



AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

PRIORITIZING FOOD SAFETY IN AFRICA

In response to delivering on the commitments by the Heads of States of the African governments contained in the 2014 Malabo Declaration, the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) African Union Commission developed the AU Malabo Business Plan for Implementation of CAADP and a supporting Operational Plan (2018-2020). The plans are aimed at supporting AU entities and its member states to generate strategic results from implementing the key actions. In the Malabo Declaration, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Result Area 5 prioritizes boosting intra African trade in agricultural commodities and services. The commission has also taken progressive steps in supporting the Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) processes and negotiations as a direct response to the agenda of boosting intra African trade in agricultural commodities and services. It is clear that a major component of trade in Africa involves food commodities. It is therefore paramount to have a continental policy framework on sanitary and phytosanitary standards (SPS) and structures to ensure that AU member countries have robust Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures in place, with a specific focus on food safety to achieve expanded trade.

It is in this context that DREA has elaborated the Malabo Commitments in the AU Malabo Business Plan for Implementation of CAADP referred to above and has put forth a strategic programme on “Enhanced Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards and Compliance” in support of Boosting intra-African Trade in Agricultural Commodities and Services agenda. The Strategic Context is that most countries in African have inadequate capacity to implement international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards. It is also clear that a vast majority of countries have inadequate capacity to meet international standards and meet SPS import requirements of trading partners, and, in the light of the ambitious Malabo targets, more so with the ambition of boosting intra Africa and international trade, there is an urgency to address the relevant SPS constraints and formulate sound programmes and initiatives.

The Commission therefore aims to prioritize capacity building needs and interventions (human, institutional and infrastructural) in the SPS domain. The specific objective is to enhance the SPS capacities of AU member states in order to improve human, animal, and plant health, promote trade and generate economic growth. The output areas in the AU Malabo Business Plan around which strategic actions have been identified include;

1. Strategic Framework, Good Practices, Benchmarks and Tools for SPS; Food Safety and Compliance
2. Establishment and operationalization of a Food Safety Coordination Mechanism for Africa
3. Training modules for enhanced SPS measures/standards, Food Safety and Compliance

Most AU member states face significant demands to enhance their SPS capacity to improve agricultural productivity, strengthen health protection and/or boost regional and international trade. In general, the resources available from national budgets, donors and/or private businesses are insufficient so difficult choices must be made between competing SPS investments, all of which may be likely to bring appreciable benefits over the longer-term. An evidence-informed decision-making process, that engages all the relevant public and private sector stakeholders, can therefore help to promote dialogue on the priorities for SPS investments and interventions, and enhance the efficiency of resource allocation decisions.

In this context, the AU Commission intends to promote use of the P-IMA framework (Prioritizing SPS Investments for Market Access)¹, as part of the above-mentioned Output 1. In addition to providing an evidence-based approach to inform and support decision-making processes, use of P-IMA is expected to; enhance the much sought dialogue between the public and private sector; inform the development of sound and sustainable SPS projects; and help mobilize resources from national governments and donors for SPS capacity building.

The establishment and operationalization of a food safety coordination mechanism for Africa has been identified by the AUC as a long-term objective under Output 2. To support this objective, the Commission, in collaboration with technical and development partners, recognizes the importance of a reference food safety testing laboratory for the African continent that would enhance SPS capacity and infrastructure in the long-term. The reference laboratory will be established with technical support from Nestle as one element

¹ P-IMA was developed by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF). The P-IMA framework has been piloted in selected countries in Africa. A regional COMESA project to build regional expertise and capacity on P-IMA is under development. See: www.standardsfacility.org/p-ima

in a desired broader food safety regulatory and legal framework and links its establishment to global and regional development goals. Established as an African Union entity, the scope, governance and funding model of such a facility will be defined for both its construction and operational phases. Having recently completed a state of the art testing laboratory in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, built from scratch, Nestlé proposes to help the African Union project manage the construction, commissioning and accreditation of the new facility, with the support of other industry members via appropriate cross-industry platforms; and offers to continue offering technical input to a multi-stakeholder operational governance model. The African Development Bank (AfDB) as expressed interest in supporting the project while the European Union is equally keen and already supporting a number of AU SPS-related activities.

In order to consistently address persistent inadequate capacity to implement international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards that most African countries face, it is important to develop sound training modules (to support the strategic framework and food safety mechanism) and deliver training modules to key target groups. This will include training policy makers in evidence based policy making for Food safety and provide demand-driven implementation support to key target clients under Output 3.

