

# BIOSAFETY NEWS

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Newsletter



## INTRODUCTION

## Project Background

The Regional Agricultural and Environmental Innovations Network (RAEIN-Africa), a regional non-governmental organization, has worked primarily on science, technology and society, including on biosafety capacity building projects since 2004. From 2007, RAEIN-Africa has been conducting regional training on detection of living modified organisms (LMOs) for selected Southern African Countries, leading to the establishment and launch of the Southern African Network for GM Detection Laboratories (SANGL) in 2009. Through the implementation of SANGL (2007 to 2013) and the UNEP-GEF Preparatory Grant (PPG) 2014 to 2015), an in-depth study on the status of the existing regulatory and policy environment around biotechnology, biosafety and biodiversity conservation, human and infrastructural capacities and gaps thereof, for LMO detection was carried out in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, and Mozambique. Based on the needs and gaps identified, a need-driven, context-specific intervention entitled “Multi-Country Project to strengthen Institutional Capacities on LMO Testing in Support of National Decision Making” (MCP-ICLT) was born.

## Why LMO Testing Capacities?

Inadequate human and institutional capacity in LMO detection is a major impediment to effective implementation of national biosafety regulatory systems. Without the required LMO detection capacities, countries are unable to effectively implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB). The “Multi-Country Project to Strengthen Institutional Capacities on LMO Testing in Support of National Decision Making” aims to assist six countries in the region: Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, and Mozambique; on pre-and post-approval monitoring of LMOs as part of the risk management processes under article 17 of the CBP.

## The MCP-ICLT Project Scope

The MCP-ICLT is a four-year, UNEP-GEF funded project led by RAEIN-Africa in collaboration with Six partner countries; Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique. The Project falls under the UNEP medium-term Strategy (2014-2017), sub-programme on Environmental Governance, whose objective is to ensure that environmental governance at country, regional and global levels is strengthened in line with agreed environmental priorities. The project purpose is to contribute to ensuring an adequate level of protection in the field of safe transfer, handling, transport and use of LMOs resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of

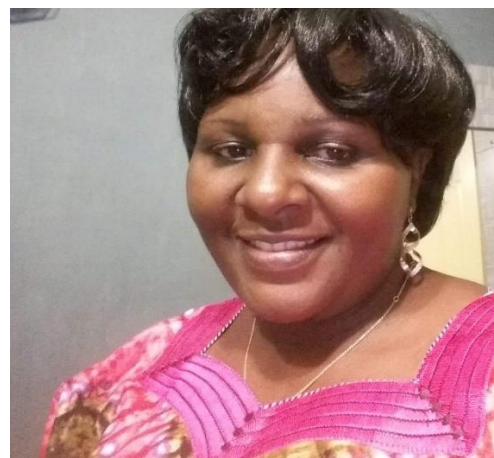
biological diversity, also taking into account risks to human health, and specially focusing on transboundary movements.

## Local Arrangement

Environmental Affairs Department (EAD) in the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining is the National Executing Agency (NEA) of the project and entered into Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with RAEIN-Africa, the Lead Implementing Agency. The MoA which was signed on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2017, spells out the role of each party in the implementation of the MCP-ICLT project. Dr. Lilian Chimphepo at EAD is the project National Coordinator.

The project targets Biotechnology Laboratories at Chitedze Agricultural Research Station (DARS) and Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR). The project focuses on furnishing the two laboratories with basic equipment and reagents for LMO testing besides building technical capacities of lab technicians in LMO detection. NEA entered into a Memorandum

of Agreement (MoA) with the Implementing Laboratories which was initiated in November, 2018 and completed with official signing in February 2018. The MoA highlights the obligations of each implementing laboratory and the NEA in the MCP-ICLT project including financial management and procedures.



*Dr. Lilian Chimphepo*

## EAD HOSTS A NEW PROJECT

**🔗 Funded to the tune of 400,000 US\$ from UNEP-GEF**

On 15th November, 2017, Environmental Affairs Department (EAD) took participants from National Biosafety regulatory committee, Department of Agriculture Research Services and University of Agriculture and Natural Resources to the shores of Lake Malawi in Salima for the launch of **MCP-ICLT** project which is being

implemented by 6 African countries namely, Angola, DR Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique. The project is funded by the United Nations Environment Programme and Global Environmental Facility (UNEP-GEF). The meeting created awareness on the project background, objectives, approach and also giving roles to

the implementing partners on how the project should be delivered. After the meeting The Malawi National Project Task

Force team was formed comprising of 6 representatives from the implementing laboratory, the NBRC and the NEA.



*Participants at the National Project Inception Workshop, Salima Malawi*

According to the project National executing Agency (EAD) the project goals are to build and strengthen human and infrastructural capacities for LMO testing in the country, establish guidelines and harmonized methods for sampling and handling and LMO detection based on international acceptable standards, link and partner with other regional international LMO detection laboratories and networks with other institutions involved in biosafety regulation, and establish a collaborative communication

platform for LMO detection laboratories for exchange of information and learning.

**UNEP** is the implementing Partner with **RAEIN-Africa** as the Lead Executing Agency, whereas **EAD** is the National Executing Agency, and the Implementing laboratories being at **Chitedze** and **LUANAR**.

Participants to the launch were informed that the project is for four years (2017-2021) and is being funded to the tune of 400,000 US\$ from UNEP-GEF while Malawi is contributing 540,500US\$ in kind.



## MCP-ICLT-MALAWI GETS OFFICE BEARERS

The National Task Force for the project met on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2018 at Linde Motel in Mponela, Dowa District. The meeting was represented with 9 participants, of which 4 of the members were female. Among others the taskforce reviewed their terms of reference, activities to be implemented during this quarter corresponding with the

approved budget and draft procurement strategy from the Lead Executing Agency.



