



ISAAA

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE
FOR THE ACQUISITION
OF AGRI-BIOTECH
APPLICATIONS

SPARKING CHANGE

***AfriCenter* Annual Report 2017**

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Published by: International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) *AfriCenter*.
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Citation: Karembu M., and Iraki B. 2018. Sparking Change: AfriCenter Annual Report 2017. Nairobi, Kenya: ISAAA *AfriCenter* .

VISION

A food secure Africa free of hunger and poverty

MISSION

To share knowledge on agricultural biotechnology and biosafety through strategic communications and outreach for informed policy choice

FOCUS AREAS



Communication and knowledge sharing on crop biotechnology



Capacity building for effective science communication



Policy engagement for creation of a favourable environment for crop biotechnology development



Media engagements to enhance a more balanced and accurate reporting on agri-biotechnology and biosafety



Strategic partnerships to facilitate a coordinated approach in optimizing crop biotechnology resources

DIRECTOR'S REMARKS



Despite the 'Africa Rising' narrative, the continent is still struggling to feed its people. Although agriculture is the mainstay of most economies across the region, this sector is still under threat from a myriad of challenges. Innovative technologies in agriculture continue to offer great promises, and modern biotechnology tools can generate significant benefits. However, opposition and ideological wars continue to slow down adoption, preventing Africa from joining in a global agricultural revolution.

We have remained steadfast and relentless in our efforts towards contributing to Africa's food security challenges through use and application of modern biotechnology. This report is a reflection of how ISAAA AfriCenter contributed towards the creation of an enabling environment for biotechnology development in Africa.

We channelled our efforts towards amplifying brave new voices that will undoubtedly spark change. To streamline our outreach for maximum impact, we facilitated creation of three key networks namely: Society for Biotech Farmers of Kenya, a farmer's movement championing the course for biotech crops and a responsive agri-biotech policy environment; Women for Biosciences Network which seeks to amplify women's voices in the biotech and biosafety discourse while highlighting their challenges; and a Regional Network of Policy Reform Advocates, comprising of business community

members championing for agri-biotech in local policy circles. These networks will play a key role in facilitating evidence-based policy and programmatic actions.

Recognising the distinctness between knowledge sharing and communication, the Center, together with partners, invested heavily in outreach activities that enable two-way communications. The activities were very effective in reaching out to grassroots communities and identifying various concerns and background conversations held by key agri-biotech and biosafety stakeholders. This has enabled us to effectively develop responsive messages and knowledge products that address those concerns.

AfriCenter continued to serve information needs of different stakeholders, in an effort to quench Africa's thirst for credible scientific information on biotech crops and biosafety. We conducted a virtual launch of the ISAAA Annual report on Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM crops (Brief 52) through our wide network of science journalists. This was complemented by physical launches in selected six African countries, garnering more than 5 million media impressions. The launches provided platforms for positive policy pronouncements in support of the technology.

The Center, through its pioneer seeing-is-believing study tours, exposed over 150 key stakeholders in Africa to

agri-biotech and biosafety advancements, both locally and globally. These exposure visits provided experiential learning while revealing the technology's potential and the region's progress and capacity. Our colleagues at the South Asia Biotechnology Center in India for example, hosted Uganda's Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation, Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye, who played a fundamental role in passage of Uganda's National Biosafety Bill. This exposure visit contributed towards his appreciation of the technology, partly enabling him to more confidently steward parliamentary debates on the Bill. Another study tour by Kenya's board chairs of key regulatory agencies and cotton subsector players to Malawi's Bt cotton National Performance Trials (NPTs) provided useful insights on experimental design, as the country gears to plant its NPTs in early 2018.

AfriCenter and her key partners continued to invest in building the capacity of those who play a role in shaping public opinion on biosciences and biosafety. We held close to eight science communication training workshops in 2017, targeting over 300 participants. Majority of them have reported an increased level of confidence in communicating with non-scientific audiences.

A major landmark under our capacity building program was hosting of the second Symposium on Agricultural

Biotechnology and Biosafety Communications (ABBC 2017). The 3-day conference brought together 100 participants comprising of CEOs of select African biosafety agencies, their biosafety communicators/spokespersons, biosafety experts and professional communicators. ABBC 2017 aimed to strengthen communication for improved biosafety management, and its outcomes will play a big role in informing communications strategies for regulatory authorities across Africa.