Background and rationale

Africa needs and deserves safe food, but at present food borne disease accounts for more than 91 million cases of illness in Africa each year (WHO). Meanwhile, stunting and underweight affect 39 per cent of African under 5s. This impairs brain/other organ development, decreasing productivity, leading to an estimated -8pc impact on national economies. Mycotoxins, the highly toxic metabolites produced by moulds in contaminated foods, are a major cause of morbidity and mortality in both humans and animals who consume contaminated foods. Aflatoxins, which is produced by the fungi *A. flavus*, has been shown to be the major cause of liver disease and stunting. Mycotoxin contamination affects up to 85 per cent of all maize and ground nut harvested in Africa, rendering it unsafe to consume and unusable by most processors. Heavy metals, pesticides and other residue concentrations are also higher than can be accepted by processors, inhibiting value addition and export. At the same time, the infrastructure to detect and therefore manage contaminants to internationally accredited standards is currently almost nonexistent on the African continent.

Set against this, development agendas set by the global and African communities both specifically reference the need for access to safe, nutritious food (UN Sustainable Development Goal 3, target 1); and to reduce stunting in children to 10% and underweight to 5% (Africa 2063).

Establishing a reference food safety testing laboratory for Africa, built to global best in class standards from scratch and using internationally accredited testing methodology deployed by highly trained African staff, would develop analytical competence and provide analytical services using methods based on international standards; This in turn would contribute to accurate and reliable quantification of contaminants in locally produced and imported food, thereby enabling better monitoring and enforcement of food safety standards. This will result in safer foods for consumers, thereby contributing to decreased mortality and morbidity from food borne illness (linkage to SDG2 and Agenda 2063).

The laboratory is envisaged as one element in a broader food safety structure that should include harmonized food safety legislation, followed by the establishment of a food safety agency/coordination mechanism for the continent. While these elements are not in the scope of this proposal, neither is their establishment and that of the reference laboratory mutually dependent, it is recognized that they need to be followed in parallel. The establishment of the reference laboratory is expected to provide a catalytic effect on the broader food safety framework in Africa.

As the laboratory would be pan African in nature, under the auspices of the African Union and at the service of all African food safety authorities and professionals, it would have the additional benefits of accelerating analytical methods alignment across Africa, while creating a scientific basis for harmonisation of food safety standards on the continent, increasing intracontinental trade, exports and competitiveness (link to AU Agribusiness strategy). In this way, it would help equip African agribusiness to compete globally (vs. current lack of QA capacity; link to AU Agribusiness strategy).

Such a facility could be flexible in nature and could mentor and build capacity in a network of accredited regional sub-laboratories around the continent, each potentially focusing according to regional priorities (e.g. heavy metals in one geography, aflatoxins in another). The central facility would also lead in-country research projects for knowledge acquisition.

Governance of the reference food safety laboratory for Africa

The facility will be governed on a pan African basis by the African Union Commission with technical support provided by an accredited industry partner where necessary.

It is further recognized that there are multiple stakeholders active and expert in the field, from Intergovernmental Organisations such as FAO and WHO, to Codex (CCAfrica and relevant specialist committees), Regional Economic Communities, National governments

and their regulatory agencies; industry organisations (such as the Consumer Goods Forum's Global Food Safety Initiative or GFSI; or the larger GFSP platform that, in Asia, already includes industry actors, FAO and WHO); farmers' organisations, relevant Civil Society actors and the scientific community. These will be mapped and engaged systematically throughout the process. All key institutions and organizations, development partners and experts in the SPS area collaborate within the STDF, and convene regularly in the STDF Working Group.

More specifically, in order to function properly, a Reference Food Safety Laboratory will have to be underpinned by solid and harmonized food safety legislation. Work to this end commenced by Kenya, Cameroon and, in the near future, hopefully CCAfrica, will be essential in this respect.

Scope of the facility

The primary function of the Reference Laboratory would of course be sample analysis. This can be divided into Chemical Contaminants (mycotoxins, heavy metals, pesticides, veterinary drugs and antibiotics etc.); and Microbiological Contaminants – comprising Bacteriological (e.g. E Coli, E Sakazaaki), Viral and Fungal.

However the facility should also be geared toward knowledge and capacity building, research and teaching. It should aim to translate data gathered from sample analyses into easily usable material for industry (e.g. in association with GFSI), farmers, hygiene professionals, regulatory compliance officers etc.; also to publish its findings in scientific journals.

Knowledge exchange and capacity building would take the form of physical and e-learning courses, visits, accompanying regional and national labs in their development.

Finally, it can be a reference point for the development of Food Safety policies at continental, regional and national level based on scientific research.

