Communique for the 4th PACA Partnership Platform Meeting

Held on 6th -7th December, 2023, Nairobi, Kenya.

Theme: "A Decade of partnership for Aflatoxin Control – *Looking back to define the Future of Aflatoxin Control in Africa"*

Introduction

1. The African Union Commission (AUC) through its program, the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) convened the 4th PACA Partnership Platform Meeting (PPM) from 6-7 December 2023, in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme *"A decade of Partnership for Aflatoxin Control – Looking back to define the future of aflatoxin control in Africa."* This pivotal assembly brought together a diverse spectrum of stakeholders. Focused on addressing the critical issue of aflatoxin contamination, the meeting aimed to foster collaborative strategies, share best practices, and formulate future-focused approaches for effective aflatoxin control across the continent.
2. The 4th PACA PPM was a collaborative effort organized by the African Union Commission, in partnership with the Government of Kenya, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and, AGRA. It welcomed a broad array of participants from across Africa and beyond, comprising representatives from AU Member States, Regional Economic Communities, Non-Governmental Organizations, academia, civil society, and the private sector. This diverse participation underscored the event's commitment to inclusive, multi-sectoral dialogue and action, fostering a united front in the fight against aflatoxin contamination.
3. The opening session of the 4th PACA PPM featured distinguished speakers who recognized the negative impacts of aflatoxins on health, trade and food security which hinder Africa's development efforts. The speakers set a progressive tone for the meeting and called for holistic approaches in addressing this pervasive food safety issue. Dr. Aggrey Agumya, Executive Director of The Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), initiated the session, followed by remarks from Ms. Jennifer Maurer, Resilience Coordinator, USAID; Ms. Kefilwe Moalosi, Nutrition Project Manager, AUDA-NEPAD; Ms. Lucy Muchoki, CEO of the African Agribusiness and Agroindustry Consortium (PanAAC); and Prof. Afeikhena Jerome, the Special Advisor to the AU

Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE). The session was officially opened by Dr. Collins Marangu, Director Crop Development and Food Safety at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, who underscored Kenya's commitment to agricultural development and aflatoxin control.

4. Setting the scene, Dr. Amare Ayalew the Program Manager of the PACA Secretariat at AUC highlighted PACA's achievements and lessons learned, as well as future strategies for aflatoxin control. The Second Presentation made by Dr. Blaise Outtara informed the meeting on the FAO/WHO Food Control Assessment Tool being used in AU Member States to inform food safety action plans.
5. MS. Mweene Kambombi presented on the *'Experiences from Domesticating PACA's Country-Led Model for Aflatoxins Control: Lessons and Tools.'* Through her presentation, she gave Zambia's experience in adopting PACA's country-led model for aflatoxin control and emphasized the model's effectiveness in creating systematic change at the grassroots level.
6. The Presentation made by Ms. Wezi Chunga-Sambo's, Senior PACA Program Officer, on *'The Next Decade of Aflatoxin Control in Africa'*, set the stage for strategic planning, innovative approaches, and collaborative efforts essential for mitigating aflatoxin impact over the next decade.
7. Breakout sessions were pivotal, enabling participants to delve into specific challenges and brainstorm strategic solutions based on the presentation by Ms. Chunga-Sambo. These discussions led to a set of comprehensive recommendations, including enhanced stakeholder engagement, policy refinement, and capacity building, which are instrumental for future strategies in aflatoxin management.
8. The meeting also featured insightful country reports, showcasing diverse national experiences in aflatoxin control. Professor Archileo Kaaya of Makere University provided an update on Uganda's strategic initiatives, while Tanzania's progress was outlined in the Tanzania Initiative for Preventing

Aflatoxin Contamination (TANIPAC) project by Mr. Clepin Josephat Mbekomize, TANIPAC Coordinator. Dr. Guole Gueye presented Senegal's focus on Aflasafe production, illustrating their commitment to agricultural development and public health. Ghana's National Policy for Aflatoxin Control, presented by Mrs. Faustina Atupra, highlighted efforts in coordination and public awareness. These reports reflected the multifaceted approaches and progress made in combating aflatoxins across the continent.

