Workshop on Combating Aflatoxins in the Maize Value Chain of Africa

Theme: "Unleashing the full potential of the Maize Value Chain through Aflatoxin Management"

Communiqué

On 4-5 December 2017, the African Union's Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) and key partners brought together African stakeholders in order to galvanize a multi-sectoral response towards addressing the impacts of aflatoxins in the maize value chains. Maize is one of the most susceptible crops to aflatoxin contamination. Nearly all outbreaks of acute aflatoxin poisoning that led to tragic loss of lives in Africa are related to consumption of maize containing high aflatoxin levels. In addition, given the high per capita consumption of maize, moderately contaminated maize is a source of chronic exposure to aflatoxins with a range of adverse health effects including liver cancer.

The workshop benefited from the support of key partners including the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) research program of the CGIAR, Center for

Research, Agricultural Advancement, Teaching Excellence and Sustainability in Food and Nutrition Security (CREATES) of Nelson Mandela African University of Science and Technology, and Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA).

The workshop, which was officially opened by Hon. Dr Charles Tizeba, Minister of Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries, Tanzania comprised of approximately 105 participants from private sector and civil society (input suppliers and seed companies, Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the media, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and farmer representatives); public sector (government ministries responsible for health, trade & agriculture, government parastatal bodies such as TFDA, bureaus of standards, cereals and produce boards); regional organizations such as East African Grain Council (EAGC); research and academia (universities, national agricultural research institutions, CGIAR including International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), IITA, CIMMYT, A4NH); technical and development partners including World Food Programme (WFP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the African Union Commission (AUC)), deliberated on the impacts of aflatoxins on health, agriculture and trade and how to mitigate the challenge in maize value chains of Africa.

The welcome note was given by Mr Khecha Abderrahmane on behalf of the AUC. He underlined the importance of combating aflatoxin in order to enable the achievement of Malabo commitments, especially commitment number 3 (Commitment to Ending Hunger by 2025); number 4 (commitment to Halving Poverty by 2025 through inclusive Agricultural Growth and Transformation) and commitment number 5 (Commitment to Boosting Intra-African Trade in Agricultural Commodities and Services).

Other remarks were made by Dr Chris Muyunda, Chairman of the Governing Council of the CAADP Non State Actors Coalition and by Mr Hiiti Sillo, Director General, Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority, where the PACA country officer for Tanzania is hosted.

The keynote speech was made by Dr Bodduppali Prasanna, Director of the CGIAR Maize CRP and Director of the CIMMYT Global Maize Program, where he encouraged stakeholders to explore good traditional methods/technologies such as nixtamilization from Mexico. He also stressed that aflatoxin is a problem that needs management among other problems some of which such as the Fall Armyworm could also aggravate fungal attacks and aflatoxin/mycotoxin contamination.

The opening statement by Hon. Dr Charles Tizeba, acknowledged the coordination and leadership role of AUC on aflatoxin control as a milestone to encourage commitment, transparency and accountability of the AU Member States in integrating aflatoxin in country policies and investment plans. He noted that political commitment is very critical to effectively

and systematically combat aflatoxin at the country level. Such political commitment should be demonstrated through allocation of resources to aflatoxin interventions and lead in engaging with Development Partners to support national aflatoxin plans.

In recognition of the adverse effects of aflatoxins in the maize value chain, and noting that maize is a key staple food in most households in sub-Saharan Africa, the participants identified challenges of aflatoxin mitigation, and appropriate technologies and practices for aflatoxin prevention and control in the maize value chain, and made the following recommendations:

1. Increase awareness on the health, agriculture and trade impacts of aflatoxins

Given the link between aflatoxin and adverse human health impact, and recognizing that millions of people living in Africa are exposed to high, unsafe levels of aflatoxins through their diet; and that toxins are carried over along the food chain, causing health problems in livestock through contaminated feed, participants emphasized the need for multi stakeholders approach in enhancing awareness creation on the impacts of aflatoxins.

Participants noted that aflatoxin contamination is a barrier to the growth of domestic and international markets for food and feed, especially when products do not meet international food safety standards, and therefore recommend that African Union Member States and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) identify and raise awareness where market incentives can support improved food safety and better health outcomes for poor consumers.