On the policy front, AfriCenter continued working closely with policy and decision makers to ensure they are well-versed with agri-biotech and biosafety advancements both locally and globally. This was achieved through sensitization workshops, round table meetings and biotech study tours.

Indeed, 2017 was a remarkable year for us. However, we could not have attained our achievements without the support and belief from partners and collaborators. So, to you whose confidence continues to inspire us; our funders whose unwavering support has made our work possible; and to our Board who continue to model dedication and service, we are indeed grateful. We look forward to your continued collaboration in intensifying the sharing of knowledge for informed policy and choices in Africa.

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ABBC 2017 aimed to strengthen communication for improved biosafety management, and its outcomes will play a big role in informing communication strategies for regulatory authorities across Africa.

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COMMUNICATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

AfriCenter's work on knowledge sharing is inspired by the need to transform the agri-biotech discourse. The Center's goal is to share credible information to diverse audiences in order to facilitate informed policy and choice. However, evidence from the continent to support the technology's benefits is limited. In this regard, AfriCenter, through its communication and knowledge-sharing program, has managed to serve information needs of different stakeholders. To quench the continent's thirst for credible scientific information on global trends and socio-economic impacts of agri-biotech the Center:

- Virtually and physically launched Brief 52
- Developed various knowledge products
- Facilitated seeing-is-believing biotech study tours
- Engaged farming communities and special interest groups

Launching Brief 52



Overview

ISAAA's flagship product for knowledge and information sharing is the Annual Review on the Global Status of Commercialised Biotech Crops and their positive economic, environmental and humanitarian impacts. The Annual Review (popularly referred to as the Brief) is unique and has become the standard reference for biotech crops by popular media, academia and governments. It is launched every year in different countries around the world. Given its positive impact, AfriCenter has played a critical role in launching the Brief across the continent and scaling out its reach and use.

Action



AfriCenter virtually launched Brief 52 in June 2017, in Nairobi, Kenya.

6 physical launches in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda.



500

copies of Brief 52 and the Executive Summary were also re-printed and shared with key stakeholders across the region

- policy makers, media,
- academic and research institutions,
- scientists
- various development partners



Dr. Albert Changaya (centre front row) with journalists during the launch of Brief 52 in Lilongwe, Malawi



The Global Status of Commercialized Biotech Crops report is one of the most cited documents because of its relevance and authoritative nature. Regional Journalists should make reference to this report and convey factual messages so that governments are informed in decision making. The continent can no longer afford to shun biotechnology in the face of climate change and the current infestation by fall army worms, especially when the world is evidently progressing.

Dr. Albert Changaya, Controller of Agricultural Extension and Technical Services, Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Water Development, Malawi during launch of Brief 52 in June 2017.



Impact



The launches enabled biotechnology to penetrate the news agenda throughout the year and garnered over 5 million media impressions.



The global adoption trends boosted confidence on the technology and served as a stark reminder to African governments that many countries are moving on and reaping tremendous benefits from agricultural biotechnology.



The physical launches provided platforms for positive policy pronouncements and inspired policy makers to re-evaluate their positions on biotechnology.



(L-R) Faith Nguthi, Senior program officer ISAAA AfriCenter; Barbara Zawedde, coordinator UBIC; State Minister Agriculture, Christopher Kibazanga; and Theresa Ssengoba, the Board Chairperson UNCST during the launch of Brief 52 in Kampala, Uganda, in July 2017.

“

In order to maximally exploit the potential of our agriculture sector, we need to consider adopting this technology where necessary but we also need to regulate its use and educate the public about it so that they can appreciate its relevance and harmonized regulations. Any resistance against science in any field (in this country) means that you are only telling your people to remain poor.

Hon. Kibazanga, Uganda's State Minister for Agriculture while launching Brief 52 in July, 2017

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Development of Knowledge Products



Overview

Knowledge is critical in accelerating adoption of agricultural innovations. AfriCenter is alive to the fact that access to relevant and credible scientific information will play a key role in the acquisition of agri-biotech applications. Over the years, the Center has developed information, education and communication (IEC) materials that address the needs of different stakeholders. These IEC materials are repackaged into simplified easy-to-use knowledge products that are reflective of and responsive to local cultures

Action

(Snapshots of the IEC materials produced...including screen shots of the video bites)



AfriCenter repackaged Brief 52 into a variety of simplified popular formats such as:

- Top Ten Facts on Biotechnology and Biosafety in Africa, 2016
- Top Ten Facts on Biotechnology and Biosafety in Kenya, 2016
- Video highlighting the status of agri-biotech and biosafety in Africa by 2016



Other IEC materials produced include banners, posters, briefs, infographics, as well as biotech and biosafety video bites.



