

**REPORT OF THE 2017 AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOSAFETY
COMMUNICATION ABBC 18th – 20th JULY, 2017**

**THEME: STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION FOR IMPROVED BIOSAFETY
MANAGEMENT**



LAICO LAKE VICTORIA HOTEL ENTEBBE, UGANDA

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List of acronyms

ABBC	Agri-Biotechnology and Biosafety Communications (2017 Africa Symposium)
ISAAA	International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications
GM	Genetic Modification
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
UBIC	Uganda Biotechnology Information Center
NARO	National Agricultural Research Organisation
ABNE	African Biosafety Network of Expertize
MSU	Michigan State University
PBS	Program for Biosafety Systems
SCIFODE	Science Foundation for Livelihoods and Development
USDA	United States Department of agriculture
STI	Science Technology and Innovation
UNCST	Uganda National council for Science and Technology
NBB	National Biotechnology and Biosafety
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
AU	African Union
MABIF	Malaysian Biotechnology Information Center
EU	European Union

Executive Summary

The ABBC is a platform for agri-biotech communication stakeholders to actively exchange experiences and best practices towards improving agri-biotech and biosafety communications. The first international conference on agri-Biotechnology and Biosafety Communication was held in April 2015 in Nairobi, Kenya. The second ABBC 2017 Africa symposium was held from 18th – 20th July 2017 at Laico Lake Victoria Hotel, Entebbe, 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/GM crops in Africa. This was especially critical as several African countries have recently made various important biosafety decisions related to genetically modified (GM) crops, including decisions to authorize their general/environmental release. However, the ultimate success of delivering these products to farmers is threatened by tenuous support of these decisions from policymakers and the public, due to limited understanding of biosafety concepts, regulatory processes and decision-making factors. The symposium provided a platform to interrogate innovative communication techniques to address these gaps, thus building confidence in the biosafety systems and enabling the safe and beneficial use of agri-biotechnology in Africa.

In his official opening remarks, the guest of honor Hon. Dr. ELlioda Tumwesigye emphasized the Government of Uganda's commitment in creating an enabling environment where scientists excel in coming up with innovations to reduce poverty levels in the country.

The Symposium was attended by over 100 participants including heads of African biosafety agencies, their biosafety communicators/spokespersons, biosafety experts, professional communicators and other stakeholders in the biotech industry from around the world. Expert presentations, in-depth discussions and practical working sessions comprised the bulk of the symposium program. Principals and essentials of biosafety communication, communication to build alliances and trust in biosafety management, experience sharing on biosafety communication, managing the narrative of emerging breeding technologies and multimedia approaches in biosafety communication in Africa were some of the thematic topics discussed during the event. A key immediate outcome of the event was the establishment of the African Biosafety Communicators Network to further engagements beyond the symposium.

The symposium was organized by a consortium of partners led by International Service for the acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS), Africa Biosafety Network of Expertise, Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) and Uganda Biosciences Information Center (UBIC).

Objectives

1. Share and advance innovative strategies for communicating biosafety concepts, processes and decisions through case studies
2. Strengthen exchange of approaches, resources, and expertise on biosafety communications leading to formation of a community of biosciences communication practitioners
3. Identify essential follow-up actions for aligning biosafety communication with current and emerging technologies

Symposium structure

The symposium discussed five themes

Themes

The following themes were discussed

1. Foundation of Biosafety Communication
 - a. Global and regional context of biosafety issues
 - b. Communicating regulatory concepts, processes and decisions: past, present and future.
 - c. Principles and essentials of biosafety communication
 - d. Sharing experiences and lessons learnt from biosafety Agencies in Africa on Communicating about biosafety through country case studies
2. Building trust and connection in biosafety management by addressing values and emotions
 - a. Factors affecting trust and credibility in science
 - b. Using narratives/stories to supplement technical information
3. Emerging biosafety issues
 - a. Managing the biosafety narrative of emerging New Breeding Techniques
 - b. Enhancing visibility of regulatory agencies through media and grassroots engagement
4. Implications of international debates on biosafety communication.
 - a. Africa's preparedness for international biosafety negotiations
 - b. Partnerships to address challenges and compliance with National Biosafety Laws

The symposium was structured into 4 sessions:

Session 1: Opening Ceremony & Keynote address

The opening session

The opening session comprised of brief statements by representatives from the various partners including UNCST, NEPAD/ABNE, COMESA, MSU, PBS, and ISAAA Africenter.

