

Advocacy and Communication Strategy for the Biosafety and Biosecurity Legal Framework



Context

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) recognizes that the risk of a catastrophic biological event continues to be magnified by global travel, urbanization, terrorist nefarious interest in weapons of mass destruction, and rapid advances in technology in manipulation of pathogens. Despite these risks, many African countries have little or no demonstrable biosafety, biosecurity and biorisk management policy/regulation capacity, as demonstrated by the WHO Joint External Evaluations (JEE) and Global Health Security Index (GHS Index). To rectify this, the Africa CDC, supported by its regional and global partners, launched the **Biosafety and Biosecurity Initiative (BBI)** to strengthen the biosafety and biosecurity systems and capacities of African Union (AU) Member States in order to mitigate and manage the risks of unintentional or deliberate releases of dangerous biological agents and toxins. This effort also assists Member States in complying with international requirements and regulations, such as the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1540.¹ To ensure a comprehensive and sustainable approach, One Health should be taken into account throughout the design and implementation of the initiative. Agriculture, environment, and many other sectors all play a role in ensuring proper biosafety and biosecurity capacity is extended across the continent. As such, it is critical to engage animal, plant, and human health communities – including laboratories and research facilities – and develop robust plans to harmonize and coordinate implementation activities on biosafety and biosecurity.

¹Africa CDC. Biosafety and Biosecurity Initiative. <https://africacdc.org/programme/laboratory-systems-and-networks/biosafety-and-biosecurity/>

In order to advance and coordinate the implementation of the BBI in an inclusive and consultative manner within the African continent, five multi-sectoral **Regional Biosafety and Biosecurity Technical Working Groups** (RBB-TWG) made up of experts from the AU Member States, were established. These RBB-TWGs, guided by agreed upon Terms of Reference (ToR), were convened by the Africa CDC secretariat and its Regional Collaborating Centers (RCCs). The RCCs will oversee the implementation of the BBI for their respective region.

Among its key objectives, the BBI seeks to develop a **Biosafety and Biosecurity Legal Framework for the African Continent** (BSBS Legal Framework) for use by African Union (AU) Member States. The BSBS Legal Framework serves two purposes: first, it may be used by a Member State to guide review of existing legal instruments to more fully understand its existing legal capacity to support national biosafety and biosecurity systems; second, the BSBS Legal Framework identifies ways that a Member State's legal instruments could be amended or developed to support a national biosafety and biosecurity system. In developing the BSBS Legal Framework, Africa CDC furthers its mandate to harmonize disease control and prevention policies and promote the prevention and control of diseases by building capacity of public health institutions in Member States. Member States are encouraged to use and adapt the BSBS Legal Framework at the national level to support the development of national legal instruments to bolster comprehensive national biosafety and biosecurity systems.

The nature and scope of existing BSBS Legal Frameworks for assuring biosafety and biosecurity practices among WHO Member States and more specifically among WHO AFRO Member States is very diverse.² Some countries have highly developed regulatory systems, with detailed legislation and well defined responsibilities and processes, while other countries may completely lack regulatory guidance on biosafety and biosecurity.² The BSBS Legal Framework outlines critical domains that should be incorporated into national legal instruments to further strengthen the Member State's existing national biosafety and biosecurity system. These domains are key areas addressed in the laws, decrees, or regulations that influence biosafety and biosecurity activities. They include:

- Authorization of the establishment of a lead entity/agency responsible for regulating and managing biosafety and biosecurity systems
- Development of national standards for biosafety and biosecurity
- Authority for biological risk assessment

²World Health Organization (WHO). WHO Guidance on Implementing Regulatory Requirements for Biosafety and Biosecurity in Biomedical Laboratories- A Step Approach. 2020. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/332244/9789241516266-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>. Accessed March 3, 2021.

- Regulation of laboratory and facility requirements for handling high consequence agents and toxins
- Education, training, and human resource development for all personnel who possess, use, manipulate, store, transfer or destroy/incinerate high consequence agents and toxins
- Transfer, storage, and disposal of high consequence agents and toxins
- Prohibition of all activities in the development, possession, and transfer of high consequence agents and toxins for the purpose of producing weapons of mass destruction.

