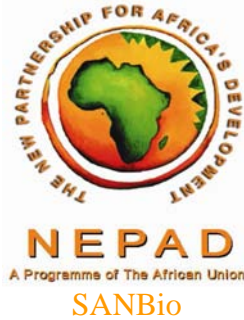


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REPORT ON SANBIO NETWORK DIRECTOR'S VISIT TO LESOTHO

Background

The SANBio Network Director visited the SANBio country focal point in Lesotho from 31 March-2nd April 2008. The purpose of this mission was to meet with officials at the Ministry of Communication S & T and other stakeholders to discuss with them areas of collaboration on SANBio initiatives that have commenced and those that are in the pipe line. This was also an opportunity for both parties to identify areas where NEPAD and its international partners can add value to the ongoing biosciences initiatives within Lesotho.

During this visit the Network Director was a host of Mrs Williams Maseqobela, the Director, DST in the Ministry of Communications S & T of Lesotho who is also the SANBio Steering Committee Member for Lesotho. A meeting of stakeholders was held at the National University of Lesotho and hosted by Dr. W.O. Odenya, the Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences who also facilitated the meeting. A total of 21 participants from 8 stakeholder institutions attended the meeting. Institutions represented at the meeting included: Lesotho Highlands Development Authority, UNESCO Commission, Faculty of Health Sciences and Institute of Southern African Studies (ISAS). Others were the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, the Department of Biology, Ethno Herbal Products, and the host Ministry, Ministry of Communications, Science & Technology.

Programme

- Opening
- Welcome remarks, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture
- Objectives of the Meeting/Introduction of SANBio Director, Prof. Luke Mumba – Director DST
- NEPAD S & T Programmes – Director SANBio
- Discussion
- SANBio Business Plan & Implementation – Director SANBio
- Discussion
- Biosciences in Lesotho – Input from Different Departments
- Discussion
- Plan of action/Way forward – Discussion and Adjournment

Presentations from SANBio

In his first presentation Prof Mumba gave a summary on the Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action highlighting the following issues:

- Background
 - Role of STI in Africa
 - Africa's agenda for STI
- AU/NEPAD Consolidated Plan of Action
- Programmes of the CPA
- African Biosciences Initiative
- Progress on implementation of the CPA
- Funding mechanisms
- Challenges
- Conclusions

He later gave out copies of the CPA and the Biotech Report and invited participants to access the AMCOST Website (www.nepadst.org) for more information.

In his second presentation, he introduced the SANBio Network and the Business Plan highlighting the following issues:

- Genesis of SANBio
- Mission and vision of the SANBio
- Governance and Management structure
- Priority R & D Projects
- Implementation status of 5 R & D Projects
- Mode for regional collaboration
- Funding mechanisms
- Challenges
- Conclusions

General Discussion

- Need for countries in the SADC region to enact legislation on IPP, MTAs and ABS, particularly in the area of bioprospecting.
- Noted that the absence of such laws tended to disadvantage local communities. A case in point was the Lesotho Highlands Development Project for hydro electricity whose benefits have not trickled down or accrued to the local communities.
- On the SANBio Flagship Project, the Network Director elaborated on the procedures that SANBio followed in transferring plant materials from the host country to the CSIR in South Africa in the absence of a legal framework.
- Participants wanted to know if there was a possibility for expanding the scope of research in health to include other ailments other than HIV/AIDs. Explained that although the flagship project in SANBio was on HIV/AIDs, flexibility exists to work on other diseases. Informed the meeting that within NEPAD there is also the Health Sector that is devoted entirely to health matters.
- A proposal was made to establish an institute of traditional medicine/IKS to coordinate these matters at national level.

Biosciences in Lesotho

Lesotho Highlands Development Authority

- Aquaculture aimed at empowering local communities
- Water quality control in dams to assist communities to use this water for irrigation.
- Establishment of a network of nature reserves
- Development of botanical gardens
- Loss of fish biodiversity of indigenous fish species as a result of introduction of exotic species such as the trout.

Department of Agricultural Research

- The department was engaged in mushroom production for food security and as source of income for local communities
- Engaged in outreach to popularize mushroom since mushroom is not considered to be a delicacy in Lesotho
- Research on substrates for mushroom cultivation from maize cobs, grass and other materials
- Produce spawn for distribution to communities
- Construction of green houses for mushroom production from local raw materials
- Challenge was to expand the project to reach out to more local communities

Ethno Herbal Products

This unit is engaged on research in essential oils for skin diseases. The unit lacks the capacity to identify active ingredients. It relays on exporting samples to India for this purpose. The Unit would like to explore collaboration with the CSIR in this area as doing so would significantly reduce the costs for analyses.

Department of Biology

The Department has experience working on antimicrobial properties of traditional medicine. However, their capacity is limited. They are keen to gain exposure to other bioassays and cytotoxicity tests and would like to be linked up with the SANBio hub. The Department has also been researching on medicinal properties of pelargonium.

Department of Crop Sciences

- Plant tissue culture in potatoes to produce clean materials for distribution to farmers as well as for germplasm conservation purposes
- Propagation of medicinal plants through TC
- Propagation of underutilized indigenous plants through TC and then conserving them.
- The Department has also been engaged in mushroom farming and it is a member of the Mushroom Consortium (ZERI Project) which is coordinated from University of Namibia.

Department of Pharmacy

- Produce formulations from traditional medicine for use in primary health care.
- The Department lacks equipment to carry out chemical profiling or fingerprinting

Way Forward:

1. The meeting identified potential for collaboration and engagement with Lesotho in the following areas:
 - Aquaculture
 - Research on loss of fish biodiversity
 - Antimicrobial bioassays for HIV/AIDs
 - Conservation of PGR

- Mushroom farming
2. Network Director to facilitate links between the Lesotho Highlands Authority and the SANBio Fish Node, in Malawi.
 3. Network Director to facilitate communication/linkages between the Department of Crop Sciences and the SANBio mushroom farming project at in Namibia.
 4. The work on plant tissue culture and conservation of plant genetic resources to be connected to the SPGR Network and the SANBio Project on germplasm conservation.
 5. The Director, DST, to convene a national stakeholders meeting in Lesotho to discuss the formation of a National Centre for IKS/Traditional Medicine. At this meeting the formation of a National SANBio Coordinating Committee should be discussed.
 6. SANBio Network Director to provide contacts details in Swaziland and Botswana where similar institutes such as the one being proposed in 5 have been established.
 7. At a wrap-up meeting at the Director's Office, it was agreed that the Network Director should explore possibilities for initiating a project on IKS in Lesotho. The University of the North-West which has conducted IKS surveys in the region in the past should be requested to elaborate the type of expertise that would be required to undertake an IKS survey in Lesotho.
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List of Participants

MEETING TO DISCUSS SANBio PROGRAMS AND BUSINESS PLAN, INCLUDING BIOSCEINCES IN LESOTHO

VENUE : ISA AUDITORIUM- NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

DATE : 01 April 2008

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