



PRESS RELEASE N°093/2016

AUC holds workshop on “engaging the health and nutrition sectors in aflatoxin control in Africa”

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 23 March 2016: A two-day workshop under the theme “Mitigating the Health and Nutrition Impacts of Aflatoxins in Africa through Uncommon Partnerships” commenced today at the African Union Commission (AUC), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The workshop brought together diverse stakeholders mainly from the health and nutrition sectors, including representatives from African Union member states, research and academia, private sector, non-government organizations and development partners; agriculture and trade sectors were also well represented recognizing the need for cross fertilization of ideas and synergy across sectors affected by aflatoxins. The Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) of the AUC convened the meeting together with Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Amref Health Africa and other partners.



The objective of the workshop is to foster and reinforce multi-sectorial engagements for aflatoxin control, particularly addressing health and nutritional hazards in Africa. The workshop is expected to increase awareness among health and nutrition professionals on the burden of aflatoxins in Africa and develop a roadmap for addressing health and nutrition challenges due to aflatoxins in Africa.

During the opening session Dr. Janet Edeme, Acting Director of Rural Economy and Agriculture of the AUC emphasized that aflatoxins pose a threat to food security, health and regional and international trade as well as broad developmental efforts. She noted that the impact of aflatoxins weighs heavily on human health and there is compelling evidence from the continent as tragically demonstrated by the outbreaks of acute aflatoxin poisoning in Kenya and the chronic exposure data from many other countries including Benin, Ghana, Cameroon, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, the Gambia and Uganda. These exposure cases have been generally linked to consumption of low grade aflatoxin-contaminated food stuffs.

She further added that aflatoxins are ravaging the continent, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. Children are exposed to the toxins while in the mother's womb which continues during breast feeding and the introduction of weaning foods.

Dr. Amare Ayalew, Program Manager of Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA-AUC) stated that that Africa loses trade due to aflatoxins, which also undermine food security both in terms of the quantum of food rendered unfit and the low-grade contaminated food regularly consumed by millions of Africans. He underscored the bottom line to all these problems is the adverse health effects of aflatoxins.

He further elaborated that recommendations that emerge from this workshop will forge a way forward for the whole continent to mitigate the health impacts of aflatoxins. Therefore, he urged participants to focus more on the solutions and actions that are necessary to jointly combat the problem.

Dr. Joachim Osur, Director for regional programs and field officer of Amerf Health Africa, stated in his remarks that as an organization they recognize that by eliminating aflatoxin contamination they will not only be improving supply of plant foods such as maize and groundnuts, but also creating safer animal foods leading to healthier and more productive livestock. This will save governments significant funds currently being used to treat preventable illnesses. He stressed that tackling aflatoxin is therefore not just a nutritional and health issue, but a great development initiative that will help achieve a number of SDGs.

Speaking at the workshop Prof. J. David Miller Professor and NSERC Research Chair of Carleton University, Canada gave a presentation on a World Health Organization (International Agency for Research on Cancer, IARC) Working Group report on mycotoxin control in low and middle income countries. He focused on child health and pleaded for action for the "benefit of our children". He highlighted the recommendations of the IARC working group report, which has been distributed to 30,000 people worldwide and offers a sound basis for improved health in developing countries with a focus on human exposure to aflatoxins and fumonisins.

During the press conference that was held on engaging the Health and Nutrition Sectors in Aflatoxin Control in Africa, Dr. Edeme of the AUC highlighted that more than 5 billion

people in developing countries are chronically exposed to aflatoxins.



Dr. Joachim Osur of Amref Health Africa further added that the problem is at a community level; he stressed that partnering with communities is crucial to improving their health. He expressed that until the

district health system is able to come up with an intervention that can be implemented, this will continue to be seen as a problem.

Mr. Greg Garrett, director of Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), stated that 85 countries have mandated some kind of grain fortification for essential vitamins and minerals, and many of those are in Africa. However, the bad news is some 25% of crops worldwide are affected by mycotoxins, and that coordination is needed between different actors, PACA, the African Union and governments.

Ms. Martha Byanyima lead expert of sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Programme of Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) reiterated that COMESA is elaborating an action plan where they can take solutions and actions to member states and coordinate collective actions to ensure safe nutritious, food supplies.

The workshop will continue on the 24th March 2016.

HE/BH/AB/Mts

Media Contact:

Mr. MolaletTsedeke, Media Center Coordinator | Information and Communication Directorate | African Union Commission, via E-mail: MolaletT@africa-union.org

For further information:

Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: DIC@african-union.org | Website: www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

Follow us

Face book: <https://www.facebook.com/AfricanUnionCommission>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/_AfricanUnion

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/AUCommission>

Learn more at: <http://www.au.int>