THEME 1: MESSAGES AND COMMUNICATION CHANNELS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ENTRY INTO FORCE OF THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL ON BIOSAFETY AND BEYOND

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Since Nigeria’s signing and ratification of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, efforts to establish a National Biosafety Management Act commenced. The Act was eventually passed in 2015, culminating to the establishment of a National Biosafety Management Agency. The National Biosafety Management Agency is established by the Federal Government of Nigeria, and is charged with the mandate of regulating the practice of modern biotechnology in the country.

Prior to the establishment of the Agency, there was high-level unawareness of LMOs in Nigeria, which resulted to unregulated transboundary movements of LMOs in and out of the country. However, since the birth of the National Biosafety Management Agency in 2015, there has been increased awareness and control at various levels.

From the Nigerian experience, the focus for Parties and stakeholders that want to undertake awareness raising activities should be to identify their target audience (farmers, youth, NGOs, or the general public), then identify the best communication tools that would work for such audience. For instance, if the target audience is local farmers, then enlightenment campaigns at village squares or townhall meetings would be more appropriate.

Regulating a sector that was almost non-existent in the mind of an average Nigerian necessitated the need for extensive awareness creation. Since its inception, the National Biosafety Management Agency has done a lot in raising awareness on LMOs, through printing and distribution of the NBMA Act, leaflets, FAQs and the National Biosafety (Implementation, Etc.) Regulations. The Agency has also come up with its National Biosafety Policy, which was recently approved by Nigeria’s Federal Executive Council. The policy will be ready for distribution soon.

In the electronic media, the Chief Executive Officer of the Agency has granted several press interviews, and participated in many live radio and tv programmes. The Agency has on its own organized press conferences/briefings and media chats, and has also, upscaled its social media awareness through regular tweets and Facebook posts. It currently commenced its Tweeter chats, which is aimed at giving the general public an opportunity to bring on their concerns and questions directly to the CEO of the Agency for direct and clarifications. Again, the Agency organizes annual National Biosafety Conference, aimed at bringing together stakeholders and representatives of various interest groups to deliberate on issues of LMOs and biosafety in Nigeria. The Agency hopes to organize a training for journalists on proper reporting on LMOs in the nearest future.

Nigeria began to learn about LMOs from a negative perspective, which the Agency has worked tirelessly to correct since its inception. Through its public awareness, the National Biosafety Management Agency has enlightened many journalists on LMOs, hence moving them from negative reportage to neutral and hopefully positive in the near future. These awareness-raising efforts are monitored by tracking traffic at the Agency’s website, Tweeter and Facebook followership, retweets, posts and comments. Also, turn-outs at the Agency’s events, especially the annual National Biosafety Conference, are measuring tools.

The Secretariat of the Convention has done very well in disseminating information through the BCH. However, more capacity building of the Parties, especially, training-the-trainers on the latest communication tools, through which a wider audience can be reached at a time will go a long way.also, developing videos and documentaries from activities, which can be deployed during awareness campaigns would be helpful, as well.