9. The 4th PACA Partnership Platform Meeting featured a series of dynamic presentations followed by insightful panel discussions, fostering a rich dialogue among experts and participants. These sessions were instrumental in deepening the understanding of aflatoxin control, exploring a range of innovative solutions and addressing various implementation challenges. Prof. Limbikani Matumba from Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) delivered a passionate presentation on harmonizing aflatoxin sampling and testing protocols, a vital step towards standardizing aflatoxin control measures. This was followed by an engaging panel discussion, allowing participants to further delve into the topic. Similarly, Ms. Jane Kamau from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) provided an in-depth presentation on the scaling of food safety innovations, with a particular focus on the development and commercialization journey of Aflasafe. The subsequent panel discussion expanded on these insights, drawing from practical experiences and strategies that have demonstrated significant impact in the field. These collaborative sessions culminated in actionable recommendations, highlighting the meeting's commitment to advancing practical and effective solutions in aflatoxin management.
10. The meeting delved into a range of critical topics essential to aflatoxin control and food safety, featuring a series of passionate and compelling presentations followed by in-depth panel discussions. A notable highlight was Mr. Isaac Ghokah from AGRA, who delivered an elaborate and insightful presentation on *'The Importance of Food Safety for Food Systems*

Transformation.' In his presentation, he mphasized the critical role of food safety amidst evolving agricultural and public health challenges. This key theme was further explored in the subsequent panel discussion facilitated by Mr. Tayani Banda, AGRA-CALA Food Systems Champion from the Malawi Planning Commission. Similarly, Ms. Winnie Osulah and Dr. Sam Oando from IGNITE/TANAGER presented powerful and thought-provoking insights on the need for harmonized, gender-sensitive food safety policies, a crucial aspect in addressing the diverse impacts of aflatoxin contamination. Their timely and enlightening presentations were pivotal in highlighting the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives in aflatoxin management. The meeting also benefitted from the significant contributions of Dr. Alejandro Ortega-Beltran, Prof. Ranajit Bandyopadhyay, and Dr. George Mahuku from IITA, who discussed emerging risks to food safety, such as conflicts, climate change, and external shocks. These sessions underscored the necessity for an adaptive and resilient approach in managing aflatoxin, and the ensuing discussions amplified these themes, drawing on the vast expertise of the panelists. This collaborative approach, seamlessly integrating presentations and panel dialogues, was instrumental in advancing a more inclusive and effective strategy for aflatoxin control.

11. The concluding presentations, including those by Ms. Nadine Umutoni on behalf of Dr. Hermogene Nsengimana, the ecretary General of the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO), emphasized the importance of harmonizing aflatoxin standards across Africa. The case of Aflatoxin M1 served as a poignant example of the cross-border implications of aflatoxin control and the necessity for continental collaboration in standard-setting.
12. All sessions organized for the 4th PACA PPM collectively highlighted the imperative for collaborative problem-solving, the sharing of diverse perspectives, and the development of actionable strategies. Participants at the meeting underscored the need for a multifaceted approach that encompasses technological innovation, policy alignment, gender sensitivity,

and a proactive response to emerging challenges, thereby charting a strategic course for advancing aflatoxin control efforts across Africa. The meeting concluded with a firm commitment to action, aligning with the strategic vision outlined. It was agreed that collaborative efforts, both regionally and globally, are essential for the successful implementation of these strategies. This entails not only a unified approach towards policy and practice but also a sustained commitment to resource allocation and knowledge sharing.

Key Messages

13. **Reflecting on a Decade of Aflatoxin Control:** Celebrating the achievements and lessons learned over the past ten years, with a focus on shaping future aflatoxin management strategies.
14. **Importance of Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:** Highlighting the critical role of collaborative efforts among governments, Development partners, NGOs, academia, and the private sector in tackling the complexities of aflatoxin control.
15. **Success of Country-Led Approaches:** Showcasing the effectiveness of tailored, country-specific strategies in managing aflatoxin risks, underscoring the need for broader adoption and scaling of these approaches.
16. **Role of Innovation and Harmonized Policies:** Emphasizing the importance of technological advancements, such as Aflasafe, and the need for harmonized policies across African nations for consistent and effective aflatoxin control.
17. **Integrating Gender and Conflict Considerations:** Acknowledging the necessity of incorporating gender-sensitive measures and understanding the impact of conflicts on aflatoxin management, ensuring comprehensive and inclusive approaches.
18. **Enhancing Public Awareness and Education:** Underscoring the importance of raising public awareness and education about the risks of aflatoxins and the measures to control their impact on agriculture, trade, food safety and health.

