

ABNE in Africa

Building a Functional Biosafety System in Nigeria

To provide a framework for the safe application of modern biotechnology, Nigeria developed biosafety guidelines in 2001. This enabled the National Biosafety Committee to review and approve two applications for confined field trials for nutritionally-enhanced cassava (Biocassava+) and maruca-resistant cowpea. Currently, Nigeria's biosafety law awaits Presidential assent following the enactment of the Biosafety Bill into law by the Senate on June 1, 2011.

Recognizing ABNE's role in biosafety capacity building, Nigeria's NBC, in consultation with other stakeholders, prioritized national biosafety needs for ABNE's intervention as follows: strengthen regulatory administrative systems including the national biosafety office; sensitize legislators to enhance passage of the Biosafety bill; provide access to credible and relevant biosafety information; assist develop capacity for risk assessment and management and also develop standard operating procedures (SOP) and guidelines for confined field trials (CFT) compliance; assist in develop capacity for regulatory compliance and biosafety communication; and provide opportunities for long and short term training in biosafety through workshops, short courses, online courses, study tours and internships in environmental biosafety, food safety, intellectual property, liability and redress and socio-economic issues in biosafety.



Participants from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, **Nigeria**, Somalia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe on a field visit during a study tour to South Africa in Nov./Dec. 2010.

ABNE Biosafety Capacity Building Activities in Nigeria

Human resource capacity building and technical backstopping are central to ABNE's efforts to assist in build functional biosafety systems in Africa, and also in response to requests for assistance. Since 2009, ABNE has provided various services to stakeholders in Nigeria. Of these, 187 regulators, policy and decision makers were beneficiaries of ABNE capacity building activities (Table 1).

These activities contributed to enhancing their knowledge and skills in performance of regulatory functions and communicating science using various tools and approaches and broadened their understanding of key issues in biosafety decision-making. A regulator was enrolled in a Masters e-biosafety course, which is a distance learning programme designed to assist regulators who cannot be away from their duty posts for extended periods of time. Biosafety information was made available to regulators through ABNE's web portal, policy briefs, newsletters and news bulletins. Some technical assistance in the development of (SOPs) for the administrative handling of applications was also provided.



Sensitization workshop for Stakeholders on Nigeria's Biosafety Bill, February 23, 2011.

To develop a support network for exchange of information and experiences and to promote better regulatory coordination between and among countries and sub-regions while fostering regional cooperation and a more

harmonized approach to policies and regulations, a regulator and 5 scientists participated in ABNE's forum for regulators and scientists on April 7 – 8, 2010.

Impact of ABNE activities in Nigeria

ABNE's approach to capacity building recognizes efforts being made by national institutions and other biosafety initiatives, and values cooperation. Thus ABNE worked with various stakeholders to achieve gains in Nigeria. A notable achievement was ABNE's contribution to the process that culminated in the passage into law of the biosafety bill. Furthermore, through ABNE's efforts, Nigerian regulators have been empowered in monitoring and inspectorate functions. Consequently, the inspectorate unit of the NBC is functional and monitoring regulatory compliance. The study tours and training workshops also resulted in the knowledge and skills of regulators being upgraded in emerging issues in biotechnology/biosafety including risk assessment, and risk management and the adoption of best practices in the conduct of CFT.

Table 1: Summary of ABNE Activities in Nigeria

Type of Intervention	Venue and date	Number of regulators/ stakeholders empowered
Training workshop on biosafety decision-making	Accra, Ghana, March 29-31, 2010	12
Environmental biosafety short course	Michigan State University, July 25 – 30, 2010/July 31 – August 5, 2011	3
Science & Technology communication short course	Michigan State University, August 14 – 19, 2011	1
Masters e-biosafety course	Italy, Jan – Dec 2010	1
Training workshop on CFT compliance and in-country study tour	Abuja, Nigeria, September 22-25, 2010 (included field visits to CFT sites at Umudike and Zaria)	52
Study tour	South Africa, November 28 – December 4, 2010	1
Study tour	India, December 6 – 18, 2010	1
Sensitization meeting for stakeholders in Nigeria on the Biosafety Bill	Abuja, Nigeria, February 23, 2011	116
Total		187

Future Capacity Building Efforts

ABNE envisages support for the NBC in developing implementing regulations and guidelines to operationalize the biosafety law. The national biosafety secretariat will also continue to receive technical support for increased functionality. In taking cognizance of the dynamic regulatory landscape, there is the need to deepen awareness and understanding of key stakeholders on issues of biosafety and biotechnology through continued capacity building efforts. ABNE's communication manual for African regulators will be subjected to review and adaptation by Nigerian regulators to support biosafety communication efforts.

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