*National Taskforce meeting at Mponela Dowa, Malawi*

## MCP-ICLT-IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS IMPARTED WITH SOFT SKILLS

Twenty participants from the two implementing laboratories of Chitedze and LUANAR (6 lab technicians from each) and representatives from the Environmental Affairs Department (NEA) of which 7 were females, attended a Soft Skills Training from 11th to 17th March, 2018 at Linde Motel, Dowa. The training was facilitated by the Malawi National Project Coordinator (Lilian Chimphepo) and representatives from the

implementing laboratories of Chitedze and LUANAR who attended a regional training of trainers by RAEIN-Africa, South Africa, in November 2017. This was done to enhance the MCP-ICLT stakeholders' skills and knowledge for engaging in multi-stakeholder processes in the operationalizing of national LMO testing for strengthening biosafety decision making systems



*Participants pose for a group photo*

The training was organized to strengthen knowledge and skills for applying the multi stakeholder systems approach for implementing the MCP-ICLT Project, develop specific multi-stakeholder systems intervention plans, identify and address organizational and institutional constraints that can hinder effective operations of the LMO testing and decision making systems including strengthening stakeholders' reporting skills.

The training package comprised of the MCP-ICLT Project Flow (African Funeral) (sharing responsibilities), Multi-Stakeholder Processes, Team work, Systems thinking, Leadership Skills, Effective Communication,

Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Time Management, Attitudes and Work Ethics, Networking, SWOT analysis and Monitoring and Evaluation. This content was delivered through group exercises and role plays including multi-stakeholder Systems and Teamwork Exercise, SWOT Analysis Exercise, Conflict Management Exercise, and Networking Exercise. Besides the soft skills, participants were also oriented on the outcomes of the training attended by the lab managers on guidelines on minimum infrastructure requirements for internationally accepted LMO detection and competence levels for LMO testing in Bloemfontein South Africa.



*Participants involved in game dynamics of the training*

After the training participants evaluated the training as very good and relevant to their professions and implementation of the MCP-ICLT Project.

## **NCST/PBS & EAD DRILL BIOSAFETY INSPECTORS**

Environmental Affairs Department with support from the National Commission for Science and Technology (NCST) through Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) organized a two and half day training workshop for Biosafety inspectors in Mzuzu from 27th to 29th August 2018. The training was attended by biosafety inspectors from various institutions represented in the National Biosafety Regulatory Committee (NBRC) which are: Health, Agriculture, National Parks and Wildlife, Trade and Industry, Gender and Children Development, Labour, Forestry, Environment, Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS), Malawi Revenue Authority (MRA), Consumers Association of Malawi (CAMA), Coordination Unit for Rehabilitation of the Environment (CURE) and Police. Twenty inspectors attended the training of which 5 were women. The training was officially opened by Mr. Manda, the Director of Planning for NCST.





*Group photo for the participants*

The training aimed at orienting Biosafety Inspectors on their roles and responsibilities, developing a common understanding of genetically modified organisms, orienting Biosafety Inspectors on the Legal Framework for Biosafety in Malawi and enhancing knowledge and skills on effectively compliance monitoring for all activities working with genetically modified organisms.

The training was successful and it involved conference room presentations, group work and a practical field inspection in Nkhata Bay.



*Participants inspecting the banana confined field trial in Nkhata Bay.*



## CHITEDZE RESEARCH STATION LABORATORY GETTING A BOOST

The nomination of Chitedze Research Station Laboratory under Department of Agricultural Research Services (DARS) as one of the potential referral laboratories for LMO testing for the MCP-ICLT project has added more value to its human and infrastructural status as the laboratory has been involved in a number of activities;

During the MCP-ICLT project inception in November 2017, a representative from the Laboratory was nominated to be part of the National Project Task Force team which has given DARS a platform to contribute to successful implementation of the Project

In the same month, a representative from the laboratory participated in soft skills training of trainers organized by RAEIN-Africa secretariat in Pretoria, South Africa,

who later was part of facilitators for national training held at Linde Motel in Mponela from 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> March 2018. The national training included other laboratory staff, who were equipped with soft skills to help them in their day to day laboratory operations and interpersonal interactions.

Under the same project, in November 2017 Chitedze Biotechnology laboratory was visited by technical advisor, Prof Chris Viljoen in the technical backstopping mission to evaluate available LMO testing, equipment, testing their functionality and providing technical advice on spatial orientation recommended for LMO testing. The mission provided laboratory staff with an insight of an ideal laboratory setup of workflow for LMO detection.



*Prof Viljoen (left) at Chitedze Biotechnology Laboratory*

RAEIN-Africa organized a back to back workshop on minimum infrastructure and competence levels for internationally acceptable LMO detection in Bloemfontein, South Africa from 5 to 8 February 2018, a representative from Chitedze Biotechnology laboratory was in attendance. Major outputs of the training were the proposed spatial orientation for Chitedze Biotechnology Laboratory that was presented and adopted by reviewers and prioritization of laboratory equipment for Chitedze. A follow up in-country training was held at Linde Motel in Mponela, Malawi, between 12th and 16th March 2018 in which four other laboratory staff members participated. The follow up

training helped to create awareness among the laboratory staff members on the proposed spatial orientation.

Under the World Bank Funded Agriculture Productivity Programme for Southern Africa (APPSA) project, a new laboratory complex is being constructed at Chitedze Research Station. Among others, the structure will house the Biotechnology Lab which is currently receiving support from RAEIN Africa in terms of building human capacity as well as laboratory equipment for LMO detection. It is expected that construction of the new structure will significantly reduce problem of space in the current laboratory.