

ABNE in Africa

Building a Functional Biosafety System in Mali

Mali ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2003 and enacted the Mali biosafety Law in 2008 with the aim of establishing a regulatory system for agricultural and food biotechnology. This was an important achievement that was viewed by scientists and many other stakeholders as a significant step towards starting the process for approval of agricultural biotechnology activities in Mali, especially trials with Bt cotton.

In a continued effort, the government adopted two decrees in December 2010, which establish 1) the composition, duties and working procedures of the National Biosafety Committee (NBC); and 2) the conditions for conducting research on genetically modified organisms. It was believed that the adoption of these decrees would provide research institutes and laboratories in the country the regulatory framework necessary for starting experiments, trials and release of GMOs in a safe and responsible manner. However, to date, despite the fact that Malian farmers have clearly expressed interest in growing Bt cotton and the national research institute IER (*Institut d'Economie Rurale*) allowed by its board to conduct confined field trials (CFT) of Bt cotton, no CFT applications have yet been submitted to NBC for BT cotton in Mali.

ABNE efforts in building a functional biosafety system in Mali

From the inception of its capacity building programs, ABNE has been engaged with Malian regulators, through sponsoring regulators to participate in various meetings and training workshops in Africa and outside Africa. Furthermore on request from the Malian farmers' organization, ABNE conducted an information-sharing workshop in Mali for sixty participants. Table 1 (over) summarizes ABNE's capacity building activities carried out in Mali for regulators.

As a result of these capacity building efforts, particularly from the information sharing workshop recently held in Bamako in July 2011, willingness and commitment was shown towards moving the process forward to set up a workable regulatory system in Mali that would allow Researchers and farmers to benefit from new agricultural technologies, especially Bt cotton. As a matter of fact, the Malian biosafety bill, like many others in African countries, appears to be preventive and therefore needs to be improved through better alignment with the provisions in the international treaties and protocols such as the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the recent Supplementary Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Protocol on Liability and Redress.



ABNE Biosafety Information sharing workshop and reflection on the Malian Biosafety regime, Bamako, July 19-20, 2011

Table 1: Summary of ABNE capacity building activities for Mali Regulators and Stakeholders (July 2009 – September 2011)

Activity	Place and date	Number of Malians trained and/or involved
Biotech workshop in Dakar in July 2009	Dakar, July 2009	2
International meeting in Ouagadougou	Ouagadougou, April 2010	2
Training workshop in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso	Bobo-Dioulasso, November, 2010	6
Information sharing workshop and reflection on Malian Biosafety regime	Bamako, July 2011	60
Biosafety Short course	Michigan State University, August 2011	1
Totals		71

Based on requests from Malian Regulators and other stakeholders, ABNE shall continue to assist in the process of building a functional biosafety system in Mali.

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