



OFAB Newsletter

Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa



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Minister commends OFAB for awareness on GMOs



■ Dr. Mrs. Omobola Johnson, Minister of Communications Technology & Supervising Minister, Federal Ministry of Science & Technology

The Minister of Communications Technology & Supervising Minister, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, Dr. Mrs Omobola Johnson commended the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology (OFAB) in Africa for mitigating negative perception on genetically modified products in the country.

In her opening remarks at the 4th Annual OFAB Review and Planning Meeting held in Abuja on 23rd April 2014. She said, "I am pleased to inform you that OFAB activities have contributed immensely towards mitigating the negative perceptions people have on genetically

modified products. It has also succeeded in reaching out to policy makers at the State Level, Civil Society, Media, Farmers and the Academic community".

"The role of Agricultural Biotechnology in taking our food security issues, generating employment for our young people and enhancing national economic growth cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, with the establishment of OFAB in Nigeria, under the auspices of NABDA, Nigeria can be said to be one of the fast lane to economic stability and wealth creation, according to her.

"It is however of utmost importance that we persist in the struggle for the

enactment of the National Biosafety Law to ensure that Nigerians reap the dividends of Biotechnology as it is obtainable in other parts of the world. However, I have no doubt in my mind that this herculean task will be achieved under the very

competent hands of the newly appointed Director-General of NABDA, Prof. Lucy Ogbadu”, she reiterated.

“Therefore, as you all brain storm in the next few days on how to move OFAB in the next few days to the next

level in your various countries, I want to assure you that OFAB Nigeria will continue to enjoy my support through the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology”, she concluded.

We cannot allow Nigerians die of hunger - Abonta

Keynote Speaker

The Deputy Chairman House Committee on Privatization and Commercialization, Honourable Uzoma Nkem Abonta has said that Nigeria cannot because of opposing ideology, allow her people to die of hunger and poverty. While delivering a Keynote address at the 4th Annual OFAB Review and Planning Meeting, he stated, “while our people wallow in abject poverty and are dying daily of acute hunger, we cannot wait for opposing ideologies to dictate the pace of our agricultural biotechnology growth. We must act and the time to act is now”.

He further explained that for centuries, farmers and researchers have been labouring to improve wild plants and animals through the selection and breeding of desirable characteristics by means of crossing, relying on the random re-arrangement of existing genes between two closely related parent's plants and animals. Breeding has become more sophisticated in the twentieth century, as traits selected for breeding include yield, disease and pest resistance, drought resistance and enhanced flavour. Scientific methodology that are more in-depth are now being applied, i.e. Genetic Modification and or Improvement.

“Agricultural biotechnology encompasses a range of modern plant breeding techniques, thereby enabling improvements that are not possible with traditional crossing of related species alone. Scientists have learned how to move genes from one organism to another, thus, allowing

the transfer of useful characteristics (such as resistance to disease) into a plant, animal or micro organism by the insertion of genes (DNA) from another organism. This process is called Genetic Modification (GM), Genetic Engineering (GE), or Genetic Improvement (GI). To me, this summarizes Agricultural Biotechnology”, he said.

According to him, “for proponents/opponents of Agricultural Biotechnology, one fact is very certain, hunger does not recognize any ideological position in choosing victims. The only antidote to hunger is food. From all indications, Agricultural Biotechnology is the answer to sufficient food production for all”.

“We have had several revolutions. Socio Political revolutions for better governance, Industrial revolutions for greater productivity, scientific revolution i.e electricity, telephone, medicals, aeronautic and space exploitation for ease of travelling. All these revolutions were done for the benefit of mankind. Science as knowledge must be used for the benefit of mankind”, he highlighted.

“Currently in Nigeria, and all over the world, there is an ongoing Information technology revolution global system for mobile communications (GSM), as well as internet facilities. All these scientific revolutions are discoveries geared towards better life and society. Some schools of thought and ideological positions are vehemently opposed to these revolutions. But we all know is that, the advantages far outweigh



■ Honourable Uzoma Nkem Abonta, Deputy Chairman, House Committee on Privatization and Commercialization

the disadvantages if any. Agricultural biotechnology should also be seen as a positive revolution in agriculture and affordable food production”, he explained.

Concluding his Keynote Address, he noted, “Agricultural biotechnology would help provide affordable food for our people, with the caveat that government must put in place adequate rules and regulations as well as regulatory infrastructure to regulate this evolving technology to avoid problems. The National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) needs to be adequately funded and must rise up to the challenges posed by our venturing into this new horizon”.

Biosafety Bill is for the benefit of ordinary Nigerians

The Director-General National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), Professor (Mrs.) Lucy J. Ogbadu reaffirmed commitment to ensure that Biosafety Bill is signed into law for the benefit of ordinary Nigerians.

