



OFAB Newsletter

Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa



National
Biotechnology
Development
Agency

■ A Publication of OFAB Nigeria

Vol.5 No.6 June 2017

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Report on Nigeria's March for Science, 22nd April 2017



■ Participants of the science march creating awareness on the role of science in National Development

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The March for Science, organized by the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), the Open Forum for Agricultural Biotechnology (OFAB) Nigeria Chapter in collaboration with the Cornell Alliance for science was indeed more than a March!

Over 400 Participants consisting of researchers, scientists, civil servants, members of civil society, journalists, and science lovers joined this walk from the Eagles square Abuja to Unity Fountain (these locations were strategically mapped because of their centrality in the Capital Territory)

The crowd assembled as early as 6:54am at

the Eagle Square and by 7:30 am, the 7-kilometer march commenced and the atmosphere was electrifying. Amongst the participants were volunteers who expressed their passion for science saying that it has the potential to solve the problems of the millennia and ultimately save our planet.

The March, which was the first of its kind in history, was a global event and was chosen as part of the activities to mark the World Earth day celebration. The Earth day is a great day to talk about science, understand science, think about science, support science, embrace science. The ultimate goal was to ensure that scientific integrity



■ DG,CEO NABDA, Prof. Lucy Ogbadu Speaking at the Science March

plays an important role in government decisions that affect everyone, from funding through policy making and regulatory recommendations. We felt that the best way to achieve this is through the following objectives:

- i. To build capacity, gain publicity, and demonstrate strength and solidarity in science to decision-makers.
- ii. To re-emphasize the role of Science in National development- Science protects the health of our communities, the safety of our families, the education of our children, the foundation of our economy and jobs, and the future we all want to live in and preserve for coming generations.
- iii. To speak up because research is not gaining enough support it needs to drive the plan to revitalize Nigeria's Agricultural sector. We speak up now because all of these values are currently at risk. When science is threatened, so is the society that scientists uphold and protect.
- iv. To create an open, honest science communication and inclusive public outreach. The March is important for scientists, farmers, and allies to stand up for the truth and organize people to speak out.
- v. To affirm science as a democratic value. Science is a vital feature of a working democracy, spurring

innovation, critical thinking, increased understanding, and better, healthier lives for all people.

It was full of enthusiasm, vigour and excitement. Gathered, were a crowd of people united by science, instead of protesting the lack of recognition and funding of science, towed the path of jubilation in the call for increased scientific awareness.

They recognized and empathized with people affected by the prevalent hunger, poverty, epidemics, disease and pest infestation of farm lands, infant mortality and unemployment and called the attention of government to the fact that science holds the answer to these challenges. These challenges have gone unabated because of the lack of or misinformation of policy makers on how science can help in solving these issues.

One could see the undying enthusiasm of all Participants as they unanimously raised their voices in support of science. Many of them could be seen poising with thought provoking placards and happily displaying them for the world to see. The messages on some of the placards read; ***"The world has so many problems, science has the solutions"***, ***"Fund research creates jobs"***, ***"You didn't die of an infection, thank a scientist"*** and there were several other messages like that. The

motivation behind these messages were borne out of a burning desire to see the fortunes of Nigeria change for the better and science at the fore front driving the vehicle for the change and the possibility of this happening sooner than later with the attention of government made it even more worthwhile.

During the march, people listened to speeches from the DG/CEO, NABDA, Prof Lucy Ogbadu, who in her speech enjoined everyone to support science because of its importance to the society. "The Earth day is a great day to talk about science, understand science, think about science, support science, embrace science. It holds the key to constant development and improvement for addressing climate change, food shortage and challenges in medicine. At the current population of over 180 million people and projected population of 400 million people by 2050, Nigeria is faced with the risk of decreased farming population due to age; decreased arable land; poverty, malnutrition and hunger because the conventional method of agriculture can no longer meet up with our demand. Science through genetic improvement holds the solution to our food security", she reiterated.