These were followed by a key note speech titled “*Communicating Biosafety and Biotechnology: Balancing the act*” by Dr. Mahaletchumy Arujanan, Executive Director Malaysian Biotechnology Information Center. This was followed by the official opening of the symposium by the guest of honor Hon. Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye also Minister for Science Technology and Innovation (STI). Thereafter a policy dialogue session ensued where invited legislatures elaborated on strategies for engaging policy makers on matters science, handling challenges in biotechnology and biosafety, and the role of gender in biotech and biosafety communication.

Keynote Speech: *Communicating Biosafety and Biotechnology: Balancing the Act*

Dr. Mahaletchumy Arujanan, Executive Director, Malaysian Biotechnology Information Center.

Whereas regulators are wary of being involved in the biotechnology debate the need to balance biosafety and biotechnology communication is paramount. Biosafety communication involves sharing information on aspects like risks, regulations, precautionary principles, timeline, public participation in terms of approvals and notification. Biotechnology communication relates to answering questions such as what is GMOs why GMOs, how are GMOs developed, what are the benefits public concerns and addressing misinformation. However, it's difficult to completely separate the two thus the need to balance the two through effective communication that is accurate, factual, non-biased and simple. In addition regulators and scientists must desist from communicating among themselves but reach out to the wider audience to increase the degree of understanding of science for better decision making.

One of the challenges in biotech and biosafety communication is the current global connectivity that enables fast movement of information. Today “*A lie can travel halfway around the world before the truth can get its boots on*”. This is what has happened with biosafety and biotechnology where misinformation has spread globally creating a rift between proponents and opponents of the technology. This calls for deliberate, strategic and planned biosafety and biotech communications.

This will entail understanding the audience, through stakeholder analysis to appreciate their concerns and interests. Understanding the motives of the critics is also critical.

Official Opening Remarks - Hon. Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye

Uganda is ranked among the most entrepreneurial countries in the world having the best research scientists on the continent especially in the areas of agriculture in general and biotechnology in particular. The Government of Uganda is cognizant of this fact hence continues to create enabling environment for scientist and innovators to excel in order to have a vibrant technology and science driven society. These innovations have the potential to reduce poverty levels by increasing house hold income level to above \$10 per day per house hold if well harnessed. Scientists have been accused of being poor communicators, but science is not an easy subject to communicate especially to lay audience. Recognizing the shortcoming of scientists and sharing ideas to enhance their communication skills is essential. <http://www.environewsnigeria.com/gmos-scientists-asked-simplify-biosafety-information/>

Highlights from policy dialogue

Hon. Beatrice Atim Anywa, chair, gender committee, in the Ugandan 10th parliament

Scientists need to get out of the labs and interact with the product consumers. This will help in demystifying the inhuman face they are known for. There is also need to segment and disaggregate gender categories as far as biotechnology communication is concerned that will involve gender mainstreaming with specific messages for each category. Messages should be simple and address real challenges biotechnology can solve and likely opportunities e.g. food insecurity, poor nutrition, stable homes and less domestic violence incidences.

Hon. Dr. Ogenga Latigo

While modern agri-biotechnologies holds enormous potential for revolutionizing African agriculture, scientists have a challenge in communicating this to policy makers and non-scientists. Scientists should not shy away from acknowledging any plausible risks as well as highlighting the benefits of the technology.