In her opening remarks at the 4th Annual OFAB Review and Planning Meeting, she stated, "The struggle is still on and NABDA shall not relent until the National Biosafety Bill is passed into law because biotechnology can improve the lives of ordinary Nigerians".

"The hosting of OFAB in NABDA for the last five years has given the Agency ample opportunity to change the perception of Nigerians on Modern Biotechnology. Through our numerous sensitization programs in different parts of the Country, Nigerians, especially farmers, are now more willing to embrace Modern Biotechnology", according to her.

"The Policy Makers and the Legislators are not left behind. They are now much more positively inclined to work towards the

enactment of a National Biosafety Law in the Country that will enable us reap the benefits of biotechnology. The size and population of Nigeria calls for additional support by AATF as our visits to certain regions only show a small fraction of appreciable coverage", she added.

"Although the Biosafety Bill suffered a temporary setback, since its return to the National Assembly, efforts have been made to ensure that it is passed into law soonest. Consequently, we have embarked on high-level sensitization seminars at the National Assembly, to educate them on the technology and what the country stands to gain when the law is established", she reiterated.

"Just recently, we held one at the House of Representatives with the recorded presence of the House Committees on Agriculture; Science & Technology and Environment with other relevant stakeholders; the workshop was well received. At the end of the day, one of the lawmakers who was an anti GM was won over and strongly agreed that the Biosafety law was a necessary prerequisite for Agricultural



■ L-R: Prof. Lucy Ogbadu, DG/CEO NABDA, responding to the Press

development in Nigeria", she added.

The DG NABDA also informed the forum that NABDA has enjoyed a good working relationship with the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), the sole initiator and main sponsor of OFAB program in Africa. However, with the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) as co-host, we look forward to many more years of fruitful work and partnership.



■ L-R: Prof. Lucy Ogbadu, DG/CEO National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), making a presentation

Provision of Adequate Food Global Challenge



■ Prof. Oyebiodun Grace Longe, President, Nigeria Academy of Science

The President, Nigeria Academy of Science who was represented by Professor Oyebiodun Grace Longe lamented that there is no doubt the provision of adequate food for a growing world technology is a global challenge. In her speech at the OFAB Planning and Review Meeting, she added, "For Africa, a relatively large continent, the problem of food scarcity is of great magnitude. There is need to increase food production substantially and this is of great concern to us all as Africans, and indeed the international community. Developing a technology that can help farmers not only to increase yield per hectare but also produce crops with improved quality traits could be a way out of food shortages, malnutrition and poverty".

"Agricultural Biotechnology is one of the many tools to transform agriculture. It offers promise to production of foods that are nutritionally enhanced or engineered to combat diseases. The tools of biotechnology have been successfully used in the development of improved animal and plant varieties. Genetic modification (GM) is known to contribute notably to agricultural development and that it is a means to increase food supply for the growing

population. Hence the technology is of direct benefit to man and livestock. Farmers can grow crops that are resistant to disease and insect pests for increased yield and with reduction in production costs", according to her.

"Some countries in sub-Saharan Africa (South Africa, Egypt and Burkina Faso) have been able to adopt and commercialize GM crops and there are many promising ones also which when approved by the regulatory agency can be made available to farmers. Using genetically enhanced seeds to increase agricultural productivity is one of the ways to mitigate the challenges of food security. Yet after almost two decades of commercializing the first GM crop, tomato (FlavrSavr), many countries in Africa are yet to commercialize GM crops. Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe are engaged in advanced field trials. Some countries may have food and drugs laws but are yet to adopt a national biosafety framework", she pointed out.

Prof. Longe also highlighted that for GM products to receive wide acceptance, there must be a regulatory system that manages the potential risks of the products using scientific risk assessment and sound technology. Products should be

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regulated according to their intended use. Each country must have the right strategic focus put in place, the right policy environment, supporting research and development with evidence based advocacy.

"The need for strong and sustained partnership and collaborations in agricultural biotechnology cannot be overemphasized. Science and technology research outcomes should be properly harnessed for sustainable national development in order to make definitive progress, research priorities must be set as meets needs in Africa, she stated.



■ A group photo of participants at the 4th Annual OFAB meeting



■ L-R: Prof. Lucy Ogbadu, DG/CEO NABDA and Dr. Mrs. Omobola Johnson, Minister of Communications Technology & Supervising Minister, Federal Ministry of Science & Technology



■ L-R: Dr. Mrs. Omobola Johnson, Minister of Communications Technology & Supervising Minister, Federal Ministry of Science & Technology and Dr. Denis Kyetere, Executive Director African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)



■ L-R: Mrs. Rose Gidado OFAB Nigeria, Dr. Nompumelelo Obokoh, CEO, Africa Bio, Dr. Margaret Karembu OFAB Kenya and Mr. Rufus Ebegba, Nigeria Fed. Min. of Environ.