All AU five (5) regions were consulted in the process of developing the BSBS Legal Framework, in collaboration with regional and international experts. To ensure strong, high-level political support as well as buy-in among Member States and other stakeholders, communicating the details of the BSBS Legal Framework and advocating for its adoption by AU structures, including the Specialized Technical Committees for Health and Legal Affairs, is essential. This advocacy must continue as Member States consider incorporation of the critical domains of the BSBS Legal Framework through country specific legal and parliamentary mechanisms. Regardless of the legal mechanism used by an individual country, support from the highest levels of Government is critical. Because details included in legal instruments that support BSBS measures at the national and laboratory or facility level have implications for the Ministry of Health as well as other agencies, and the support of the Minister of Health as well as high-level officials from other Ministries is essential. Africa CDC, working with Member States, will identify champions in the region to advocate and communicate the vision for the BSBS Legal Framework across the continent, but also domestic champions to encourage its domestication into national legislative instruments and implementation in countries across the continent. Africa CDC will also work to gain the support from influential entities outside the region, such as civil society and development partners, philanthropic organizations, and national governments.

This advocacy and communication strategy outlines the process of raising awareness and support for the BSBS Legal Framework among different stakeholders, as well as working to mobilize additional tools and resources for its use in countries across the region.



Objective of this Advocacy and Communication strategy

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Improve the likelihood that the AU will adopt the Biosafety and Biosecurity Legal Framework for use by Member States
- Engage all relevant sectors involved (human, animal, and environmental health) in the context of One Health initiative/approach
- Increase the number of AU Member States that use the BSBS Legal Framework to develop comprehensive biosafety and biosecurity legal instruments at national level
- Improve likelihood that AU Member State legislatures enact biosafety and biosecurity legal instruments and allocate funding necessary to comply with the provisions of the legal instruments.

Main activities to achieve objectives include:

- Increase awareness and understanding among relevant champions (i.e., member state leaders, civil society, or others) of the role of the Biosafety and Biosecurity Legal Framework in developing national biosafety and biosecurity systems;
- Build national-level political and social will for using the BSBS Legal Framework to develop national biosafety and biosecurity legal instruments by communicating the important role of law in establishing systems that protect people from accidental or deliberate releases of dangerous biological agents and toxins;
- Mobilize partnerships, tools, training and resources to support national review, adaptation, implementation of the critical domains of the BSBS Legal Framework.



Target audience and their communication needs

Key partners for these activities are placed into five categories:

- 1) Strategic Partners: These partners sit at the Government level, overseeing policy development and implementation. While not exclusively political leadership, these partners hold extensive power in domestic and international political spheres.
- 2) Operational Partners: These partners sit at the operational level, tasked with carrying out the policy priorities of strategic partners. They are domestic technical

experts and scientists who will be charged with implementing the activities that promote compliance with national BSBS legal instruments upon adoption and implementation in a Member State. They will be critical partners for early and consistent engagement throughout the process.

- 3) Non-Governmental Partners: These partners include domestic civil society and non-governmental entities, including journalists and local influencers. They do not always have the political or technical background but are important in gaining buy-in from a domestic audience, as well as providing critical operational support when needed.
- 4) External Partners: These external partners are a critical part of implementing the BSBS Legal Framework across the African Union Member States. They provide financial and technical support for biosafety and biosecurity capability development. In many cases, they could include international assistance programs, development banks, or private companies.
- 5) Member States: These are the beneficiaries of the Legal Framework for Biosafety and Biosecurity. They will implement the BSBS Legal Framework at the national level.

Media: They will create awareness of the BSBS in Member States. This will include creating awareness on main stream media, printouts and social media platforms among others.

Parliamentarians: Policy makers will be targeted especially those in the committee of Justice and Legal Affairs and Health, as well as other relevant sectors taking a One Health approach.



Key High-Level Messages for All Audiences:

- National Governments have a duty to keep their citizens safe from accidental or deliberate releases of dangerous biological agents and toxins.
- National legislatures are responsible for holding Governments accountable for carrying out this duty.
- Effective biosafety and biosecurity practices help nations counter both natural and man-made biological threats while also fostering safe scientific progress.