In addition, the Center has continued to actively contribute to the Crop Biotech Update (CBU) keeping our global readers informed on the latest crop biotechnology news from the region.

Impact



Greater outreach following wider distribution through sensitization workshops, farmer field days, exposure visits and stakeholder meetings.



Increased interest to read and learn about agri-bitech as a result of simplifying and translating IEC materials.



Cultivation of positive attitudes about GMOs through the IEC materials that address stakeholders' concerns and background conversations.



AfriCenter's Director Dr. Margaret Karembu sharing some IEC materials with SOBIFAK members.

“

We really appreciate the efforts by ISAAA to produce and share these top ten facts booklets with us. They keep us updated and ensure we share factual information with our fellow farmers at the grassroots. I urge all our members to make good use of these materials.”

Mr. Mugo Magondu, Chair SOBIFAK, during a farmers' sensitization workshop in April 2017.

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Seeing-is-Believing Biotech Study Tours

Overview

Over the last decade, AfriCenter, in collaboration with other partners, has spearheaded seeing-is-believing biotech study tours across Africa and the rest of the world. These study tours are driven by the need to provide agri-biotech and biosafety stakeholders with experiential opportunities to learn from countries that have commercialized biotech crops. Key stakeholders that include legislators, journalists and farmers have benefited immensely from these study tours.

Action

The Center organized and facilitated two study tours to Malawi's Bt cotton National Performance Trials (NPT) and three local in-country biotech study tours to WEMA's Bt maize confined field trials (CFTs), and VIRCA Plus' regulatory field trials (RFTs).

Close to 200 stakeholders comprising of policy and decision makers, journalists, social media influencers, members of the business community from COMESA countries, farmers and regulators took part in the study tours.





NEMA Kenya Chairman Mr. John Konchellah counting the number of balls on a Bt cotton plant. Looking on is the Chairman of a Cotton Farmers Union in Western Kenya (Top Left); Prof. Thomas Kipkurgat, Managing Director Rivatex, Kenya's leading textile factory, inside the Bt cotton NPT's in Malawi (Top right)



Stakeholders, including media and scientists from Kenya listening to Malawian team outlining their NPT trial design (bottom left and right)

Impact



An enlightened Bt cotton commercialization Taskforce in Kenya

Key players in the cotton value chain who participated in Malawi's Bt cotton study tour now serve as members of the government-led Bt cotton commercialisation taskforce. As a result, Kenya's NPTs are heavily informed by the Malawi experience.



Positive stories that shed light on Africa's progress and capacity

Media practitioners amplified messages, including farmer voices demanding for the technology, through stories that covered the events. This increased awareness of the technology and revealed the technology's potential as well as the region's progress and capacity.



Improved understanding and confidence on GM crops trials

Visits to NPTs and CFTs provided an opportunity for decision makers to interact with biotech stakeholders and get a clearer understanding of how GM crops trials are conducted. The study tours also contextualised GM crops by enabling key decision makers to see them for the first time.



Hon. Christophe Bazivamo, Deputy Secretary General of the East African Community in charge of Productive and Social Sectors (2nd left in light green coat) and Hon. Adam Malima, former Deputy Finance Minister, Tanzania, and Vice Chair of East Africa Biotechnology and Biosafety Alliance (2nd right in light green coat), visiting Kenya's WEMA Bt maize CFTs during a regional sensitization workshop for select business community members within COMESA.



I am happy to be here where these trials are being done. I have witnessed a lot and have learnt a lot from what was said. Science and technology can be a solution when it comes to what we are facing here in East Africa as challenges when it comes to food security. Biotechnology can be one of the solutions but it's important that we speak about it and create awareness among East Africans especially leaders and other scientists here and throughout East Africa so that we can make use of what has been achieved in Kenya.

Hon. Christophe Bazivamo, Deputy Secretary General of the East African Community in charge of Productive and Social Sectors during a study tour to WEMA Bt maize CFTs in August 2017.



