



THE REGULATOR

NBMA... Ensuring proper regulation of modern biotechnology

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER THE NATIONAL BIOSAFETY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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NBMA ESTABLISHED TO GUARANTEE SAFETY - DG

- Agency committed to ensuring safety in the practice of modern biotechnology, handling and use of its products.



NBMA WARNS SUPERSTORES



TEAM NBMA: TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORNX



STRENGTHENING INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION



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Editor
Ogbaki Gloria

Here is to welcome you our esteemed readers to the second and New year edition of our quarterly newsletter, The Regulator.

In this second edition, we have added a lot to spice up your reading adventure as you get to find out more about the activities of the Agency since the last publication. You will get to read about the various Memoranda of Understanding that have been signed, our efforts in ensuring that Modern Biotechnology is safely deployed and of course not forgetting our sports segment. The NBMA Sports Club has been up and about and doing so well.

Our cover story talks about the fact that the Agency was not established to stop Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in the country and details the activities of the Agency. This is in a bid to correct the erroneous impression that the Agency was established to ban GMOs.

It is our hope that this edition of the newsletter will help enlighten the minds of the readers on our mandate and what the Agency is set up to do.

As a foremost writer Garrison Keillor said, we hope this newsletter becomes a gift that can be opened again and again for better and deeper knowledge.

On behalf of the Director General of the Agency and the entire editorial team, I say welcome again, take a ride with us and do enjoy the read. Stay in touch with us on www.nbma.gov.ng and follow us on Facebook and twitter.



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NBMA ESTABLISHED TO GUARANTEE SAFETY

By Ene Abounu

The Director General, National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), Dr Rufus Ebegba has said that the Agency was established by the federal government of Nigeria to facilitate the safe use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and not to stop it.

Dr Ebegba disclosed this in a keynote lecture at the launch of Science Café in Abuja, noted that activists and a whole lot of people had always thought that NBMA was established was to put an end to GMOs.

"We have always maintained that the coming of the Agency was not to stop GMOs from coming into the country. We are created to ensure that all activities involving GMOs in the country do not pose any threat to human health or the environment," he added.

He urged journalists to be truthful, factual and patriotic in the coverage of modern biotechnology, adding that those against the technology have spread misinformation about the efficacy of the technology leading to misconception among members of the public.

The launch organized by Journalists for Social Development Initiative (JSDI) and Connected Development (CODE) provided the Director General the platform to further educate the media on why it is important to report accurately on GMOs and other products of modern biotechnology.



“Communicating safe science appropriately will help Nigerians understand and appreciate the role science can play in their daily lives,” Dr. Ebegba said. “It will also inspire our youth to boldly enter various fields of scientific study.”

“Communicating safe science appropriately will help Nigerians understand and appreciate the role science can play in their daily lives,” Dr. Ebegba said, “It will also inspire our youth to boldly enter various fields of scientific study.”

He explained that these misconceptions have created a

serious burden by generating fear and mistrust especially influencing how quickly a technology is adopted to solve local problems and facilitate national growth.

He highlighted the controversy surrounding agricultural biotechnology, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and biosafety in particular to underscore how scientific findings, public opinions and attitudes can make the public either accept or resist new technological innovations.

“Issues like these are precisely why good scientific communication is important,” he said.

The biosafety advocate referred to the media as a powerful tool which Nigeria must leverage on to move from being a net consumer of the products of scientific innovations to being a pioneer in various scientific and technological fields.

He submitted that good science journalism will help to build the consciousness of the people and educate them on the truth about certain controversial scientific and technological innovations.

The Director General presented a keynote lecture entitled: Science, Technology & Modern Society: Role of Communication in achieving sustainable livelihood.



STRENGTHENING INTER-AGENCY SUPPORT FOR GMOs REGULATION

By Isaiah Edache

As part of strategies to ensure proper regulation of genetically modified organisms in the country, government agencies having dealings with GMOs have signed series of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to guarantee safe practice of modern biotechnology in the country.

These agencies include, National Biosafety Management Agency, National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Nigeria Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS), National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC) and the Standards Organisation of Nigeria.

The essence of the MoU according to its initiator, Dr Rufus Ebegba, Director General/CEO NBMA is to ensure that all government agencies having dealings with genetically modified organisms are on the same page as regards its regulation.

"The purpose of the MoU is for all government agencies either at the land, sea or air borders to work in tandem with each other in the implementation of a law of the Federal Republic as well as ensure that the practice of modern biotechnology does not pose any risk to Nigerians or the environment," he said.