Speaking further, Prof. Ogbadu said just like other scientists across the world, Nigerian scientists have developed various scientific tools that can help in the area of food security, which the public have not been fully aware of. "This March for Science therefore, has provided yet another opportunity for science supporters to come together, join voices to amplify available science-based solutions the nation can adopt to ensure food security", she added.

She concluded her remarks by saying that science is a Principal Driver of Change and has the power to completely transform civilization and make life comfortable and secure.

While the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Science & Technology, Mrs. Belema Wakama in her address said that the life of every one of us is highly dependent on the scientific inventions, innovations and modern day technologies. Science has changed the lives of people largely which, have been



■ Participants of the Science march showing why they are Marching



■ Participants of the Science march showing why they are Marching

deployed to every aspect of modernization and in sectors like Agriculture, Medicines, Environment, Education, Industry, Electricity, Aviation, Information, etc for both developing and developed Nations.

“Agricultural Biotechnology and Genetic Modification have been recognized all over the world as a potential solution to food security. Scientific and regulatory agencies around the world have repeatedly and consistently found crops and foods improved through biotechnology to be as safe as, if not safer than those derived from any other method of production”, she asserted.

“I urge you to use this March to form useful alliances and partnerships that will change the course of history and inspire the next generation of

scientists. I leave you with the words of the Honorable Minister of Science and Technology Dr. Ogonnaya Onu at the just concluded Technology and innovation Expo 2017. He said “Most distinguished ladies and gentlemen, with a strong and diversified economy driven by science, technology and innovation, our citizens will be happy and proud to remain at home pursue their happiness and contribute meaningfully to National development” she concluded.

Other prominent citizens were the Academic Staff Union of Research Institutes(ASURI), Nigerian Labour Union, a Director from ECOWAS, Politicians, Media and Research Leaders. In their speeches, they recognized the role science has played in the development of

countries and economies around the world and emphasized the urgent need for increased funding of science and research activities.

After the March, there was a media chat and facility tour of the laboratories in the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA). During the chat, discussions about science by Dr. Abdulrazaq Ibrahim, a Biochemistry Lecturer at the Ahmadu Bello University(ABU), Zaria and Dr. Rose Gidado, Country Coordinator, OFAB Nigeria Chapter attracted non-scientists and some who after the chat said they could not imagine how the world would have been like without science and that they now realize how beneficial science has been to them. They also added that the March for science has helped them see how the dividends of Science can help in overcoming most of Nigeria's challenges and help her claim her pride of place in the comity of developed nations.

On the whole, the march re-emphasized the need for scientists to communicate more with the public. Government policies around science and research should be based on facts for them to work and serve the interest of the people. It has again brought to the fore, the fact that science is missing in Nigeria's quest for development. Science is science and its results transcend all races and remain the only tool in our quest to preserve our planet, understand the world around us and derive the



This report was written by Dr. Rose S. M. Gidado, The Country Coordinator, Open Forum on Africa Biotechnology (OFAB), Nigeria Chapter

NABDA and stakeholder will not relent on Public Awareness - *DG/CEO, NABDA*

The Director- General/CEO, National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), Professor Lucy Ogbadu has said that NABDA and her stakeholders will continue to hold meetings and workshops to enlighten Nigerians on biotechnology.

She made the statement while addressing participants at the Professional Cadre Training, informing them that the meeting is another in the series at trying to get Nigerians to understand what the Biotech. Stakeholders are doing

and to know the plain fact of the science behind the development of genetically modified crops/foods/products.

“I welcome everyone, I welcome the good people of PBS who came all the way from across the Atlantic to help us; researchers; staff of other regulatory agencies, today you are with us in the struggle, trying to get the public to understand what we as scientist are doing in this nation, so I sincerely want to welcome you to this meeting today”, she said



■ Prof. Lucy J. Ogbadu, Director General, National Biotechnology Development Agency

Seed Council works closely with NBMA -*DG/CEO, NASC*

The Director-General/CEO, National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC), has disclosed at the Professional Cadre Training that his agency is working closely with the National Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA) to be able to understand and identify GMOs.