Outreach to Special Interest Groups

Overview

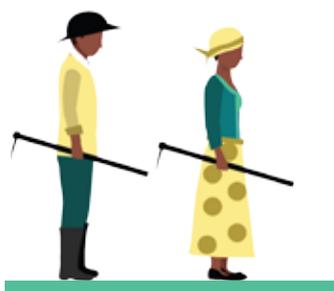
AfriCenter acknowledges the distinctness between knowledge sharing and communication. As a result, the Center invests heavily in awareness creation and outreach activities that enable two-way communications. These activities have been very effective in reaching out to key players along the agri-biotech value chain, identifying their concerns and background conversations, thereby enabling the Center to develop responsive messages. To facilitate dialogue and bring on board new voices to advocate for policy reforms, the Center reached out to:

- Marginalised grassroots communities
- Women and youth
- Members of the business community
- Faith-based leaders

These interactions have been useful in creating movements that will spark change.



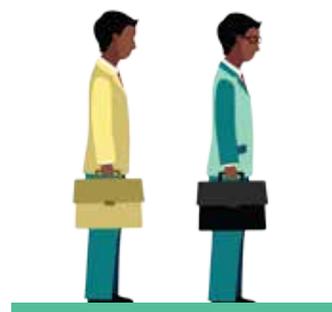
Action



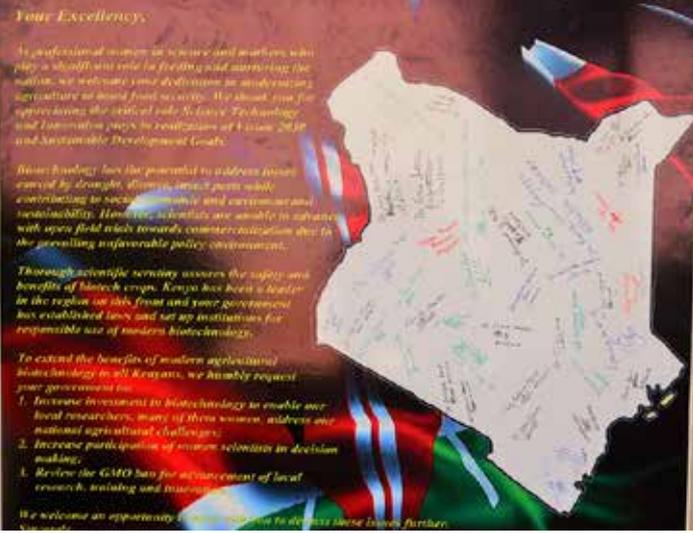
AfriCenter directly engaged close to 1,000 farmers through sensitization workshops, farmer field days and seeing-is-believing biotech study tours.



The Center also held sensitization workshops for Kenyan women with an interest and passion for biosciences, faith based leaders, and business community members from the COMESA region.



The business community members also got an opportunity to visit WEMA's Bt maize confined field trials.



Some of the African Women for Biosciences (left) signing the communique in the form of a “support board” (right) to the country’s top leadership

Impact



Formation of Society for Biotech Farming in Kenya (SOBIFAK)

The farmer-led network has become a hallmark movement for its members to advocate for access to improved seeds. SOBIFAK has a diverse and nationwide membership that is playing a fundamental role in cascading factual agri-biotech information to the grassroots, and amplifying demand for biotech crops.



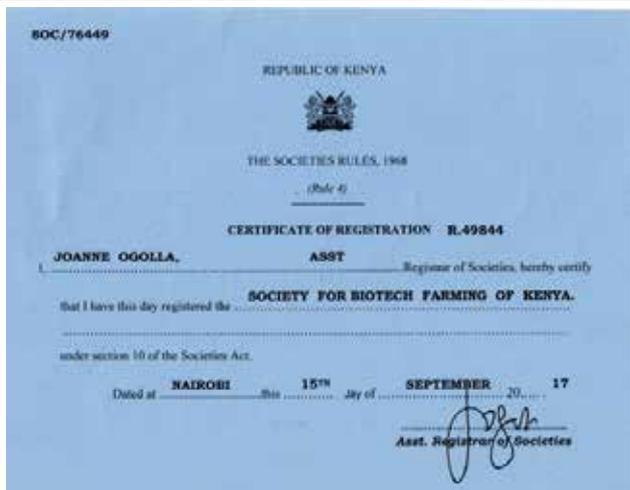
Establishment of African Women for Biosciences (AWfB) network

Kenyan women with an interest and passion for biosciences formed a network dubbed AWfB that will play a key role in advocating for and addressing public concerns on agri-biotech and biosafety. In addition, a database of women experts has been created for sharing with the media, in order to diversify voices speaking on the technology in Kenya.