Hon. Adam Malima, former deputy minister and chairperson PRAs for Agri-biotechnology from Tanzania

Agriculture is not just a source of food in Africa but rather a way of life for more than 70% of the population so farmers need to secure enough to eat, save and also invest. While engaging policy makers it is important to address these questions: who are policy makers? why do we need to engage them?, why are they relevant? How do you engage policy makers? There are critical

questions that require answers: Why is the EU focused on making sure Africa does not have access to biotech? Why are our policy makers so bent to implementing what the EU fronts? Why Europeans should be allowed to decide what is good for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania?

Prof. Yaye Gassama, the former Minister and Vice-chair Senegal Academy of Science.

The Senegalese President commissioned the National Academy of Science to undertake a major study to understand the impact of GMOs in the country. The Academy captured this opportunity to communicate benefits of biotech to dispel the deeply rooted myths and fears in the populace that had stagnated progress in the arena for 15 years. This led to the President's acceptance of GM cotton that is currently under experimentation. Some of the lessons from these experience include: ensuring that farmers and policy makers get the best available evidence showing how the technology can assist in solving problems; sharing relevant science and simple information with the public fosters acceptance since many stakeholders are not familiar with biotechnology; close interaction with social groups in society is paramount for policy influence and action; taking advantage of the great potential in the young generation to fully integrate Africa into a global biotech enterprise.

A panel discussion saw this session come to an end with questions like, how do we rally women and youth given the stake they have in biotechnology?

Session Two: Foundations of Biosafety Communications

This session had the following presentations:

Dr. Douglas D. Buhler, Director, Agbio-Research College of Agriculture and Natural Resources - Michigan State University: Why Communicate Science to Public and other Stakeholders

Key aspects emerging from his presentation included the need to acknowledge and deal with problems surrounding the biotech debate, separating the technology from products, listening to stakeholders concern, especially those losing confidence in science and simplifying messages. The need for using influencers like lawyers and doctors who interact with the general public on a regular basis in biotech and biosafety communications was emphasized. Embracing social media will also help in creating a buzz on the technology.

This was followed by Country case studies that highlighted communication experiences and lessons learnt from Biosafety Agencies in Africa (Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa) and Brazil.

Dr. Hennie Groenewald, Executive Manager- Biosafety South Africa

Public perception and knowledge of biotechnology in South Africa is quite low. Surveys conducted in 2004, showed that 21% of respondents knew what biotech is but this increased to 41% by 2016. The primary goal of South Africa's communication strategy is increased awareness and confidence. This is accomplished through five objectives including networking, capacity building, and ownership and monitoring. Emphasis on addressing audiences concerns, focusing on the message you want to pass on for a particular target group, being prepared to handle uncertainties and paying attention to the context was laid.

It is not enough to regulate, but rather we must be seen to regulate, build related competencies, institutional support, and increase relative amount of publically accessible information.

Dr. Rufus Ebegba, the Director General and CEO of the National Biosafety Management Agency, represented by Alex shared Nigeria's experience in biosafety communication

Prof. Dorrington Ogoyi, the technical Director Kenya National Biosafety Authority

Highlighted the process of public participation conducted during the recent environmental release of GM cotton and maize in Kenya.

Ms Carina Gomes Rufino, the communication manager – EMBRAPA Soybeen Brazil's biosafety and biotech communication experience.

A communication strategy is key in helping audiences build meaning, generating engagement, building esteem and relevance which leads to credibility. Understanding basic principles of human communication is paramount in effective communication. Dialoging, mapping stakeholders, defining key-messages, learning to deal with activism, focusing on public opinion, open guided visit to biotech labs for different stakeholders were highlighted as some of the key areas of focus. Scientists must move out of their comfort zones and engage the public for increased acceptance of the technology.

Dr. Judy Chambers, Director PBS who gave the first presentation of the day entitled "A Critique of Biosafety Communications: Past, Present and Future".

