Nivigara, Mozambique Minister of Science and Technology, and Higher Education. The objective of the meeting was to share information on biosafety e-Learning modules for roll out within the selected member States, including Mozambique.

In his opening remarks, Hon. Minister Nivigara thanked AUDA-NEPAD for the support provided

to Mozambique over the past years. He stated that Mozambique is a young country and indeed needs capacity building. He also acknowledged that





*Hon Minister Prof. Dr Daniel Nivigara of Mozambique (Center) and his team during a virtual meeting with AUDA-NEPAD representatives*

biotechnology is one of the country's priorities and therefore there is a need to implement adequate measures for Mozambican interests. During the meeting, the AUDA-NEPAD ABNE team presented the key features of the e-learning platform developed by ICGEB in collaboration with the AUDA-NEPAD technical staff as resource people. The e-modules will be administered to all Member States in Africa through AUDA-NEPAD. All the major aspects of biotechnology regulations are encompassed in the GMO Food Safety, Biosafety and Biosecurity, and seven different modules: Risk Analysis, Containment and confinement, Biosafety regulatory frameworks Socioeconomic considerations.

"We need to harness science and experience from other countries. Mozambique should be involved in experience sharing networks for staff capacity building and effective resource mobilisation" Minister Nivigara went on to state. The Minister also pointed out that Mozambique will need laboratories for scientific research that could meet the current international standards, reiterating that he wishes to continue to have frequent and productive exchanges with AUDA-NEPAD.

Dr Jeremy Ouedraogo, Head of ABNE, congratulated the Minister for his appointment to this position. He wished him a successful implementation of his mission. He also presented AUDA-NEPAD ABNE mission and activities in Africa and assured the Minister that the mandate of the agency is to build the capacities of African

countries in safely harnessing science, technology and innovation opportunities, and ABNE will continue to provide the necessary technical support to Mozambique. Dr Ouedraogo also elucidated the need to improve the current memorandum of understanding that guides the activities of both parties, for better delivery services.

This platform is meant to strengthen critical mass of biosafety experts that could adequately help the countries to make informed decisions on the safety of biotechnology products. A similar meeting with the biosafety team in eSwatini was held earlier, and this meeting was the second of a series of meetings to be held with African biosafety authorities on this innovative capacity building opportunity. For this pilot phase, a few countries will be concerned but the ultimate goal is to cover the entire continent within the next four years.



*Dr Jeremy T. Ouedraogo, Head of AUDA-NEPAD ABNE (top) and Dr Olalekan Akinbo, AUDA-NEPAD ABNE (bottom) during the meeting*



## AUDA-NEPAD and Michigan State University's Innovative Global Virtual Tour to Argentina, India, USA and Bangladesh



*A view of participants during the virtual study tour*

AUDA-NEPAD ABNE, in partnership with Michigan State University organized a biotechnology and biosafety global virtual study tour to four countries, Argentina, India, USA and Bangladesh, from 6 – 1 March 2021. This should have been the 9th physical study tour to countries like India and the US organized the AUDA-NEPAD and MSU but this year, due to the pandemic it was done virtually in collaboration with partners in the four countries.

The key objective of this online study tour was to share biotechnology and biosafety experiences of the global community with focus on countries that have given approvals and successfully commercialized GMO crops. The study tour also aimed to provide opportunities for interactions with regulators, scientists, farmers and industry representatives from these countries and to build a global resource network for African regulators and policy makers to access science-based information on biotechnology and biosafety.

The study tour program included a three-hour session per country sharing the regulatory,

commercialization and product stewardship experiences of biotech crops commercialized in these countries including B.t. Eggplant/Brinjal, B.t. Cotton, B.t. and Herbicide Tolerant Maize, Herbicide Tolerant Soybeans, Herbicide Tolerant Sugar Beets, and Herbicide Tolerant Alfalfa.

Participants were able to watch presentations and videos of concrete applications in the field and to virtually interact with scientists, regulators, industry representatives, local farmers, and other relevant stakeholders engaged in biotechnology and biosafety in these four countries.

At the end of the study tour, participants praised this high impact initiative organised by AUDA-NEPAD ABNE and MSU. They were particularly impressed to see how much technology and innovation could benefit farmers when applied safely. They called for more of such seeing-is-believing study tours especially to African countries that are advanced in the safe application of biotechnology for agricultural development and health improvement.