More voices advocating for agri-biotech policy reforms

Business Community members and faith-based leaders enhanced their understanding and appreciation of agricultural biotechnology, as well as the research and regulatory status in the region. These key stakeholders will champion the technology in local policy circles and encourage decision makers to make evidence-based decisions.



Members of the Society for Biotech Farming of Kenya (top) during the inaugural meeting in April 2017. The farmer network was officially registered in September 2017 (certificate of registration on the left)

“

The society provides us with a unique opportunity to take our grievances to our leaders and educate our fellow farmers at the grassroots. Let us work hard and strive to achieve our goal of accessing Bt maize and cotton seeds.

Mr. Mugo Magondu, Chair, Society for Biotech Farming of Kenya

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**CAPACITY BUILDING
FOR EFFECTIVE
AGRI-BIOTECH
AND BIOSAFETY
COMMUNICATIONS**

The Center believes that building public trust is a prerequisite to acceptance of agri-biotech and biosafety messages. This is because both the message and the messenger combine to shape public opinion. AfriCenter works towards building the science and biosafety communications capacity for partners confronted with agri-biotech and biosafety issues regularly.

In 2017, the Center and her partners conducted eight science communication trainings for close to 300 participants. The trainings, spread across Africa, targeted a wide range of experts along the agricultural technology value chain, including communicators, regulators and biosafety experts, as well researchers from national agricultural research systems.



No.	Training	Participants	Impact/ Outcomes
1	Science communication training for Kenya's National Bt Commercialization Taskforce in Nairobi, Kenya. The training was done in September 2017, in collaboration with OFAB-Kenya and PBS.	15	Increased confidence by taskforce members in relating with and delivering messages to the media; Identification of key stakeholders, their concerns and responsive messages, at the NPT stage of research.
2	Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety Communications Symposium for CEOs of select African biosafety agencies, their biosafety communicators/spokespersons, biosafety experts and professional communicators from across the globe. The symposium was held in July 2017, in collaboration with PBS, ABNE, COMESA, MSU, SCIFODE, Seed Stories, UBBC, UBIC, UNCST and USDA.	100	98% of the participants felt they had learned something new at ABBC2017 with 73% saying they had gathered new information about biosafety communication strategies. ABBC's other objective was to create and build networks - 71% of the participants felt that networking was one of the dominant benefits of ABBC2017.
3	Biosafety communication training in Zanzibar, Tanzania, for Economists leading PBS's BioRAPP project from Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda. The training was done in May 2017, in collaboration with PBS.	20	Appreciation on need for effective communication in delivering outcomes from the BioRAPP project; Development of a draft communication and outreach outline, as well as identification of expectations and communication needs.
4	Biosafety communication training in Accra, Ghana, for regulators from Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania. The training was done in March 2017, in collaboration with ICGEB.	38	Increased confidence by regulators in developing and delivering biosafety messages in low trust, high concern situations.
5	Biosafety communication training in Abuja, Nigeria, for regulators from Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania. The training was done in March 2017, in collaboration with ICGEB.	40	Increased confidence by regulators in developing and delivering biosafety messages in low trust, high concern situations.
6	Biosafety communication training in Kampala, Uganda, for banana scientists and regulators from East and West Africa. The training was done in October 2016, in collaboration with VIB-IPBO.	30	Increase confidence by researchers and regulators in message development and how to handle media interviews.
7	Science communication training workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, for researchers from national agricultural research systems, from 11 African countries. These included Ivory Coast, Sudan, Rwanda, Niger, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Cameroon, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya. The training was done in November 2017, in collaboration with BecA-ILRI hub.	24	Significant improvement across five key areas of training namely: knowledge on effective principles of science communication, familiarity with stakeholder engagement strategies, message development skills, confidence in relating with the mass media, and understanding the role of social media in science communication. Prior to the workshop, participants scored themselves, on average, 34% across the five areas. This improved remarkably to 74%.
8	Science communication training workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, for researchers from national agricultural research systems, from 12 African countries. These include Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic republic of Congo, Eritrea, Gabon, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Kenya. The training was done in Decemebr 2017, in collaboration with BecA-ILRI hub.	28	Significant improvement across five key areas of training namely: knowledge on effective principles of science communication, familiarity with stakeholder engagement strategies, message development skills, confidence in relating with the mass media, and understanding the role of social media in science communication. Prior to the workshop, participants scored themselves, on average, 30% across the five areas. This improved remarkably to 70%.