Fundamental background factors influencing biotech and biosafety communication issues over the years include the complexity of science hence not being easily explained to "lay public"; contentious agriculture trade environment especially between the US and EU; disconnect of "average consumer" in industrialized countries from agriculture production; the origin of the products which were initially US public research but quickly "adopted" by private sector compared against a "public goods" mindset on agriculture in developing countries and among NGOs. All these factors were compounded by EU factors such as green party, NGO fund raising, trade factors, and food scares (dioxin, mad cow disease). Early communications missteps were highlighted including oversimplification of messages, little outreach to consumer in the early days, lack of

“consumer” products, conflicting messages among companies and ignorance of global/cultural agriculture practices. Communication issues in the developing countries were highlighted as limited experience and technical capacity, lack of locally relevant products, conflicting donor interests, farming systems operating at marginal levels that are susceptible to “risk and fear mongering” arguments, the need to adhere to the Cartagena Protocol and the introduction of the African Model Law both of which focus on risk and are highly precautionary.

Presently, the picture is characterized by growing anti-science/anti-technology campaign. This situation has led to controversy with long lasting impacts on attitudes and perceptions among both policy makers and the public which has impacted negatively on biosafety policy and biotechnology acceptance. Safety issues have been lost in the misinformation noise leading to a negative “domino effect” of miscommunication on biosafety. In Africa this is reflected in low political good will, slow movement towards science based biosafety policies and low adoption of the technology.

These challenges and opportunities will need to be addressed from an informed position through strategic communication. This will involve adoption of a values approach characterized by patience, listening, being sensitive to the cultural settings and complexities and understanding *who is* and *is not* a part of the conversation *and why*.

Launching the African Biosafety Communication Network - ABNE

ABNE, MSU and ISAAA AfriCenter launched the network whose objectives are to promote biosafety communication in African countries.

Session Three: Building Trust and Connection

This session had three plenary presentations each followed by a group exercise.

Dr Jay Byrne, president v-Fluence – “The global and regional context of biosafety issues in Africa.

The present global food and agriculture environment is characterized by: a globally coordinated anti-conventional agriculture campaign launched in 2012 – evolving in 2017 to combine political intersections; integration of GMOs, antibiotics and pesticides with broader anti-agriculture corporate themes and combined with overarching water and climate concerns; partnering between emerging “new” advocacy models with political and business stakeholders who profit or benefit from disruptions in food security. The three core sources of negative agriculture content was highlighted as being power, politics and profits which ultimately contribute to big budget differences in favor of the anti GMOs civil societies. Examples of the increase in annual budgets of anti-agriculture NGOs, growth of global market for certified organic products compared with global GMO seed market as well as geo-political, trade-related and regional political use of food as a weapon were presented.

“Agroecology” as a term and how it evolves into policy has been coopted by political and socio-economic activist interests to specifically exclude “Western” technologies, free trade, open market or capitalist oriented elements. In relation to the environment, GMOs are inherently considered an abomination to agroecology because they require technology, lack indigenous cultural foundations, involve the use of intellectual property systems which allegedly subjugate and usurp sovereignty away from individuals to corporations. Several groups promoting agroecology with the goal of winning hearts were presented. Their mode of operation which is increasingly being seen in Africa include legislation, litigation and lobbying support to block GMOs and plant breeder rights, engagement with key stakeholder groups such as women, peasant farm organizations, labor unions, consumer groups to oppose GMOS and modern agriculture and technical support for journalists and elected officials to support agroecology.

Three elements of effective response were highlighted as:

1. Effective science advocacy and continually employing risk communications.
2. Challenging the oppositions’ credibility and exposing conflicts (but typically not from those promoting science but as a separate parallel activity)
3. Expanding existing networks beyond traditional ag-science supports to help science advocacy and breaking down biases.

Group exercise

Participants were divided into groups to identifying and engaging complimentary stakeholders. Given the nature of the participation, regional clustering approach was adopted to form six groups- Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan - group one, Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar – group two, Anglophone West Africa (Nigeria and Ghana) – group three, Francophone West Africa (Togo, Cameroon) – group four, Malawi, Zambia and South Africa – group five and lastly group six Uganda which had members as the host. This exercise lasted forty five (45) minutes with animated brainstorming that climaxed with presentations from each group.