- Biosafety practices aim to protect people – and the surrounding community, animals and environment - from accidents associated with exposures to, or the unintentional release of, dangerous biological agents and toxins.
- Biosecurity practices aim to prevent unauthorized access, loss, theft, deliberate release, or misuse of hazardous biological agents, and associated research-related information. It is equally important to actively promote responsible conduct of life science research and oversight of dual-use risks.
- Agriculture, environment, and many other sectors all play a role in ensuring proper biosafety and biosecurity capacity is extended across the continent. We must engage animal, plant, and human health communities – including laboratories and research facilities – and develop robust plans to harmonize and coordinate implementation activities on biosafety and biosecurity.
- National legal instruments (i.e. legislation, regulations, decrees, aretes, etc.) are the foundation of whole-of-Government biosafety and biosecurity systems designed to keep people safe and secure and to preserve the forward progress of scientific research.
- The Africa CDC is developing a BSBS Legal Framework to guide countries as they develop national biosafety and biosecurity legal instruments and help ensure incorporation of key domains or characteristics of law.
- Sustained funding is critical to ensuring biosafety and biosecurity systems are effective.
- Sustained, high-level political attention to this issue will maintain momentum and ensure adoption of the Biosafety and Biosecurity Legal Framework by the African Union, which will lead the way for national biosafety and biosecurity legislation.
- Technical and financial partnerships are a critical part of building biosafety and biosecurity. We must work with domestic, international, civil society, and private sector partners to accomplish our goals.
- Because biological threats do not respect borders, we want to see an increase of the number of African Union Member States with comprehensive biosafety and biosecurity systems so that all public remain safe and secure.

Additional details and key messages are outlined in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. Proposed Activities and Timeline for Implementation of BSBS Legal Framework

Proposed Meeting	Proposed Timelines			Supporting/Coordinating Organization
	April - June Dates TBC	July - September Dates TBC	October – December Dates TBC	
Five (5) Regional Biosafety and Biosecurity TWG	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Africa CDC
African Union Members States (At least 2 from each region)	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Africa CDC
Champions from the Africa Region	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Africa CDC
Regional Economic Blocks (RECs)	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Africa CDC
African Biological Safety Association (AfBSA)	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Africa CDC
Pan African Parliament Two Plenary Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Four statutory meetings ● Relevant committee meetings ● Committee on Monetary and Financial Affairs ● Committee on Health, Labour and Social Affairs ● Committee on Transport, Industry, Communications, Energy, Science and Technology ● Committee on Cooperation, International Relations and Conflict Resolution 	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	NTI (contingent on funding)
Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	NTI (contingent on funding)
World Economic Forum Meetings (in Africa)	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	
World Bank Meetings of African Finance Ministers	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	Dates TBC	

Proposed Meeting	Proposed Timelines			Supporting/Coordinating Organization
	April - June May 5 – 6 May 24 – June 1	July - September	October – December	
WTO General Council Meeting				
World Health Assembly				
UNICEF Annual Session	1-4 June			
Executive Board Meeting of UNDP, UNFPA, and UNOPS; Annual Session	7 – 11 June			
GP GPWG Plenary Meeting				NTI (contingent on funding)
GP BSWG Intersessional Meeting				NTI (contingent on funding)
BWC Meeting of Experts		30 Aug – 8 Sept		NTI (contingent on funding)
United Nations General Assembly		Sept 14 – 30		
Annual Global Biosecurity Dialogue		Dates TBC		NTI (contingent on funding)
GP GPWG Plenary Meeting		Dates TBC		NTI (contingent on funding)
GP BSWG Intersessional Meeting		Dates TBC		NTI (contingent on funding)
BWC Meeting of States Parties			22 – 25 Nov	NTI (contingent on funding)



Engagement Map

African Union Development and Endorsement Process

Key messages will be developed specific for each stakeholder in collaboration with the Africa CDC Communication and advocacy team

Stage of Development	Engaged Partners
Development of Zero Draft	AU Representatives
Advocacy and Communication to stakeholders	Member States Members of the AU STC RECs Civil Society Influencers Media
Adoption	AU Representatives, Parliamentarians Media Member States

National Level Development and Implementation Process

Stage of Development	Engaged Partners
Ratification	Member States Parliamentarians Media AU representatives
Domestication <ul style="list-style-type: none">Review of legal systemDevelop a road map for implementation and Pilot in four Member StatesEnactment	
Monitoring and evaluating the process of implementation in Member States	AU Member States



Table 2: Key partners in advocacy and communication activities for the implementation of BSBS Legal Framework