Participants during the ABBC 2017 Symposium

Agricultural Biotechnology and Biosafety Communication (ABBC) Symposium

The ABBC is a biennial platform for agri-biotech communication stakeholders to actively exchange experiences and best practices towards improving agri-biotech and biosafety communications. The second ABBC 2017 Africa symposium was held in July 2017, in Uganda. The theme of the three-day symposium, *Strengthening Communication for Improved Biosafety Management*, was informed by the need to promote public awareness of regulatory systems and processes to ensure safe and sustainable research, development, and commercialization of biotech crops in Africa. ABBC 2017 was attended by 100 participants comprising of CEOs of select African biosafety agencies, their biosafety communicators/spokespersons, biosafety experts and professional communicators from across the globe.

Impact



ABBC 2017 presented a unique opportunity to enhance knowledge and build confidence on the technology among key government officials and parliamentary groups. This engagement with policy makers contributed towards informed parliamentary debates that contributed to passage of the Uganda Biosafety Bill, 2012 currently awaiting Presidential signing into law.



The Symposium was captured in several media articles with high impact impressions, including ISAAA's weekly electronic newsletter that reaches close to 30,000 global subscribers.



98% of the participants felt they had learned something new at ABBC 2017, with 73% saying they had gathered new information about biosafety communication strategies. About 71% of the participants felt that networking was one of the dominant benefits of ABBC 2017.



The symposium attracted high social media traction becoming a trending topic in Uganda for three consecutive days. #ABBC2017 had over 1,600,000 impressions and reached over 200,000 followers.



**MEDIA
ENGAGEMENT
FOR INCREASED
COVERAGE OF
AGRI-BIOTECH AND
BIOSAFETY ISSUES**

The GMO debate can be won or lost in the media. Therefore, having a group of journalists and editors with factual knowledge on agri-biotech and biosafety is an important asset. AfriCenter continuously engages media practitioners through various awareness creation and outreach activities, including seeing-is-believing biotech study tours and inclusion in various sensitization workshops. These engagements enable the Center to sustain media coverage and capture voices across Africa speaking on the benefits of agricultural biotechnology. To foster this relationship, AfriCenter together with partners held targeted media engagement activities including:



Media Sensitisation Workshops

Two regional media sensitisation workshops for journalists and social media influencers, took place in Ethiopia and Malawi in March and June 2017, respectively. The workshops enhanced journalists' understanding of agri-biotech and biosafety issues, leading to increased and more balanced reporting within the COMESA region. The workshops also presented ISAAA with an opportunity to expand its media list and identify potential members for an upcoming network of science communicators in Africa.

Science Café

An inaugural Science Café was held in Nairobi, Kenya in July 2017. The café aimed at sharing updates on the local, regional and global status of biotech crops in an informal setting. The session initiated conversations and strengthened linkages between journalists and scientists, thereby increasing the frequency and accuracy of biotech coverage. Participants in the inaugural event were equipped with factual information that led to positive stories with high impact impressions.



Dr. Getachew Belay, COMESA's Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy Advisor during a media biotech study tour to Malawi's Bt-cotton NPTs, organized together with the AfriCenter and Malawi's Department of Agricultural Research Services, in June 2017



Media Recognition Award

A media recognition award was held in Nairobi in September 2017 to appreciate science reporters and their contribution towards public understanding of agricultural biotechnology and biosafety. The event, done in collaboration with AATF and NACOSTI in celebration of OFABKenya@10, encouraged excellence in science reporting. Winners were drawn from television, radio and print categories. Entrants to the competition were judged on six criteria: consistency, credibility, initiative, completeness and science in the story, human interest, and presentation style.



Social Media

AfriCenter's Facebook posts reached over 800,000 users in 2017 alone, with close to 1,500,000 impressions. The @afri_isaaa twitter handle grew from 2500 followers in 2016, to over 3000 in 2017. The Center garnered over 250,000 tweet impressions in 2017. OFAB-Kenya also grew its social media audience base to over 200,000 users on Facebook alone with its posts recording 500,000 impressions. The @OFABKenya twitter handle garnered over 100,000 tweet impressions.