Prof. Lulu Rodriguez, University of Illinois Principles and essentials of biosafety communication: The science of science of communication

The presentation was guided by three questions

1. What do we know about the state of affairs in biotechnology and biosafety communication?
2. What might be the reasons behind this?
3. What findings in the communication sciences might be applicable to advance the current state of biotech and biosafety communication?

The knowledge levels are low although interest is high, the public still perceives GM foods as unsafe. There is a very vocal opposition that feeds public with misperceptions and capitalizes on

fear. Although the media is still the primary sources of science and technology information with the internet is gaining ground fast, scientists still remain among the most preferred sources of information. But after all is said and done the fact remains that food biotech is one of many tools farmers and food producers can use to provide a food supply that is safe, affordable, plentiful, flavorful, nutritious, convenient and sustainable hence the need for scientists and researchers to step up to the plate. Good practices in biosafety communication were listed:

-  Do not allow a communication vacuum to occur
-  Seize the communication environment
-  Counter rumors and accusations in real time
-  Manage mixed messages.

The need to simplify science with more visuals than text, and to tell the story with human interest frames were posited as the way forward. Personalize stories by giving farmers ample time to tell their stories one at a time. Bring home the problem, which involves showing evidence of how science solves problems.

Group Exercise

Participants got together in the previously formed groups for an exercise dubbed “several ways of cutting a GM mustard seed”. It involved reading a BBC article on the GM Mustard and assess the following parameters from two different standpoints, that of an average newspaper reader and that of a biosafety regulator:

As an average newspaper reader

1. Did it do a good job of making you an informed consumer? What grade will you give this story?
2. What informational items might help you make up your mind whether you will support or reject GM mustard? In other words, what else do you need to know about GM mustard?
3. Based on the Indian experience, what contextual factors might influence your attitude about GM mustard?

As a biosafety regulator

1. What communication concepts and principles are touched upon and can be applied in this case?
2. What do you consider as the most important challenges of a biosafety regulator given this scenario?

3. Does the challenge you identified call for a communication solution? If so, what communication initiatives might be conducted to prevent a regulatory deadlock?

Each group was given an opportunity to share with the rest of the participants.

Nabila Alibhai, Senior Associate of Well-made-strategy- Telling a Good Story”

Factors that influence decision making were highlighted as emotions, identity, lived experiences, values, beliefs, and associations among others. All these play a fundamental role in allowing or preventing an individual from changing a certain set of beliefs or attitudes they hold. Messengers with whom the audience can identify with also increase the persuasive power of the message. The key highlights of a good story include the hero, the problem, a solution and lastly reality. Specifics also complement good stories e.g. name, age, location, quotes, facts and figures. It is equally important to describe how the problem was solved, and evidence of what changed? Tips of telling a good story were highlighted as using simple language, avoiding jargon, making the story interesting, personalizing the story, writing in the third person always he/she, and adding images with captions.

Group exercise

Initial groups were maintained for this exercise, where participants went through hands exercise of story writing. The stories were shared in the plenary and feedback was given to each group right after the presentations. This was a highly interactive and interesting exercise that was greatly appreciated.

SESSION FOUR: EMERGING ISSUES

This session addressed a combination of trending and cross cutting issues in biosafety and biotech communication.

Dr. Hennie Goenewald -Managing the Biosafety Narrative of Emerging New Breeding Techniques

The presentation highlighted evolution of crop breeding techniques and gave a detailed overview of new breeding techniques (NBTs). It was emphasized that the question that stakeholders should be asking is “are NBTs products of GMOs?” but rather “what possible risks may be associated with the products of the various NBTs and when or how should they be managed?”. That way, appropriate science-based risk management framework will be established. The evolution of science-based GMO regulation was also highlighted with major focus on both risk analysis and risk perceptions

Some challenges associated with NBTs include defining genetic variation beyond that which may also occur naturally i.e. defining an acceptable threshold, international harmonization and leadership as well as alignment with the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety. According to review

findings, it was established that NBTs hold great potential, especially for developing countries, currently, there are low levels of international regulatory commitment and clarity, the genome modified organism itself is a principle source of risk and not the process under which is proven, and the ability to use existing GMO frameworks for products that should be regulated.