Professor Samson Adebayo and his team from NAFDAC with Dr. Rufus Ebegba DG/CEO NBMA and staff of NBMA

Dr. Ebegba noted that, agencies such as NAFDAC remained a major stakeholder in Biosafety as the NBMA Act 2015 specifically states that NAFDAC will also be involved in the certification of GM foods while other agencies like the Nigeria Customs Services, the National Agriculture Quarantine Service are very crucial agencies that are needed to implement the

"It is good that NBMA has signed MoU with other major Government Agencies that will contribute to the effectiveness of its mandate."



Professor Samson Adebayo, Director PRS NAFDAC with Dr. Rufus Ebegba, DG/CEO NBMA.

Biosafety regime in the country hence the need to have them working together. A representative of the Director General, NAFDAC, Professor Samson Adebayo, Director Planning, research and statistics, stated that NAFDAC is very ready to collaborate with NBMA to ensure GM products in the country are safe for consumption by Nigerians.

Director General, Standard Organization of Nigeria, Barrister Osita Anthony Aboloma expressed happiness over the memorandum and stated that SON is ready to partner with NBMA to actualize its mandate.

Osita who was represented by the Director legal services Mr. UmaruKawu, stressed the need for government agencies to synergize, and to facilitate the set goals of government. "it is good that NBMA has signed MoU with other major government Agencies that will contribute to the effectiveness of its mandate."



NBMA WARNS SUPERSTORES

By Funke Williams



Dr. Rufus Ebegba, DG/CEO National Biosafety Management Agency

The National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) has asked all super stores across the country retailing products containing genetically modified ingredients to officially formalise their dealings or risk sanctions.

The warning is a fall out of the recent survey embarked upon by the agency to ascertain GMOs products present in the country and the safety of the gene of insert.

The agency last year directed all super stores to declare all GM products in their stores as part of an ongoing survey to document all imported GM foods/products across the country with a view of confirming their safe status and compliance with the NBMA act.

Director General/CEO of the Agency Dr Rufus Ebegba in a renewed warning urged all super stores to comply with the NBMA act 2015 to avoid disruption of their businesses.

The NBMA act part VII (22) directs that "no person, institution or body shall import, export, transit or commercialize any genetically modified organism or a product intended for direct use as food or feed or for processing without the approval or permit of the Agency".

The DG said that the Agency was not interested in disrupting the business of the super stores but to ensure that they comply with the NBMA act 2015 and to ensure safety to the health of Nigerians.

"The Agency was prepared to work with super stores to formalize their GM products across the country in order to analyse, ascertain the gene of insert and their safety to human health".

He reiterated the Agency's commitment to ensuring proper regulation of modern biotechnology and its products adding that the Agency as an unbiased umpire will not compromise the health and safety of Nigerians.



WHY GMO IMPORTERS MUST GET ACCREDITATION

By Gloria Ogbaki

At the end of 2017, the Federal Government of Nigeria repatriated a ship load of genetically modified maize which was illegally imported into the country.

A joint collaboration between government agencies including, the Nigeria Customs Service and the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) led to the interception and successful repatriation of the maize worth \$9.8 million.

NBMA Director General/CEO, Dr. Rufus Ebegba, who alerted Nigerians about the illegal bulk shipment said that as painful as the repatriation order may be, government decision was based on the fact that on law of the federal republic must be taken for granted.



From L-R: Mrs. Bello Scholastica, Head PRS National Biosafety Management Agency, Dr. Ojo, DG National Agricultural Seed Council, Dr. Rufus Ebegba, DG/CEO National Biosafety Management Agency, Dr. Vincent Isegbé, Nigeria Agricultural Quarantine Service

"The ship load had to be repatriated not because GM maize is bad or harmful, but because the importer failed to comply with the NBMA Act 2015," he said.

The NBMA Act, Part VII states that "no person, institution or body shall import, export, transit or commercialize any genetically modified organism or a product intended for direct use as food or feed or for processing unless with the approval of the Agency".

"The NBMA is by this Act empowered to sanction any erring party for importing release of unauthorized genetically modified products be it grain or any kind of seed as the case may be," The DG noted.

He said that the Act made it clear that any person, institution or body who wishes to import, export, transit or otherwise carry out contained activities, confined field trial, multi-locational trial or commercial release of a genetically modified organism shall apply to the Director General of the Agency prior to such activity.

He also said that, there is no sacred cow and whoever imports GMOs without following due process will be made to face the law. Every importer must first apply to NBMA before bringing GMOs into the country.

He said "We are working closely with our line and sister Agencies; Nigerian Custom Service (NCS), Nigeria Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS), National Seed Council (NaSC), and National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), to ensure that our operations are smooth and effective."

