



AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY FOUNDATION
FONDATION AFRICAINE POUR LES TECHNOLOGIES AGRICOLES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
18 July 2006

The AU/NEPAD High-Level Panel on Biotechnology meets in Nairobi to finalise report

The fourteen-member High-Level Panel on Modern Biotechnology will hold its fourth meeting in Nairobi, Kenya from **25 – 28 July 2006** to refine and finalise its report in preparation for submission to the January 2007 Summit of the African Heads of State. The Panel was appointed last year by President Alpha Omar Konare to provide the AU, NEPAD and African governments with independent strategic advice on developments in modern biotechnology and their implications for agriculture, health and environment. The Panel's establishment was in response to the decision of the AU Summit that called for an African common position on modern biotechnology, and resolutions of the first NEPAD ministerial conference on science and technology to build a broad consensus and effective strategies, regional R&D, and facilitate Africa's participation in international fora, processes and discussions on global biotechnology issues.

The Panel has prepared a draft report that will lead towards an African common position on biotechnology and the realisation of regional cooperation in addressing possibilities and the range of issues associated with modern biotechnology. It is identifying specific priority areas in which biotechnology development and applications offer high potential for regional economic growth and trade. The full draft report is available on the NEPAD Science and Technology website: www.nepadst.org

The Panel is inviting comments and feedback from all stakeholders in modern biotechnology, including government representatives, parliamentarians, diplomats, development partners, civil society, scientists, industrialists, environmentalists, agriculturists and development experts.

The Panel is co-chaired by Calestous Juma of the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, USA and Ismail Serageldin of the Library of Alexandria, Egypt.

###

For more information on the meeting, contact:
Nancy Muchiri
AATF Communication and Partnerships Manager
Tel: 254 20 4223700 or 735 992 206
E-mail: n.muchiri@aatf-africa.org

ABOUT THE HIGH-LEVEL AFRICAN PANEL ON BIOTECHNOLOGY

Members

Calestous Juma, *Co-chair*, Harvard University, USA <Calestous_juma@harvard.edu>

Ismail Serageldin, *Co-chair*, Library of Alexandria, Egypt <is@bibalex.org>

Amadou Tidiane Ba, Institute for Environmental Sciences, Senegal

Mpoko Bokanga, African Agricultural Technology Foundation, Kenya

Abdallah Daar, University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics, Canada

Cheick Modibo Diarra, Microsoft Africa, South Africa

Tewelde Berhan Gebre Egziabher, Environmental Protection Authority, Ethiopia

Lydia Makhubu, University of Swaziland, Swaziland

Dawn Mokhobo, Nozala Investments (Pty) Ltd, South Africa

Lewis Mughogho, Tea Research Foundation, Malawi

Samuel Nzietchueng, Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation, Cameroon

George Sarpong, Law Faculty, University of Ghana, Ghana

Cyriaque Sendashonga, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Canada

Ahmed Shembesh, National Centre for Standardization and Metrology, Libya

Background and mandate of the panel

The development and application of modern biotechnology has opened up a wide range of possibilities, including the production of genetically modified crops, animals and microorganisms. These developments are, however, characterized by increasing scientific complexity, policy uncertainty, and public anxiety over real and perceived benefits and risks. These issues impinge on intra-regional and international cooperation.

No where is the need for regional cooperation likely to be more pronounced as in Africa. This is mainly because most of the African countries do not have the necessary policies, infrastructure, capacities and other resources to individually or collectively regulate and manage the development and application of genetic modification and biotechnology generally. Moreover, increasing intra-regional and international trade (and food aid) in products of genetic modification are exposing the benefits of regional approaches to managing the technology in Africa.

African governments have recognized the importance of regional cooperation to address possibilities and the range of issues associated with biotechnology and genetic modification. Within the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) they have resolved to promote programmes that will "generate a critical mass of technological expertise in targeted areas that offer high growth potential" from biotechnology and the second is to "harness biotechnology in order to develop Africa's rich biodiversity and ... improving agricultural productivity and developing pharmaceutical products."¹ To realize these goals African countries will need to first and foremost build common consensus and strategies on how best to ensure that they maximize benefits from the technology while at the same time addressing potential environmental, health, ethical and economic risks or concerns emerging with rapid advances of the technology.

The first NEPAD ministerial conference on science and technology "resolved to build regional consensus and strategies to address concerns emerging with advances in new technologies, including biotechnology, ..." The conference called upon the Secretariat of NEPAD to: "build a broad consensus on issues of common concern and develop effective strategies including joint R&D programmes where appropriate; and establish ways and means to build Africa's capacity for risk assessment and management of bio-safety, in particular promote the establishment of regional and sub-regional bio-safety facilities; and facilitate Africa's participation in international fora, processes and discussions on global biotechnology issues."

In the context of the African Union (AU), African leaders resolved to take a common approach to address issues pertaining to modern biotechnology and biosafety by endorsing decision EX.CL/Dec. 26 (III) that calls for an African common position on biotechnology.

The second meeting of the NEPAD Science and Technology Steering Committee decided that the NEPAD Secretariat and the AU Commission establish a high-level panel of eminent persons/experts to

¹ NEPAD, 2001. *The New Partnership for Africa's Development*, p. 36.

advice Africa on the scientific, policy and legal issues pertaining to the development, commercialization and application of modern biotechnology.