Enhancing visibility of regulatory agencies

Possible ways and means of enhancing visibility of regulatory agencies were demonstrated by representatives from SCIFODE, UBIC and ISAAA. This panel discussion noted that effective media engagement has potential of giving mileage to Science & Science Governance Agencies

Arthur Makara, Executive Director Science Foundation for Livelihoods and Development (SCIFODE).

It was noted that the media is critical in addressing scientific misinformation which always spreads like wild fire. There is a divide between media and scientists where on one hand scientists think journalists are unprofessional, do not understand, are not time conscious, add no value to science and distort research findings hence the facts. On the other hand, journalists think scientist are too academic, their work is complicated, they are detached from reality of society, their work is not newsworthy, are more comfortable in laboratories, and not flexible journalists can do without communicating about their work. Both entities need to work together to bridge this gap as working together has demonstrated mutual benefits

Mrs. Bibiana Kipkorir, Program Officer ISAAA AfriCenter - Why Social Media Matters

The opportunities and benefits of social media were highlighted as the ability it provides communicators to take control of their content. Social media also acts as an avenue and source of content for the conventional media who regularly visit social media platforms for quotes. It also allows communicators the ability to add context to the story enabling public to get a more complete account. lastly it's a free platform for scientists to promote their work.

Dr. Barbara Zawedde, Country Coordinator, Uganda Biosciences Information Center (UBIC).

Important factors to consider while engaging grassroots communities were enumerated as understanding community's cares and issues, appreciating their perception on risk, developing credible messages, telling the story, building and engaging allies and utilizing mass media channels. Matching the emotional manipulation of grassroots communities by activists was identified as a challenge that could be countered by telling relevant and compelling stories. It is also important to deliver tangible products to these communities or provide, periodic updates and present opportunity for physical visits since "seeing-is-believing".

Plenary Discussion

Sudan National Biosafety Authority

The representative was grateful for a very resourceful symposium and is looking forward to the adoption of more biotech crops such as corn and soybean on top of Bt cotton in Sudan. She urged stakeholders to improve communication efforts to close the existing information gap between scientists and the public.

- Need for a consistent communication function
- Key to have communication champions and more importantly have specific strategies on how to approach different key stakeholders especially politicians
- Strengthen networks to share experiences and approaches/best practices
- Develop simple messages
- Consistent stakeholder engagement
- Exploit potential social media networks in science and biosafety communication
- Make efforts to increase media involvement in biosafety communication; be proactive by reaching out to the media rather than waiting for them to come to the scientists.

Closing Session

Chaired by Arthur Makara-SCIFODE

Arthur acknowledged the over 20 countries represented in the room in a symposium that started on Tuesday July 18. He noted that Uganda was making efforts with partners to build networks and capacity through such fora.

Barbara Zawedde-UBIC

Barbara appreciated all participants for coming and said the symposium was about learning more innovative strategies to communicate better. A lot of networks have been built, she added. “Strategies have been developed to further biotechnology communication and adoption in Africa.” Barbara noted that emerging issues such as New Breeding Technologies (NBTs) discussed at the symposium will need to be regulated. “Our (National Biotechnology and Biosafety) bill seems to be looking in the right direction as it considers NBTs.

Jeremy Ouedraogo-ABNE

He wished that the lessons learned at the symposium be put into practice to improve communication efforts. He urged communicators in the room to inform their audiences that the African Union has recognized modern biotechnology as a tool to enhance agricultural output. “Tell your audiences Africa has the relevant capacity to use biotech for the benefit of our countries” he added. He appreciated the government of Uganda and the people for the amazing hospitality and wished participants a safe journey back home.