19. **Strengthening Research and Development:** Advocating for continued research and development to advance understanding and implementation of effective aflatoxin control measures.
20. **Building Resilience in Food Systems:** Emphasizing the need to build resilience in food systems against aflatoxin contamination, particularly in the face of climate change and other environmental challenges.
21. **Promoting Policy Integration and Enforcement:** Highlighting the necessity of integrating aflatoxin control policies into national agricultural and food safety frameworks and ensuring their effective enforcement.
22. **Fostering Regional and International Cooperation:** Calling for enhanced regional and international cooperation to share best practices, resources, and technologies for more effective aflatoxin control across borders.
23. **Economical alternative use of aflatoxin-contaminated grains:** Calling for more research focusing on alternative use of contaminated grains. Taking into consideration the animal feed standards or using contaminated grains as fertilizer.
24. **Harmonization of Standards:** Urging Member States to adopt international and African Standards on Aflatoxin in food products and withdraw Conflicting National Standards to facilitate cross-border trade of safe products

Recommendations

25. **Strengthening National Aflatoxin Control Strategies:** Advocate for the formulation and rigorous implementation of comprehensive national strategies to effectively manage aflatoxin risks, ensuring alignment with each country's unique agricultural landscape.
26. **Cultivating Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage the establishment of robust partnerships between governments, the private sector, and NGOs, fostering a cooperative approach to aflatoxin management that leverages diverse expertise and resources.

27. **Integrating Aflatoxin Control in Agricultural Policies:** Call for seamless integration of aflatoxin control measures into broader agricultural and food security policies, ensuring a unified and strategic approach to food safety.
28. **Expanding Access to Innovative Technologies:** Promote wider accessibility to groundbreaking technologies like Aflasafe, while spurring continuous innovation in aflatoxin mitigation methods to address evolving challenges.
29. **Enhancing Regional Collaboration:** Urge a concerted effort towards regional collaboration, emphasizing the sharing of best practices, resources, and research findings to bolster aflatoxin control efforts across African nations.
30. **Focusing on Capacity Building:** Highlight the critical importance of building capacity in aflatoxin control, particularly in research, policy implementation, and technology transfer, to fortify efforts against aflatoxin contamination.
31. **Implementing Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** Recommend the adoption of gender-sensitive strategies in all aflatoxin control programs, acknowledging and addressing the different impacts of aflatoxins on various gender groups including the youth.
32. **Boosting Research Investment:** Advocate for increased financial and resource investment in research initiatives aimed at deepening the understanding and developing more effective solutions for aflatoxin control, economical alternative uses, and identification of potential disposal mechanisms.
33. **Harmonizing Standards and Regulations:** Harmonizing Standards and Regulations: The harmonization of aflatoxin control standards and regulations across African countries is encouraged to foster a consistent and effective approach to managing aflatoxin risks. There is an urgent need to fast-track the African standard harmonization work, providing technical expertise and financial resources following the submission of the New Work Item Proposal (NWIP) to ARSO. Member States are urged to adopt international and African standards on Aflatoxin in food products and to withdraw conflicting national standards, to facilitate cross-border trade of safe products. In partnership with ARSO, the emphasis is on creating awareness and carrying out capacity-

building activities for relevant stakeholders, including farmers, to promote a quality culture in Africa

34. **Prioritizing Public Awareness:** Emphasize the need for extensive public awareness campaigns to educate communities about the risks posed by aflatoxins and the measures available for prevention and control.
35. **Reaching out more AU MS**: Scaling up the PACA country-led model to other member states, to ensure at least half of the MS have been capacitated.
36. **Implementing progress monitoring and evaluation at the country level:** A lot is being done in countries, and there should be a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of aflatoxin control activities.

Conclusions

The 4th PACA PPM meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, marked a significant milestone in the collective journey against aflatoxin contamination in Africa. It fostered a deepened understanding and renewed commitment towards innovative and collaborative strategies for aflatoxin control. The meeting concluded with a strong resolve to continue building upon the successes and lessons of the past decade, emphasizing the need for multi-sectoral collaboration, enhanced public awareness, and the integration of aflatoxin control into national and regional policies. The meeting gave inputs to the development of the next PACA Strategy (2025-2034) which will be aligned to the post- Malabo agenda of the Commission. The path forward, as outlined in this communique, reflects a shared vision for a safer, healthier, and more prosperous Africa, free from the scourge of aflatoxins.