The National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) used the opportunity to warn prospective importers involved and/or intends to be involved in the handling, importation or transfer of genetically modified organisms to seek clarification and authorization from the Agency before doing so.

"The NBMA is by this Act empowered to sanction any erring party for importing release of unauthorized genetically modified products be it grain or any kind of seed as the case may be."



Delegates at the Consultative Forum







STAFF OF THE NATIONAL BIOSAFETY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

MEET THE STAFF



Mrs. Scholastica Oremeyi Bello is the affable head of the Planning, Research and Statistics (PRS) department. She has her Masters in Agricultural Economics Extension.

She joined the Agency on secondment from the Ministry of Agriculture in January 2017. She has since worked farvently to support the core functions of the Agency.

She is a woman who is passionate about preparing the youth for greater responsibilities in the Public Sector. She is soft-spoken, hardworking and highly competent.

Mrs Bello is also exemplary in every way and is so much loved by her staff.

Chief Agha Ukpai Agha, is a graduate of the university of Agriculture Umudike, now Micheal Okpara university of Agriculture where he obtained his first degree in forestry and environmental management.

He was the best corp member during his youth service year which earned him an NYSC presidential merit award and subsequently automatic employment into the federal civil service.

In pursuit of his second degree, he proceeded to the university of Adelaide, Australia where he studied plant biotechnology and biosafety under scholarship. Presently, he is a PhD researcher in agro forestry, in the university of Abuja, Nigeria.

Chief Agha is one of the pioneer staff of the agency, head environmental biosafety, a division in the department of environmental biosafety and general release. He is also the head of field offices, a unit in the Agency under the office of the DG/CEO of the agency.



WHO CAME CALLING?

Since the last edition, some dignitaries visited the agencies to interact with the Director General and management staff on how the mandate of the agency is being implemented.



Juan Manuel Ortin
Argentine Ambassador to Nigeria



Jide Akhademor
Regional Agricultural Counselor for United States Department of
Agriculture (USDA) Lagos



Uche Nzeka
Agricultural Marketing Specialist for United States Department of
Agriculture (USDA) Lagos



Umaru Kauru
Director Legal Services, Standards Organization of Nigeria

TEAM NBMA TAKING THE BULL BY THE HORN

By Edache Isalah



Dr. Rufus Ebegba, DG/CEO NBMA meets with the NBMA football team

NBMA was established in 2015 and had its first sport outing in 2017 under the Federation of Public Service Games where it showed indications of its readiness to be a force to reckon with in the nearest future.

The Team, made up of vibrant and well motivated young men and women are determined to win as many laurels as possible and also ensure their physical and mental well being.

This could be one of the reasons why the Federation of Public Service Games (FEPSSGA) and the end-of-the-month walking-jogging somewhat remain sacrosanct for them.

The National Biosafety Management Agency like every other government agencies, has actively participated in all sporting activities since 2017.

To show how important mentally fit workers are for the delivery of the NBMA mandate, Dr. Rufus Ebegba, NBMA Director General led the agency first participation in a walking-jogging at the National Stadium. It was its maiden participation, but the Team performed tremendously well winning two prestigious awards; the First Arrival Award and the second most behaved at the event.

The subsequent participations in walking-jogging were quite impressive as NBMA would leave the events with different awards.

These have gained the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) much more recognition in sport activities. On different occasions, NBMA had engaged Ministry of Youths and Sports in a volleyball competition, Chess competition, Ayo competition, drought competition, Scrabble and Table tennis competition. The Team had also engaged the ECWA Goodnews Gospel in a volley ball competition in which NBMA won by three to two.

The team also confronted City Strikers Football Club and the ministry of defence in a friendly football match.

In another encounter, the team organized a friendly volley ball match with the National Environmental Standards Regulatory and Enforcement Agency (NESREA).

These all show how proactive of the National Biosafety Management Agency in sport activities and being new in existence, it is quite promising that NBMA will achieve more in this regard.



Volleyball team of the National Biosafety Management Agency before a game





FACTS ABOUT NBMA

Nigeria signed and ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2000 and 2003 respectively.

The Biosafety system in Nigeria is geared towards minimising the possible harmful effects of modern biotechnology to human health, animals and the environment

The NBMA GM Analysis and Detection Laboratory was commissioned in May 2017.

The Agency, in September 2017, repatriated a shipment of GM maize which was illegally imported into the country

The NBMA was not established to stop GMOs from entering Nigeria but to ensure that GMOs are safe for Nigerians to consume

Nigeria signed the Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2012

The National Biosafety Management Agency was established in 2015



more at www.nbma.gov.ng

NBMA ON SOCIAL MEDIA

By Adanna Mgbodikwe

The journey to achieving the accurate communication of the National Biosafety Management Agency's mandate to Nigerians is one that requires many platforms and considering the importance of new media in our time, social media must be exalted as an important tool.