Each of the above functions can be introduced in a phased way based on the priorities and in order to facilitate funding.

Potential cost and build duration to commission

A full proposal with estimated budget will be developed and it will factor in potential consultancy fees to project manage from groundbreaking to commissioning.

Eventually, the costs relating to salaries, services, utilities etc. is anticipated to be 100 per cent covered by charging for analyses and technical services provided; while a significant proportion of the initial setup expenses would also be amortised in this way.

Once funding and land has been approved, it is estimated that the establishment would take 18 - 24 months from groundbreaking to commissioning and a further 8 – 12 months for full accreditation.

Physical location

The choice of location for the Reference Laboratory should take such factors into account as whether it has good continental transport connections; a good existing academic infrastructure and talent; ease of interaction with key stakeholders, e.g. Codex etc. In an ideal world, the facility would be located within or adjacent to an appropriate academic faculty, which will need to identify land on which to build it.

How could a designated industry partner help establish such a facility; and why would they be interested?

Industry's experience in building and commissioning from scratch a state of the art food safety laboratory, accredited to global standards, in Africa could be put at the disposal of this concept. For example in fulfilling the project management oversight role of establishing the planned facility, operating as an AU entity. The cost of engaging project management consultants would thus be saved from the estimated overall building and commissioning budget.

The benefits for industry of establishing such a facility include its potential for standardisation of testing methodologies at continental level; also to harmonise food safety standards for raw materials and finished products, accepted intracontinentally and recognised beyond, facilitating local raw material sourcing, imports and exports. It would thus play a role in reducing technical barriers to trade and promoting a level playing field based on excellence.

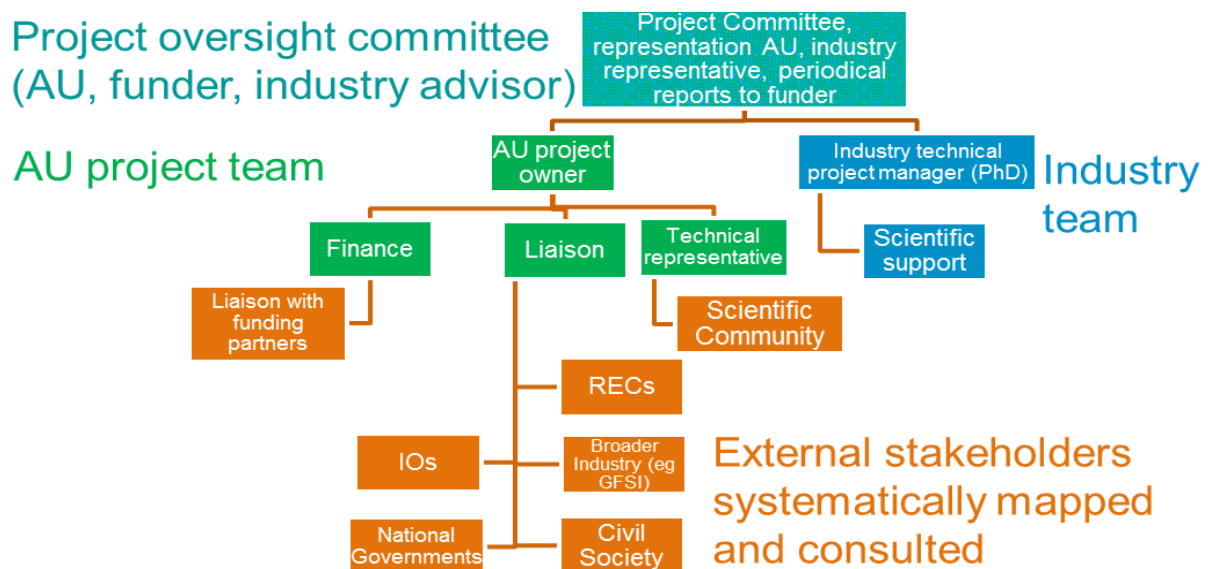
Who would be involved in building, commissioning, running and overseeing?

As indicated before, the ownership of a Reference Food Safety Laboratory for Africa would lie with the African Union Commission (AUC). In the construction phase, an AUC project manager and team (Finance, for relations with the funder and contractors; and Liaison, to lead stakeholder engagement) will need to be identified and appointed, working closely with the financing and technical partners. As before, systematic stakeholder mapping and regular engagement would need to be undertaken. It is anticipated that the lead for public sector bodies and civil society would lie with AUC, supported where necessary by designated industry advisors; while Industry liaison would

be led by the designated industry advisors with AUC support. The scientific community would be engaged jointly.

