THE AFRICAN UNION AND ITS PERSPECTIVES ON BIOSAFETY

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EC-JRC GMO Analysis International Workshop
October 28-29, 2010
White River, South Africa
The AU in a Nut Shell

- The African Union
- Member States

AU Organs:
- The Assembly
- The Executive Council
- The African Union Commission
- The Permanent Representative Commit
- Peace and Security council
- Pan-African Parliament
- ECOSOCC
- The Court of Justice
- The Specialized Technical Committees
- The Financial Institutions
The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety

developed within the context of the CBD
sets minimum international standards on biosafety
implementation in developing countries
mainly supported through UNEP biosafety projects to develop NBFs.

Almost all African countries have participated in at least one of these projects.
However in February 1999, negotiations of the CPB were stalled. The African Group and the OAU-developed the African Model Law on Safety in Biotechnology (AMLSB) to provide for a harmonized approach to safety in Africa serving as a model legal instrument for developing national biosafety legislations. Further it was felt that the Protocol does not adequately deal with all the critical priority needs of African countries. The OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2001 supported the further work on the AMLSB. It was developed to be used by African States in support of the implementation of the CPB to address its weaknesses at an African context.
July 2003 in Maputo- the Exec. Council of the AU further passed a decision:

Member States, in abiding by the provisions of the Cartagena Protocol, to use the African Model Law in Biosafety prepared by the AU Commission as a basis for drafting their national legal instruments in Biosafety, taking into account their national peculiarities, in order to create a harmonized Africa-wide space and system in the regulation of Genetically Modified Organisms movement, transportation and importation in Africa.
The decision further:

STRESSES the need for Member States to equip themselves with the necessary human institutional capacities to deal with Biosafety issues within the framework of the implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety;

APPEALS to the developed countries, particularly Africa’s development partners willing to assist Africa in its endeavour, to grant the necessary resources as well as financial and technical support towards the implementation of this programme;

• **January 2006:** AU Biosafety Project started with the financial support of the German government as part of the broader AU-German collaboration.

**Project Aim:**

The topic of biosafety has been incorporated into the political and institutional frameworks of the AU and into its support services for Member States.
Activities performed to date:
• Establishment of a biosafety unit at the AU department of HRST,
• Establishment of a TAC
• Development of the African Strategy on Biosafety
• Development of a Revised African Model Law on Biosafety (Draft)
Activities performed to date (cont’d):

- Organization of 3 meetings for the 5 geographical areas on the Biosafety Strategy and the Revised Model Law

- Development of 7 issue papers on biosafety and a study on GMOs detection/identification and commodity flow

- Organization of Prep. Meetings for African negotiators before COP-MOPs and the liability and redress negotiations (9)
Other AU Initiatives Related to Biosafety and Biotechnology

• AU-NEPAD High Level Panel Report on Modern Biotechnology: «Freedom to Innovate»- encourages the safe application of biotechnology, systematically focusing on the five regions of Africa applying various fields of biotechnology to priority needs of these regions.

• African Position on GMOs for Food and Agriculture-DREA initiated discussions on the subject matter calling for appropriate biosafety procedures in the use of GMOs.

• Africa’s Consolidated Plan Action on Science and Technology (AUC-DHRST)
PILLARS

1. Establishment and strengthening of institutional frameworks

2. Awareness raising and biosafety information exchange

3. Capacity building and preparedness initiatives

4. Policy and Legal Frameworks

5. International cooperation

6. Sustainability mechanism
ROLE OF THE AUC:
• Spearhead and coordinate communication with regional economic communities (RECs) and National Focal Points
• Create a Biosafety Unit within the permanent structure of the AUC
• Coordinate and harmonize capacity building initiatives (standards, harmony, synergy)
• Organize preparatory meetings prior to major multilateral negotiations of relevance to biosafety, to form and harmonize positions
THE AU BIOSAFETY STRATEGY

ROLE OF THE RECs:

• Information dissemination and exchange

• Sub-regional preparatory meetings to harmonize sub-regional interests

• Set standards, guidelines and requirements

• Identify sub-regional priorities for capacity-building and enhance sub-regional cooperation

• Mobilize their members to fulfill regional or international obligations

Support sub-regional centres of excellence
ROLE OF MEMBER STATES:

• Formulate conducive policies and laws
• Put in place and support the relevant personnel and institutional framework for Biosafety decision making and monitoring of GMOs
• Motivate national scientists in biotech and biosafety
• Identify and prioritize capacity needs
• Forge public-private partnerships
• Engage public in biosafety decision making
THE AU BIOSAFETY STRATEGY

ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS:

- Supporting the strategy (provision of start-up funds)
- Provision of equipments for biotech labs and GMO testing centers
- Capacity building (training of trainers)
- Provision of technical support
MAKING THE STRATEGY WORK

1. Creation of a Biosafety co-ordination secretariat at the AUC (Biosafety Unit);

2. Promotion of biosafety through the existing RECs-mainstreaming biosafety into their devp’t agenda-
holding of regional preparatory meetings, international engagements;

3. Promotion of the Revised African Model Law on Biosafety among Member States-towards a harmonized legal system;

4. South to South Cooperation/exchange of expertise-
raising funds for the strategy (internally & externally).
REVISED AFRICAN MODEL LAW ON BIOSECURITY (DRAFT)

Why the need to revise?

- Developments at the international level
- Developments at the AU level
- Sub-regional initiatives
- National R&D, policy and legislative developments
KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

- Recognizes the potential of modern biotechnology
- Recognizes the risks involved
- Based on the Precautionary Approach
- Recognizes the need to build capacity to cope with the nature and scale of known and potential risks of GMOs
KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED (cont’d)

• Recognizes that African countries need to deal with import of GMOs through aid or trade

• Recognizes the sovereign right of countries to have GM free zones

• Executive Council resolution to take on common approach on matters pertaining to biotechnology and biosafety

• Scope of application—all transactions of GMOs and products that require safety (the making, import, export, transit, contained use, release or placing on the market)
KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED (cont’d)

- Sets threshold levels for the adventitious presence of GMOs contained in non-GMO shipments (imported for aid food and placing on the market for FFPs)
  - labelling, documentation and notification requirements
- Elaborates liability and redress procedures
(RECOMMENDATIONS)

- Prepare exhaustive list of institutions dealing with GMOs for networking purposes
- Identify key partners in North and South
- Identify few reference labs for each region
- Develop guidelines for information sharing
- Keep updated list of countries adopting GMO crops or import
...and finally using interactive processes
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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