It is in response to the above resolutions and decisions that the Secretariat of NEPAD and the AU Commission are establishing a High Level African Panel on Biotechnology (APB). It will be a body of eminent experts to advise the AU, its Member States and its various organs, on current and emerging issues associated with the development and application of modern biotechnology. Its specific remit is to provide the AU and NEPAD with independent and strategic advice on developments in modern biotechnology and its implications for agriculture, health and the environment. It will focus on intra-regional and international issues of regulating the development and application of genetic modification and its products. The APB will specifically consider:

- (a) The current and potential developments in modern biotechnology outlining the implications that may be associated with adoption and/or non-adoption of such technologies for regional economic and trade integration;
- (b) The specific priority areas that offer high potential for regional R&D, including aspects of risk assessment and management;
- (c) Whether and what aspects of the development and regulation of modern biotechnology should be harmonized into a regional/continental regulatory regime for shared R&D and technology management (this may include ways and means of integrating regulatory measures in existing Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and related trade arrangements);
- (d) The scientific capacity that will be needed to ensure the safe application and use of products derived from modern biotechnology, including human resources for research, laboratory testing, safety evaluation and enforcement;
- (e) Strategic ways of building Africa's scientific capacity for regionally oriented regulation and management of modern biotechnology; and
- (f) Ways of improving cooperation with other regions (particularly Asia and Latin America) of the world to effectively address trade, R&D and regulatory issues pertaining to modern biotechnology, including implementation of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Codex Principles on risk analysis of food derived from modern biotechnology;

The panel shall make recommendations on the nature of regional institutional arrangements that are required to promote and sustain common regulatory approaches to the application and use of, and propose a strategy and policy on modern biotechnology. Tenure for the Panel is 18 months commencing at the first meeting. This meeting will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The APB's work shall be serviced by the AU Commission and NEPAD Secretariat. During its first meeting the Panel shall make decisions on the nature of literature and background papers that it will require. AU/NEPAD will seek to commission component research institutions or persons to prepare the papers on the basis of terms of reference prepared by the panel. All the documentation required by or available to the APB will be posted on www.nepadst.org unless decided otherwise by the panel.

An individual African country or government may seek advice of the Panel on a particular issue if such an issue has specific implications for regional cooperation. The Panel must at its first meeting interpret its mandate and the Terms of Reference. It ought to delineate clearly the range of scientific and non-scientific issues that fall within its mandate, those that fall clearly outside it, and those related issues that need to be addressed by other bodies to provide comprehensive answers to the questions posed by the mandate.

The Panel shall submit its report(s) to President Konare, Chairperson of the AU Commission, for transmission to the AU Summit through its subsidiary bodies.

ABOUT THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)

The Africa Union (AU) was born out of the 9th September 1999 Declaration (the Sirte Declaration) issued by the Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which called for the establishment of an African Union to accelerate the process of integration in the continent. It was established to play a dual role of catalysing Africa's participation in the global economy and addressing multifaceted social, economic and political problems which would have negative aspects on globalisation. The AU is based on the common vision of a united and strong Africa and on the need to build a partnership between governments and all segments of civil society, in particular women, youth and the private sector, in order to strengthen solidarity and cohesion amongst the peoples of Africa. As a continental organization it focuses on the promotion of peace,

security and stability on the continent as a prerequisite for the implementation of the development and integration agenda of the AU.

ABOUT THE NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT (NEPAD)

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is a socio-economic development programme of the AU. It is a new vision of African leaders in their quest for a socio-economic renewal of the entire continent. This initiative was adopted at the AU Summit in Lusaka, Zambia, 2001. African Heads of State and Government realize that Africa can only take its proper place in the international community if it gains economic strength, hence the objective of NEPAD is to stimulate Africa's development by bridging existing gaps in priority sectors which include agriculture, health, education, infrastructure, information and communication technology, environment, tourism, science and technology, African Peer Review Mechanism and private sector and civil society. The key NEPAD principles and messages are: African ownership and responsibility for the continent's development; the promotion and advancement of democracy, human rights, good governance and accountable leadership; self-reliant development to reduce dependency on aid; building capacity in African institutions; promoting intra-Africa trade and investment; accelerating regional economic integration; advancing women; strengthening Africa's voice in international forums; and forging partnerships with African civil society, the private sector, other African countries and the international community..

ABOUT THE AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL TECHNOLOGY FOUNDATION

The African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) is an African-led charity designed to facilitate and promote public/private partnerships for the identification, transfer, delivery and uptake of royalty-free proprietary technologies that will meet the needs of resource-poor smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa. The AATF facilitates networks that link food security, poverty reduction, market development and economic growth with the aim of delivering concrete value to African smallholder farmers and promoting the development of sustainable markets. To achieve this goal, the AATF works closely with African stakeholders – among others farmers, small businesses, research institutes, government extension services and NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa – to identify the needs of resource-poor smallholder farmers and match them with technologies suitable for adaptation to African ecologies and farming systems. The AATF was incorporated in the UK in January 2003 and in Kenya on 30 April 2003. It is a registered charity in England and Wales. (www.aatf-africa.org)