In his final remarks, Mr. Lawrence Kent, Senior Programme Officer at BMGF and member of the Technical Advisory Committee of ABNE said that "It would have been difficult to fly from the US to Argentina and then to India, to Bangladesh, and then back to Michigan State University but this virtual tour made it possible to talk with farmers, scientists and regulators in these countries about their experiences with biotech crops. It was good to see that the crops are benefiting farmers." He added he hoped this information would be valuable to those in Africa who are testing these crops or regulating them and would help create functional regulatory systems that will allow safe and good crops to benefit the farmers and contribute to positive agricultural transformation in Africa.

Dr Karim Maredia, Director of the World Technology Access Program at MSU said that this virtual study tour was a pilot and one of the innovations prompted by COVID19-. Sharing information and best practices is critical today, especially in a form of south-south cooperation and this is the major goal of our program. He thanked all participants for their active participation and also the 24 research faculty, regulators and farmers who shared their experiences. He also thanked AUDA-NEPAD ABNE team and MSU team for organizing the study tour. He finally expressed his gratitude to BMGF for their long-term continued support.

Dr Jeremy Ouedraogo, Head of the ABNE programme highlighted that "this study tour was made possible thanks to our strong partnership with Michigan State University. It has been very useful, informative, and fruitful to the group. We will make sure that the next tour focuses on African experiences where scientists, regulators, farmers, and decision makers can also share their views and experiences, their fears, and the challenges they are facing with regard to biotech. He added that "COVID19- has shifted the paradigm and opened the eyes of African countries. It is obvious today that our scientists need to develop health and food products that will primarily benefit the African people and not wait for products such as vaccines from outside."



*Farmer Mohammad Azizul Haq from Bangladesh Explained how Bt brinjal made a huge difference in the life of his family: no more pesticide, better health, more productivity and no crop loss, more demand and much more income.*



*On right are Bt corn roots in the USA completely safe from rootworms attack and with no chemical spray*

## United States Department of Agriculture Courtesy Call on the Head of AUDA-NEPAD Office in Dakar



*From left to right are Ms Fana Sylla, Ms Robin H. Gray, Dr Jeremy Ouedraogo and Mr Mamadou Bousso*

Dakar, June 2021, 29 - Representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service in Dakar, Senegal, paid a courtesy call on the Head of the AUDA-NEPAD Office in Dakar, Dr Jeremy Ouedraogo, who also serves as head of the African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE).

The USDA team was led by Ms Robin H. Gray, Counselor for Agricultural Affairs for Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, and The Gambia. She was accompanied by agricultural specialists, Ms Fana Sylla and Mr Mamadou Bousso.

During the meeting, Dr Ouedraogo and his team (comprising Mr Samuel Timpo, Principal Programme Officer and Jean Keberé, Communications Officer) acknowledged the fruitful collaboration AUDA-NEPAD has had with the USDA Office in Dakar over the past years. They presented the ABNE programme interventions in the West African Region and reaffirmed the commitment of the programme to working with African and international partners to continuously provide technical support to African countries in the implementation of functional biosafety regulatory systems.

The USDA team commended the effective collaboration of the USDA Office and AUDA-NEPAD. They acknowledged the efforts of ABNE and the good progress made by a number of West African countries in the establishment of functional biosafety laws. They also assured USDA Office's continued support for effective implementation of AUDA-NEPAD activities on the ground.

## ABNE and IVM programmes' staff retreat in Accra



*A view of part of participants during the retreat*

Staff of AUDA-NEPAD ABNE and IVM programmes held a four-day retreat in Accra from 26 – 23 June 2021. The objective of the retreat was to review the projects work plans, mission and procurement plans for the period of June to December 2021 and to develop a robust communication strategy for the projects. Participants of the retreat included POs of both programmes as well as staff from the Knowledge Management (KM) Unit.

During the meeting, presentations on the two programmes were made with a special focus on the work plans and the communications matters. The KM team provided useful insights on ways of effectively harnessing AUDA-NEPAD online platforms to enhance programme visibility. Discussions also addressed ways in which enhanced administrative and logistical support can be provided for improved delivery of programme work.