Getachew Belay-COMESA

Dr Belay appreciated Uganda’s Minister for Agriculture for championing biotechnology. He asserted that COMESA has good reasons for involving itself in this important biotech agenda adding that COMESA has a biotech policy implemented in partnership with its partners. “Communication has become very important and is one of our strategic objectives in the COMESA strategic plan.” Regulatory best practices can and should be shared regionally in COMESA member states.

Douglas Buhler-MSU

Douglas challenged participants to think of ways meaningfully engaging the general public to appreciate scientists’ work. He encouraged them not to tire adding that this journey is not easy but remains very relevant and important .

Margaret Karembu-ISAAA

Margaret appreciated Hon Kibazanga for his involvement in the launch of the ISAAA global report on biotech crops where he was chief guest. She had huge appreciation for Uganda’s ministers of agriculture and science, technology and innovation (STI) for their participation in the symposium. She further acknowledged and appreciated the organizers and partners for coordinating a successful ABBC 2017. “The best time to start improving biosafety communication is now!” she affirmed. The best part about networking is about giving, working and expecting nothing she said further urging guests to “go out there, grow this network and hope we’ll have a bigger group at the next symposium in 2019.” She was highly optimistic that the participants would work together going forward and reiterated her call to grow the network. She had special appreciation for the Ugandan organizing team led by Barbara Zawedde.

Barbara Zawedde (On behalf of NARO)

Speaking on behalf of the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), Barbara expressed pleasure for having had the opportunity to host ABBC 2017 in Uganda. She invited all regulators and stakeholders to all NARO institutes countrywide to witness the work being done and share knowledge and experiences. She called upon the minister of agriculture to work with his counterpart in the ministry of science, technology and innovation to get a biotechnology and biosafety law passed in the country to allow Ugandans to optimally use modern biotechnology. She further asked all media persons in the room to move the biotech and biosafety communication

agenda forward. Barbara asked the minister (Hon. Kibazanga) to appreciate all the biotechnology champions in the parliament of Uganda. She then invited the minister to make his remarks.

OFFICIAL CLOSING: HON. CHRISTOPHER KIBAZANGA-MAAIF

The Minister started by appreciating the central role agriculture plays in economic growth, development and poverty alleviation in Uganda which is key to why ‘Vision 2040’ and the National Development Plan phase II (NDP II) recognize it as one of the key sectors to bolster the country’s economic growth. He went on to state that the majority of the population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture and hinted on the huge potential agriculture has to transform Uganda’s economy. All stakeholders were challenged to work towards tapping this potential.

Describing the country’s biotech research capacity, the minister said institutions like NARO and Makerere University among others are producing important novel technologies to improve farm productivity and made a call to recognize and promote such technologies. He added that ignoring such research and innovations would mean nullifying the efforts of the country’s scientists.

Citing some of the ag-biotech research on-going in the country especially on key food security crops such as cassava, banana and maize, Hon. Kibazanga said there was evidence from research conducted by NARO showing that modern biotechnology can be used to address some of the most difficult constraints in crop and animal agriculture.

Guests were given a brief history of the journey to establish an enabling regulatory environment for management, supervision and application of modern biotechnology in Uganda. The Minister affirmed his ministry’s support for the National Biotechnology and Biosafety (NBB) Bill, 2012 which currently tabled in parliament pending passage into law.

While concluding his remarks, Hon. Kibazanga lamented that lack of knowledge and misinformation has greatly delayed legislation and application of modern biotechnology in Uganda. He made clear his ministry’s willingness through its extension department, to work with relevant ag-biotech and biosafety players to ensure that biotech and biosafety information is appropriately packaged and delivered to the public.

The minister was optimistic that the resolutions made during the symposium will be key to consolidating contemporary and future biotechnology and biosafety communication in Uganda.