“We attend all workshops, trainings and seminars that have to do with biotechnology, particularly we want to be able to identify and know exactly what it is all about. We are aware of the policy of building local capacity so that everyone will be on the same page”, he added.

“We are happy to be here as the agency that regulates the Seed Industry in Nigeria, we are part of this struggle because of the interest that biosafety has generated, we have trained more than 20 of our staff in this area here in Abuja”, he reiterated.

“At this juncture, I want to join my sister Lucy Ogbadu to welcome PBS, I am so excited from what I heard from them, that they are involved in capacity building, we are always available and waiting to be capacitated, Seed Council is like a virgin land, because we will be able to function better with capacity building, kits are also necessary for us to be able



■ Dr. O. Ojo, DC, CEO NASC

PBS does not work on crops but build capacity of Partners - *Dr. Mathew Dore*

The Programme for Biosafety Systems (PBS), Country Representative, Dr. Mathew Dore has said that PBS does not work on any crop but can work with willing partners to develop their capacities.

He made the statement at the Professional Cadre Training organized.

“We do not have a crop, what we have is to work with willing partners to develop their capacities. We want some staff of NABDA and NBMA to join us whenever we are holding international meetings to bring vividly, what is happening in other parts of Africa and indeed other parts of the world, Dr. Dore said.



■ Dr. Mathew Dore, PBS Country Coordinator



■ Group photograph of participants at the OFAB event



■ L-R: DG/CEO NABDA Prof. Lucy J. Ogbadu, DG/CEO NASC Dr. Ojo and Dr. Rose Gidado Country Coordinator OFAB Nigeria



■ L-R: DG CEO NBMA Dr. Rufus Ebegba, OFAB Country Coordinator Dr. Rose Gidado and John Komen from PBS



■ PBS team L-R: Dr. Kashmir Nair, Greg Jaffe and John Komen



■ Prof. Mary Yeye



■ Dr. Kashmir Nair of Program for Biosafety System



■ Bar Gbemisola Popoola



■ Dr. Rose Gidado Country Coordinator OFAB Nigeria

There should be room for enquiry and understanding biotechnology - *Gates Foundation*

The Senior Programme Officer, Agriculture, Bill Gates Foundation Nigeria, Dr. Audu Grema said the public should be given room for enquiry to understand the science behind biotechnology in his statement at the Professional Cadre Training Workshop.

"If science is misunderstood, there should be room for enquiry, if people are making enquiry and want to understand something, the best way is to provide policy forum like this where multiple agencies are working together to bring evidence based analysis and informed sharing, every aspect of information on the science and regulation, the promise of what this kind of technology can bring to fight food insecurity and poverty", he posited.

"I want to convey good will message from my colleagues in Gates Foundation on the



■ Dr. Audu Grema, Senior Programme Officer, Agriculture, Bill Gates Foundation Nigeria,

advocacy and training session organized by multiple number of bodies, we like the approach, what you are doing in this sector is hugely important and brave", he enthused

Dr. Grema commended highly, the well- coordinated Confined Fields Trails going on in research institutes in Nigeria, West Africa and East Africa which will provide

evidence based data. "This is the best thing to happen to any country including Nigeria", he added.

He ended his remarks by applauding OFAB Nigeria for the quality information materials provided for proper education of the general public and wished everyone successful deliberations.

NBA urges NABDA to step up on awareness creation

The former Chairman, Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), Barrister Desmond Yamah has said that NABDA should step up on awareness creation because the voice of the anti GMO is louder.

In his statement at the Professional Cadre Training by PBS/OFAB, he said that he wants to encourage the agency to engage in mass awareness because the voice of the critics on GMO is louder.

"When people say, the Biosafety Act was hurriedly signed, I laugh because Nigeria signed the Cartagena Protocol for a long period waiting to pass the biosafety bill", he

lamented.

"Families now feed 1-0-1 because there is no adequate food supply in the country, so we cannot reject GMO supply of food in the country. The creation of NBMA is one of the most wonderful things that this government has done, because it will help minimize food shortage in the country", he posited.