Dr. Karembu (far left), Chair OFAB-Kenya, and Dr. Dan Kiambi (far right), Alternate Chair, OFAB-Kenya, posing with the three winners at the media recognition award gala dinner, in September 2017



**POLICY
ENGAGEMENT
FOR EVIDENCE-
BASED DECISION
MAKING**

Effective adoption and application of crop biotechnology relies heavily on knowledgeable policy makers. Therefore, there is need to empower policy makers with credible and factual information on agri-biotech and biosafety, in a timely manner. As a result, AfriCenter engages policy and decision makers to ensure they are well-versed with agri-biotech and biosafety advancements, both locally and globally.

In 2017, the Center invited policy makers to Brief 52 launches in select African countries, and requested them to officiate key workshops and conferences across the region. These engagements provided a platform for policy pronouncements in support of the technology.

To keep policy and decision makers updated on local, regional and global developments on agri-biotech and biosafety, the Center held:



Consultative meetings



Sensitization workshops



Exposure visits

Action

The Center held round table meetings with parliamentarians to enable extensive deliberations between lawmakers and experts. A case in point was a consultative meeting with Members of Parliament (MPs) from the Agriculture, Livestock and Cooperatives Committee, to sensitize them on the biosafety regulatory framework, and deliberate on the status of biotechnology in Kenya. The engagement provided a platform for MPs to clarify certain recommendations of a GMO report that was tabled in Parliament in December 2016. The report, among other proposals, had recommended that the ban on GM food imports remains un-lifted until certain measures are put in place.

Courtesy visits were also paid to various heads of relevant government bodies, such as the newly appointed Chair of the NBA board. Such visits present an opportunity to update key decision makers on the status of biotech crops, as well as discuss any regulatory and policy bottle-necks that need urgent attention.

Several sensitization workshops for technical officers in select government ministries and KALRO senior managers were held. The events enabled these key decisions makers to familiarize themselves with the country's biotech crops research progress, as well as get updates on regional and global trends. They also present a unique opportunity to clarify any misconceptions on the technology, and pick background conversations that inform message development.

The Center also exposed board chairs of the three key regulatory agencies, NBA, NEMA and KEPHIS, to biotech crops field trial sites, as well as the KALRO board chair. The NBA board Chair visited VIRCA Plus' regulatory field trial, whereas the NEMA, KEPHIS and KALRO chairs visited Malawi's Bt cotton NPTs. These visits provide experiential learning opportunities to key decision makers, some of who have never seen a biotech crop.



Hon. Washiali, Member of Parliament, Western Kenya, addressing participants during a consultative meeting.

Impact



The study tour to Malawi provided an opportunity for the leadership of NEMA, KEPHIS, NBA and KALRO to meet for the first time. They shared their experience within policy circles and continue to lend their support to the Bt cotton commercialisation task force.



The engagement with Agriculture, Livestock and Cooperatives Parliamentary Committee enabled experts to address concerns that led to the committee's endorsement of NPTs and support for home-grown biotech research.

Key decision makers got an opportunity to engage with local experts and appreciate the country's capacity to conduct research on and regulate GMOs. For those who participated in seeing-is-believing study tours, they got an opportunity to see a GM crop for the first time, addressing concerns on the technology.

“

For cotton, if the problem has been the politics, I would recommend we do a comprehensive report for our findings here in Malawi with specific recommendations to be taken through government departments and meet with the Permanent Secretaries, to advice and inform the desired change. I will do my level best at NEMA and ask my scientists to share with me what their worries are, but we should work together to unlock the stalemate.

Mr. John Konchellah, Chairman Kenya National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)

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*Mr. John Konchellah,
Chairman NEMA,
inspecting Bt cotton
plants in Malawi's
NPTs*



**EXPANDING AND
STRENGTHENING
PARTNERSHIPS TO
LEVERAGE SKILLS
AND EXPERTISE**

AfriCenter has continued to expand and strengthen partnership with like-minded credible institutions to maximize impact of communication on agricultural biotechnology and biosafety. Owing to its Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) track record, partners have intensified their engagement with the Center, frequently contracting it to undertake communications and policy engagement activities in support of their projects. The PEC support offered by the AfriCenter is aimed at creating a facilitative policy environment for safe and responsible use of biotech crops.