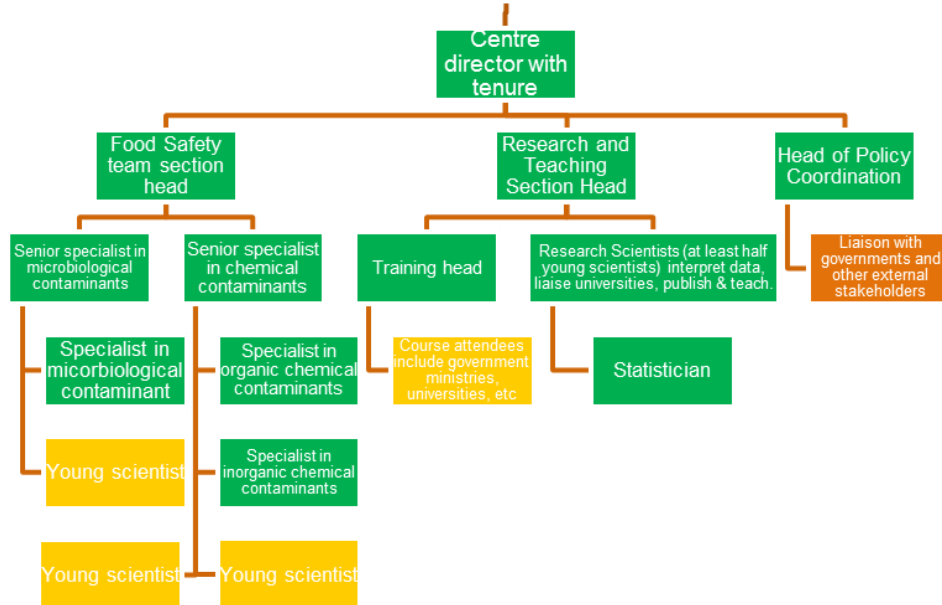
Once commissioned and accredited, it is anticipated that an oversight committee will be appointed, comprising the AU project owner, the designated industry partner(s) technical & scientific advisor; and as necessary the funding partner. In addition there would be invited advisory members on 3 year consultative terms, including e.g. African academics, representatives from RECs, farmer organisations, IOs, civil society and industry. The permanent staff at the facility would be divided by function; and within each it is anticipated that African young scientist interns would be a standing feature. The charts below illustrate the potential composition of each team in the construction and operational phases.

Construction to commissioning and accreditation phase



Once commissioned, governance and management of the facility could be envisaged as follows:

Oversight committee: permanent members include AU project owner, industry technical & scientific advisor; funding partner; invited members on 3 year consultative term include African academics, representatives from RECs, farmer orgs, IOs, civil society, other industry bodies



Once established, what of the future?

One lab may not be enough for Africa. It may be necessary to build further. To do this, the main reference facility would act as model and accrediting partner for national labs. Initially, labs operated by the designated industry advisors can form part of a continental network. Thereafter they can in turn accredit other regional labs. As time progresses, national labs could specialise in food safety concerns prevalent in their geographies.

If we agree that a Reference Food Safety Laboratory should be established, what are the next steps?

- African Union Commission agrees to sponsor the project
- MOU between AUC and the designated industry advisors developed within a broader collaboration but focusing on the Laboratory as possibly the first phase but not exclusively limited to the lab.
- AUC with support of the designated industry advisors (drafting of project proposal) applies to AfDB, World Bank or other funder for funding

- On AfDB/World Bank approval or other funder for funding, AUC works with host member state ref permissions, land acquisition, legal framework etc.
- AUC leads liaison with RECs, IOs, other interested parties (industry players)
- AUC and the designated industry advisors jointly engage with academic community as necessary. The appointed industry advisors and AUC convene further industry support and participation
- Designated industry advisors:
 - trains the project manager
 - provides the blueprint for the lab, based on international standards and existing experience
 - undertakes regular reviews of progress with the AUC project manager
 - can advise on team recruitment
 - can help validate the finished lab and assist in accreditation to international bodies

REQUIRED ACTIONS!

1. We call on African Governments to prioritize food safety in Africa noting that some AU Member States have already taken progressive steps of establishing structures and functions at national level in support of food safety
2. We call on the 2nd AU STC to endorse the development of a full proposal on prioritizing food safety in Africa and establishing a PanAfrican food safety laboratory and tapping into the industry resources
3. We call on the AU to endorse the establishment of a PanAfrican food safety laboratory for improved value addition, nutrition, and trade during the AU 2018 January Summit