It is on this premise that the Agency created several social media accounts from its inception. As our activities have increased, so has our presence on timelines and explore feeds. It is imperative to state that the Agency has accounts on Facebook and Twitter and hardly a day has gone by that our pages aren't updated.

This has led to a geometric increase in the engagements on each post and a daily opportunity to interact with Nigerians. Followers on our pages increase arithmetically every day. Our presence on social media has allowed us to put our narrative out there, change the negative opinions of a few on the objectives of NBMA, accurately enlighten the public on the mandate of the Agency and listen to what the masses have to say to us.

We cannot underestimate the relevance of feedback to our activities and that is why a premier activity for the Press Unit in 2018 was a Twitter Chat.

The rationale for this activity was to foster erudite conversations on the presence of a Biosafety authority in Nigeria, the concomitant implications to the Nigerian modern biotechnology sphere and answer exigent questions on what the presence of GMOs in the country means for Nigerians.

The success of this event is measured by the number of people who were eager to participate in the conversation, ask questions using the designated hashtag and send comments to the Agency's handle. This activity garnered more than 1,200,000 impressions (the number of times tweets from this event were read) within 24 hours. This is only one of many events which has occurred within the past few years.

This accentuates how important discussions on Biosafety are in the country and how much the presence of NBMA on social media brings these conversations to the fore. Daily posts on the work that the Agency carries out emphasizes one very significant concept- communication on social media should not only be encouraged, it must be voraciously pursued.



NBMA FORGING AHEAD AMIDST CSO DISTRACTIONS

By Gloria Ogbaki

Modern Biotechnology since its debut over 25 years ago has been engulfed in one controversy or the other.

Nigeria is not in isolation and so it was not too surprising that the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), upon creation had its first cut with members of the civil society when it granted permit to Monsanto Nigeria Limited to carry out confined field trial and commercial release of maize and cotton.

Carrying out its legitimate duties as stipulated in the NBMA Act 2015, the agency received an application from Monsanto and published their application as demanded by law and that was when the civil society activists realised the existence of the agency and since that day in 2016, the agency had never known peace from activists.

The activists had unfortunately thought that government established NBMA to stop GMOs but like Dr Rufus Ebegba, Director General, NBMA has always emphasised, the Agency was not established to stop GMOs, the agency according to him was created to act as a safety gauge that will protect Nigerians and the environment from any harm that may arise as a result of the deployment of tools of modern biotechnology.

The agency, NBMA was created by government after promoting the technology for 15 years to regulate its products and guide against any form of abuse or risk associated with the technology.

The agency has endured critics and lash backs from opponents of GMO and this could be said to have helped the Agency gain immense popularity in the media and of course in the country.

The Agency with doggedness has been able to match the civil society criticising its mandate word for word. With the proactive nature of the Director General, Dr Rufus Ebegba, the activists have been chased out of the mainstream media in Nigeria, they now rely on bloggers and a few on line medium to spread falsehood in the country.

In the last quarter of 2017, the Agency was dragged to court alongside the federal ministry of environment,

National biotechnology Development Agency, Monsanto Nigeria Limited and other relevant government organizations by a supposed coalition of civil society organisations led by Home for Mother Earth Foundation.

The CSOs numbering over 87 went to court after they failed to make any headway with the protest to the National Assembly to seek the revocation of a permit issued by NBMA.

Despite the strong critics, the Agency has not rested on its oars as it has remained strong in the implementation of its mandate of ensuring that the deployment of GMOs in the agricultural sector posed no threat to humans and the environment.

The CSOs in the country has continued to mislead Nigerians spreading falsehood about genetically modified organisms on one hand and NBMA on the hand.

They have continuously called for the scrapping of the NBMA, saying it lacked the facility or manpower to carry out its mandate. The question then is what happens if the agency is scrapped? Will the facility become available? Will the manpower become available?

In some cline, the decision of whether to farm GMOs or not is a matter of life style, they can buy so why bother to farm but here can we copy them?

This where the CSOs should be able to draw the lines between what we need as a country and what people say we need, the federal government of Nigeria has decided to deploy genetic engineering in the agricultural sector, the CSOs should join government in ensuring that the decision is well implemented.

The Agency was created to act as a safety gauge that will protect Nigerians and the environment from any harm that may arise as a result of the deployment of tools of Modern Biotechnology.