Partner category	Role	Communication activity/channel	Key Messages	Performance indicators
Strategic Partners				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Union (AU) Members States Governing Board of AU Ministers of Health Pan African Parliament Parliamentary committees on legal affairs and public health of the AU Member States Champions (Selected Ministers of Health and other influential persons) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt BSBS Legal Framework by AU Ratify BSBS Legal Framework by Member States Influence policy to support domestication of the legal framework at national level Provide strategic direction for review, adaptation, and implementation of the BSBS Legal Framework at regional and national level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop ToRs for each stakeholder Special meetings with (i) Chair - Governing Board of AU Ministers of Health (ii) Champions (iii) Pan African Parliament (iv) Influential persons (v) RBB-TWG (vi) Regional Health Organizations (vii) RECs Develop and distribute promotional materials highlighting the role of the BSBS Legal Framework in strengthening Biosafety & Biosecurity principles at national level Utilize formal government & diplomatic channels for information distribution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BSBS Legal Framework will benefit the safety and security of all AU Member States. Maintaining high level attention on biosafety and biosecurity is necessary. Ratification and adoption of the BSBS Legal Framework is critical to mitigating the effects of future pandemics. Domestic investment and attention on BSBS benefits to all citizens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Special meetings conducted with key stakeholders Number of promotional materials distributed Number of high-level meetings in which messages were conveyed by champions

Partner category	Role	Communication activity/channel	Key Messages	Performance indicators
Operational Partners				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Biosafety and Biosecurity Technical Working Groups (RBB-TWG) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review, adapt, and implement the BSBS Legal Framework at the national level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support Member States to hold several forums about the legal framework at national level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight the importance of adapting to domestic context and aligning with existing plans or evaluations (i.e., national plans for health security) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Member States supported to hold forums at national level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Health organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operationalize and implement country specific legal instruments at national levels once BSBS Legal Framework is adopted/ratified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convene TWGs and RECs to develop common approaches to implementation with full participation across sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasize the need for coordinated implementation and technical action on this BSBS Legal Framework following ratification by Member States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of countries ratified the BSBS legal Framework in national context with country specific legal instruments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Economic Committees (RECs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with national partners to domesticate country specific legal instruments effectively 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of countries trained on the role of law in BSBS
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of countries completing legal mapping using the BSBS Legal Framework

Partner category	Role	Communication activity/channel	Key Messages	Performance indicators
Non-Governmental Partners				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The general public Journalists and health reporters Civil Society partners Development partners and national governments Philanthropic organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain public trust and understanding around biosafety and biosecurity system development Provide funding to support implementation of the advocacy and communication strategy. Provide Technical assistance in the development and implementation of the advocacy and communication strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate Provide Technical assistance in the development of the advocacy and communication strategy. Organize and conduct meetings with key stakeholders. Develop promotional materials for the BSBS Legal Framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the importance of strong biosafety and biosecurity systems, linking to benefits to society. Emphasize the importance of legal and regulatory mechanisms for accountability and safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of meetings conducted with key stakeholders. Number of promotional materials distributed Number of forums conducted with communities, journalists and health reporters.



Partner category	Role	Communication activity/channel	Key Messages	Performance indicators
External Partners				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Society Donors Development partners Philanthropic organizations National Governments Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support domestication and implementation of the BSBS Legal Framework Advocate for and publicize the BSBS Legal Framework to the communities at local level. Commitment to complying with the BSBS Legal Framework requirements. Monitor implementation and compliance to the requirements of the legal framework by Government and other stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold special forums with selected journalists and health reporters to explain the BSBS Legal Framework in a respective country. Develop and distribute promotional materials and articles on various communication channels including print and electronic news, TV, social media highlighting contents and importance of the BSBS Legal Framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative & coordinated efforts to build biosafety and biosecurity capacity on the African continent are essential to development. Coordinated mechanisms to build this capacity help reduce duplication of effort and standardize processes. The BSBS Legal Framework provides an opportunity for Africa to develop its systems in a unified way. Donor partners should work with Africa CDC and national governments to align programming under this BSBS Legal Framework once ratified in a country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of promotional events conducted (print, electronic news, TV, social media) Number of committed partners Existence of coordinated mechanisms through multilateral bodies such as the Global Partnership



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