He alerted the Agency to watch out negative publicity from HOMEF because it is sponsored. "We need more workshops like this to sensitize the public. We need to reach out to secondary Schools, Universities to educate people on GMO", he concluded.



■ Barrister Desmond Yamah, Former Chairman, Nigeria Bar Association (NBA)

GMO is an answer to Farmer's Plight - AFAN President

The Representative of (All Farmers Association (AFAN) President, Chief O. Daniel Okafor, has disclosed that AFAN agrees that GMO is an answer to farmers' plight.

"we all have been keen on the issue of GMO, for about three years back, we have been active participants in stakeholders' activities and programmes, we have been with some of those that have been propagating, specified facts on GMO's, we have encountered them, we have discussed with them, discussions are still going on", he said.

He made the statement at Professional Cadre Training Workshop.

"We have stakeholders in Ministries of Agriculture, Environment and Science & Technology. These Ministries have a lot to do on GMO agenda. We are happy to be here; my



■ Architect Kabiru Ibrahim, President, All Farmers Association Nigeria (AFAN)

President is currently at National Working Committee Meeting of All Farmers Association of Nigeria at our headquarters", according to him.

"All issues of GMO's are quite interesting to us, we as farmers are ready to take more

information, because we are the primary users of this seeds, and first consumers of the produce, it is critical to us, from our various participations, various activities and discussions, we want to agree that GMO is an answer to farmer's plight", he added.

Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Service assures NABDA on its support - Coordinating Director

Nigerian Agricultural Quarantine Service (NAQS) has assured NABDA of her support in the deployment of GMO's in the country.

In her statement at the Professional Cadre Training, the Coordinating Director, NAQS, who was represented by Dr. Chinwe Ezejiofor, sends her goodwill message and support to NABDA.

"We are here to assure you that NAQS is the gatekeeper of international market in agricultural commodities, including the GMOs that is being talked about, we are ever ready to work with you and NBMA to ensure regulation of the importation and exportation of GMO products", she asserted.



■ Dr. Chinwe Ezejiofor, Representative of Coordinating Director, NAQS

BSN commends NABDA on Biotechnology Research activities - *BSN President*



■ Prof. Benjamin Ubi , President, Biotechnology Society of Nigeria

The Representative of the President, Biotechnology Society of Nigeria (BSN) Prof. Benjamin Ubi at the Professional Cadre Training commended the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA) on the support of Biotechnology Research which will take biotechnology to greater heights.

“The Biotech Society of Nigeria has been at the forefront of biotechnology written research and we cannot claim not to be receiving support from institutions and establishments which NABDA is one of them. The Agricultural Research Council (ARC), has also been supporting research on biotech as well as international agencies like DFID and others, we still stand on improving biotech work and taking our country to greater heights”, he ended.

Awareness creation on GMO is critical to GSN - *President*



■ Prof. Emmanuel Kwon-Ndung, President, Genetic Society of Nigeria

President National Genetic Society of Nigeria (GSN), has disclosed that awareness creation on GMO is very critical to GSN Agenda.

In his statement at the Professional Cadre Training, he said that all National Executive Council and Members of GSN appreciated the invitation and the interaction with the Professional Groups. “It is highly welcome by our society, we have members involved in all areas of biotechnology research, it is critical in our agenda”, he added.

“With respect to creating awareness and the use of GMO’s, we are very conscious of public perception, our society has taken it as a priority, we are comfortable with the workshop and we believe that it is one of the ways that we can convince members of our society (based on the evidences of research) on why we should adopt biotechnology in advancing our food security goals”, he highlighted.

OFAB CONTACT:

National Biotechnology Development Agency, Umar Musa Yar’adua Way, Lugbe, P.M.B.5118, Wuse, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory.

Tel: +234 803 314 2898, +234 813 602 2232

Email: nabdamails@yahoo.co.uk, askofab@yahoo.co.uk **Website:** <http://www.nabda.gov.ng>

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