■ L-R: Mrs. Rose Gidado, Coordinator OFAB Nigeria chapter, and Dr. Margaret Karembu, OFAB Kenya Chair



■ L-R: Mr. Kwame Ogero, OFAB Kenya, Mrs Nancy Muchiri, AATF, Prof. Eucharia Kenya, Mrs Rose Gidado and Mrs Margaret Karembu from ISAAA Africentre



■ L-R: Mr. Suleiman Iloh, Mrs Rose Gidado, Dr Nompumelelo Obokoh, CEO Africa Bio, Margaret Karembu, Mr. Rufus Ebegba and Dr. Chigozie Egesi



■ Cross section of participants listening to a presentation



■ Participants during tea break



■ OFAB Burkina Faso Delegates



■ OFAB Tanzania Delegates



■ OFAB Ethiopia Delegates



■ Jay Brynes, President, v-fluence making a presentation



■ OFAB Nigeria Chapter delegates



■ L-R: Ms. Rinn Self, Representative of Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation, Dr. Margaret Karembu OFAB Kenya Chair and Prof. Eucharia Kenya



■ Brantley Browning, Representative of Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation



■ L-R: Mr. Bensarah, National Seed Council, Mr. Babajide Iletogun, Head Protocol, NABDA, Mallam Iro Suleiman, IAR Zaria, Dr. Olalekan Akinbo, ABNE-NEPAD



■ R-L: Prof. Lucy Ogbadu, DG/CEO National Biotechnology Development Foundation and Mrs. Rose Gidado Coordinator OFAB Nigeria Chapter

International Service for the Acquisition of Agricultural Biotechnology Application (ISAAA) 2013 Report Launch



■ (Middle) Prof. Lucy J. Ogbadu DG/CEO NABDA, and Prof. Bamidele O. Solomon former DG/CEO NABDA at the launch of 2013 ISAAA report



■ L-R: Prof. L.J. Ogbadu, Dr. Margaret Karembu and Mrs. Rose Gidado



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■ L-R: Prof. L.J. Ogbadu and Dr. Margaret Karembu



■ L-R: Prof. Lucy J. Ogbadu and Prof. Bamidele O. Solomon

OFAB is a unique platform to understand Science & Technology - Dr. Kyetere

The Executive Director AATF, Dr. Denis Kyetere disclosed that the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology (OFAB) is a unique platform that gives room for people to understand Science and Technology.

In his Opening remarks at the 4th OFAB Review and Planning Meeting he said, "we are proud that OFAB has gone this far".

"We need to work together with policy makers, farmers, media, so that together we are able to deliver the message properly, Honourable Abonta, I am proud of you, because you will deliver the message of biotechnology to our other stakeholders, so that the policy makers will help us assent to the Bill", he added.

He also noted that other African countries have GMOs, Bt.-cotton and others, but Nigeria is conducting field trials. "We need to get to the farmers, the Legislators and the Policy makers need to assist us with the Bill", he reiterated.

"What we are looking up to, is the Biosafety system, we are proud that Nigeria has gone far, we need to re-focus on how to deliver the message properly and its only when a biosafety system is in place that it can be possible", he concluded.



■ Dr. Denis Kyetere, Executive Director African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)

OFAB Members urged to work towards effectiveness & efficiency

The African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) Communication and Partnership Manager, Mrs. Nancy Muchiri called on the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology (OFAB) Chapters Members to identify practical ways of uplifting OFAB activities which will lead to effectiveness and efficiency.

In her presentation at the Planning and Review Meeting, she appealed to members to learn through experience sharing & networking - advocacy & communication

Mrs. Muchiri shared the 2014/2015 work plans as thus: grassroots action as new opportunities that could be exploited; Familiarity with Bonus Eventus Network, issue management tool kit; new challenges; capacity development; Social media usage & measurement, Sense of achievement and purpose.



■ Mrs. Nancy Muchiri, Communication and Partnership Manager African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)

OFAB urged to seek for Policy Makers support on Biosafety Bill



The Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology (OFAB) Coordinator, Daniel Otunge urged OFAB Chapters to enhance support of decision-makers by establishing evidence-based biotech regulatory systems to facilitate timely deployment of products to consumers.

He called on the Chapters to create a critical mass of resource persons to support biotech outreach programs at national, regional and global levels.

Creation of a comprehensive, reflective and narrative of OFAB's accomplishments, challenges, lessons learnt and future plans as well as Improvement in advocacy and communication skills are the key areas to be covered for effective biotech outreach and awareness campaign, he remarked.



■ Mr. Daniel Otunge, OFAB Africa Coordinator

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