The African Union Approaches to Biosafety

By

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• Context of the Biosafety Initiative
• Objective
• Pillars of the African Strategy on Biosafety
• Main Activities undertaken
• Results /Achievements
• Lessons learnt
• Way forward
CONTEXT

• Initiated based on AU Summit Decision;
• Duration: December 2005-February 2011;
• Located in the Department of Human Resources Science and Technology of the African Union Commission;
• Support from GTZ/GiZ, EU and Member States.
OBJECTIVE

• Equip the AU with the necessary Capacity and effective instruments to support its Member States in implementing the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and using the African Model Law on Biosafety;
• Ultimate aim to incorporate biosafety issues into the political and institutional frameworks of the AU and into its support’s services for Member States.
PILLARS OF THE AFRICAN BIOSAFETY STRATEGY

- Capacity Building and Preparedness for International Negotiations;
- Awareness Raising and Information Exchange;
- Establishment and Strengthening of Institutional Frameworks;
- Policy and Legal Frameworks;
- International Cooperation;
- Sustainability Mechanism.
MAIN ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

- Nine (9) African Preparatory Meetings before international negotiations on biosafety/biodiversity;
- Two (2) Regional Training Courses on biosafety in collaboration with RECs and Civil Society Organization;
- Seven (7) Issues Paper on Biosafety to support Member States’ National Focal Point in implementation of Biosafety;
- Three (3) AU-RECs Regional Meetings to discuss Harmonization/Coordination of Biosafety Issues;
MAIN ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN (continued)

• Development of African Strategy on Biosafety;
• Revision of the African Model Law on Biosafety;
• Establishment of a Technical Advisors Committee for the Project Activities;
• Creation of Biosafety web page on AU website;
• Standard Partnership with Secretariat of the CBD to support Member States in international negotiations;
• Presentation of achievements to the AU Organs: Ext-AMCOST, AMCOST III-IV and AMCEN 12;
• Permanent Policy Officer of Biosafety integrated in the AUC Structure.
RESULTS/ACHIEVEMENTS

• Strong African positions to reflect African interest in international negotiations;
• More than 95 participants from 31 African countries benefited from the regional training courses on risk assessment and risk management of GMOs;
• Published materials/tools for the use of National Focal Points;
• Contribution in National Laws on biosafety;
• Consensus with RECs on the need of Coordination/Harmonization of biosafety issues with leading role of the AUC;
• Ongoing Partnership with EU-Joint Research Center on Harmonization of GMOs’ Analysis & Detection;
RESULTS/ACHIEVEMENTS (continued)

• Development and Establishment of a Continental Coordination of Biosafety/Biotechnology, Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), Food Safety, Animal Health underway based on the Project experience;
• Member States borrowed from the Model Law and/or amended their National Law based on its revision;
• Ongoing interdepartmental collaboration to develop additional policy on biosafety;
• AU Organs Recommendations/Decisions;
• Sustainable cooperation with SCBD.
LESSONS LEARNT

- Regional Approach of Biosafety Issues is the best way for Africa, but may need the appropriate time;
- Networking and communication are strongly required but still needed to be technically improved in African Union;
- AUC-SCBD partnership is important for the cost effectiveness and the efficiency of implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in Africa;
LESSONS LEARNT (continued)

• Common position on biosafety and biotechnology issues is yet a big challenge in Africa, the approach could be based on a first step of general guidelines and strong emphasis on information sharing;
• It is increasingly understood that biotechnology and biosafety should dealt with in a complementary manner;
LESSONS LEARNT (continued)

• Investment of self funds of Member States is essential for the sustainability and the efficiency of a regional approach on biosafety in the African Union;
• The ongoing process on the African Union Authority will be a better context than the actual status of intergovernmental organization.
MAIN CHALLENGES

• Effective coordination/harmonization of Biosafety Issues in Africa;
• Getting Appropriate Funding from Member States;
• Appropriate Information Sharing;
• Misinformation on the AU-GTZ Biosafety Initiative.
WAY FORWARD

• Broadened mandate of the Biosafety Unit renamed Life and Earth Sciences Unit;
• Establishment Continental Coordination on Biosafety/Biotechnology, Phytosanitary Measures, Food Safety and Animal health;
• International Partnerships (CBD, EU-JRC);
• Capacity Building in Thematic Areas of Biosafety: Risk Assessment and Risk Management, Public Participation, Socio-economic Considerations.
PARTNERSHIP AUC/DHRST-EU/JRC

- 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} International Workshop on Harmonization of GMO Detection and Analysis (Oct 2010, February 2012);
  - Participation of African Representatives to the Global Network Forum,
  - Africa Input to the Global Network Forum Agenda,
  - Organization of a 3\textsuperscript{rd} EU-Africa Networking Workshop in 2013,
  - Mapping of GMO detection capacity in Africa,
  - Development of other regional networks in Africa in addition to SANGL,
  - Ultimately development of an ANGL (network of regional network);
- GMO Certified Materials available (for sale) from JRC;
- GMO Plasmid Control Samples available (for free) based on Material Transfert Agreement from EU-RL GMFF
PARTNERSHIP AUC/DHRST-EU/JRC (Continued)

• Increase participation of African labs to EU JRC Proficiency Testing rounds (in particular for qualitative detection);
• Mapping of GMO detection capacity at national level in order to clarify training needs;
• Identification of specific technical training based on country mapping;
PROGRESS REPORT

- Planned African Representatives’ Meeting back-to-back with the forthcoming Global Forum on GMO;
- Status of Responses to the questionnaire:
  - Central Africa: D R Congo (2 labs), Cameroon,
  - Eastern Africa: Sudan,
  - Southern Africa: Zimbabwe (2 labs), Swaziland.
OTHER REGIONAL PROJECTS WITHIN THE AFRICAN UNION

• NEPAD AFRICAN BIOSAFETY NETWORK OF EXPERTISE
• WESTERN AFRICAN ECONOMIC MONETARY UNION REGIONAL PROJECT ON BIOSAFETY
• ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WESTERN AFRICAN STATES REGIONAL BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOSAFETY INITIATIVE
• REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL & ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES NETWORK-AFRICA, SADC REGION (CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION)
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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