Key Areas of Partnership include:



Development of communication and outreach strategies



Enhancement of knowledge sharing and awareness creation on agricultural biotechnology



Spearheading seeing-is-believing biotech study tours and sensitization workshops for several stakeholder groups

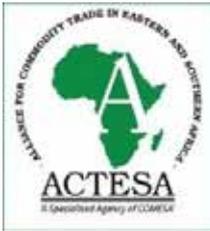


Provision of policy outreach support



Execution of science communication trainings

Partners in 2017

 <p>African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)</p>	 <p>Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA)</p>	 <p>Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)</p>	 <p>Crop Life International</p>
 <p>Donald Danforth Plant Science Center</p>	 <p>Ghent University</p>	 <p>International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology</p>	 <p>Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization (KALRO)</p>
 <p>National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO)</p>	 <p>National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA)</p>	 <p>National Commission for Science and Technology, Malawi</p>	 <p>National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI)</p>
 <p>New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)</p>	 <p>Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa (OFAB-Africa)</p>	 <p>Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS)</p>	 <p>Public Research and Regulation Initiative (PRRI)</p>
 <p>Science Foundation for Livelihoods and Development (SCIFODE)</p>	 <p>Uganda Biosciences Information Center (UBIC)</p>	 <p>United States Agency for International Development (USAID)</p>	 <p>VIRCA Plus</p>



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CHALLENGES

AfriCenter encountered a number of challenges with an impact on efforts geared towards fulfilling her mandate. The challenges include:

The ban on GM foods importation in Kenya is still in place.

Delayed implementation of key decisions such as issuance of license for conducting NPTs for WEMA Bt maize and cotton in Kenya

Failure of the Ugandan Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill to become law. President Yoweri Museveni declined to sign it into law directing parliament to clarify among other issues, its title, patent rights of indigenous farmers and sanctions for scientists who mix GMOs with indigenous crops and animals.

Heightened advocacy against biotechnology in the region



OPPORTUNITIES

Despite those challenges, the future looks promising as witnessed by the following opportunities:

Formation of a government-led taskforce to fast-track commercialisation of Bt cotton and conduct of NPTs approved by Kenya's NBA in 2016.

Improved political good will towards biotechnology breathes an air of optimism towards lifting of GM food importation ban in Kenya.

Kenya's NBA is likely to approve environmental release of GM gysophila flower, a uniquely Kenyan product.

Swaziland approved an application for Bt cotton confined field trials in November 2016

The continent is making significant progress towards adoption of biotech crops. Countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and Nigeria are likely to join South Africa and Sudan as adopter countries in coming years. To sustain this momentum, AfriCenter and her partners need to intensify her efforts towards knowledge sharing and policy outreach.

Effectiveness of multi-location trials of Bt-cotton hybrids in controlling bollworm in Ethiopia is a confidence booster for agricultural biotechnology

Exemplary performance of Malawi's Bt cotton NPTs, in preparation to select suitable varieties for commercialisation, provided a big boost of confidence towards crop biotech adoption in the country

Amendment of Cameroon biosafety regulations aimed at expediting the commercial release of Bt cotton

Expansion of Bt cotton planting program in Sudan continued in 2017



List of Abbreviations

ABBC	-	Agri-Biotechnology and Biosafety Communications
AWfB	-	African Women for Biosciences
BecA Hub	-	Biosciences eastern and central Africa Hub
BioRAPP	-	Biotechnology and Biosafety Rapid Assessment and Policy Platform
CBU	-	Crop Biotech Updates
CFTs	-	Confined Field Trials
COMESA	-	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
ICGEB	-	International Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology
IEC	-	Information, Education and Communication
ILRI	-	International Livestock Research Institute
IPBO	-	Institute of Plant Biotechnology Outreach
KALRO	-	Kenya Agricultural & Livestock Research Organization
KEPHIS	-	Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service
NBA	-	National Biosafety Authority
NEMA	-	National Environment Management Authority
NPTs	-	National Performance Trials
RIVATEX	-	Rift Valley Textiles
SOBIFAK	-	Society for Biotech Farming of Kenya
USDA	-	United States Department of Agriculture
VIRCA	-	Virus Resistant Cassava for Africa