2. Generation of robust evidence to inform policy making

While a lot of research has been done on combating aflatoxins, very little action has been taken on the evidence already available. It was therefore noted that most of the research done does not communicate to policymakers and it was thusrecommended that researchers package information appropriately for different audience, in particular, policy makers.

In line with the workshop deliberations, it was recommended that researchers adopt a multidisciplinary and comprehensive research approach. Further, it was recommended that biophysical research should be augmented with socioeconomic studies on the impacts of aflatoxins on health, agriculture aimed to provide comprehensive evidence for policy formulation and implementation.

Researchers were urged to test and evaluate various solutions within the context of the entire supply chain, and explore possibilities of developing new detection and diagnostic tools that are cheaper, more reliable, and easy to use in the field.

3. Dissemination of Appropriate Technologies

Despite exciting advances in technology, limited awareness by the African population on the prevalence and impacts of aflatoxins, low capacities of extension agents and inappropriate messaging were noted as limiting factors in the effort to manage aflatoxins in the maize value chains.

In view of this, the workshop recommended the enhancement of communication through packaging information in ways that are appropriate for different audiences. As part of this outreach effort, workshop participants called for the strengthening of extension systems and capacities of extension agents to continuously keep them updated with emerging technologies and practices in control and management of aflatoxins.

The workshop noted that while there are modern technological advances in Aflatoxin control, a number of indigenous technologies and cultural practices can also be effective. Therefore, integrated approaches are critical to effective aflatoxin control. It was recommend that there is need for scaling up of existing technologies, and the identification, documentation and validation of practical indigenous technologies; blending them with modern technologies as appropriate.

4. Brokering PPPs for mitigation of Aflatoxins

Enabling policies and institutional innovations are just as important as technological innovations. Participants recognized that mitigation of aflatoxins along the maize value chain goes beyond the mandate of a single sector and cannot be achieved in isolation. The workshop identified the need for food safety policies that accommodate broad food safety hazards and that take into account the role of different players

The forum also recommended a multi sectoral approach to the control and management of aflatoxin, tapping into the competencies of the private sector. The workshop called for integrating research, extension, education and training; connecting farmers, producers, entrepreneurs and consumers; and strengthening the entire maize value chain innovation system

5. Financing Options

Noting that resources are limited, participants called for AU Member States to be more proactive, innovative and coordinated in mobilizing resources, and in catalyzing institutions to deliver.

Participants recommended the integration of aflatoxin action plans into country planning strategies, processes and budgets to ensure that political commitment is followed by

implementation. This will further enhance the willingness of external donors to support government efforts.

As an option, participants recommended that Member States conduct in-depth analysis of prevailing aid and resource environment and develop action plans that cut across all sectors, value chains and programs; and foster public private partnerships.

6. Sharing and Communication of Workshop Proceedings

To continue momentum and help unleashing the potential of the maize value chains through aflatoxin management, it was noted that there is need for continued interaction and information sharing. It was therefore recommended that the PACA Secretariat should work with stakeholders to initiate systems that enhance communication and information sharing among participants.

Participants reaffirmed the need to publish the workshop proceedings and recommend that PACA in collaboration with authors fast track the production, publication and sharing of the proceedings.

The forum identified flagship projects that cut across policy, trade, health. Which, if implemented would help manage the aflatoxin menace in maize value chains. It was recommended that the identified working group Champions and lead institutions should work closely with the PACA Secretariat to complete the planning and financing of these projects. Specifically the forum suggested the following next steps:

1. PACA Secretariat to work closely with identified working group champions to elaborate on flagship project ideas identified at the workshop and share these with stakeholders;
2. PACA Secretariat and Lead Institutions to develop concept notes for selected flagship projects, clearly indicating timelines for proposal development and project financing;
3. Lead and supporting institutions in collaboration with PACA Secretariat to develop Business Plans and/or Project Proposals for Regional Flagship Projects, and
4. Project Champions and PACA Secretariat to seek funding support for implementing Flagship Projects.

2017-12

Communique: Workshop on Combating Aflatoxins in the Maize Value Chain of Africa

PACA