

# PARTNERSHIP FOR AFLATOXIN CONTROL IN AFRICA

OVERVIEW OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION AND  
MERIDIAN INSTITUTE'S APPROACH TO BUILDING AN  
EFFECTIVE MODEL TO AFLATOXIN CONTROL IN AFRICA

April 2018

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011, African leaders noted the importance of addressing food safety and other bottlenecks to unlock the continent's health, agriculture and trade potential. These leaders asked the African Union Commission (AUC) and the NEPAD Agency to establish an Africa-led, Africa-owned partnership that aims to coordinate and support aflatoxin mitigation and management across the health, agriculture and trade sectors in Africa. Between 2011 and 2017, the AUC with support from Meridian Institute (Meridian) built an effective, multi-stakeholder approach, the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA).

Working with many stakeholders, the AUC and Meridian established an Africa-owned and Africa-led partnership embedded in and leveraging existing structures. The success of PACA is due to the tremendous support from invested stakeholders all over Africa. Some of the key ingredients for success included:

1. PACA created a continent-wide, comprehensive program, while catalyzing actions on the ground;
2. AUC, serving as PACA's host institution, provided key strategic assets to advocate for and mobilize action;
3. Country experts developed national evidence based analysis of aflatoxin prevalence and controls, which -proved foundational for coordinated country actions;
4. Regional Economic Communities prompted Member States to align to the PACA approach, PACA Strategy and Regional aflatoxin control action plans;
5. The PACA approach was piloted in six focus countries to draw on lessons for scaling up;
6. Technical organizations implemented catalytic projects on the ground that complemented continent-wide coordination and awareness-raising at the policy level;
7. PACA developed policy recommendations and public information about the extent of the problem and feasible solutions to help governments prioritize aflatoxin mitigation;
8. The private sector played a key role in PACA's efforts to implement and scale change; and
9. All stakeholders considered aflatoxin a feasible entry point for addressing a broader array of food safety problems.

In the last six years, PACA has become a strategic leader in the fight against aflatoxin. PACA is now the credible resource on aflatoxin and related matters for many African governments. Recognizing the assets created by PACA, multiple funders are now providing financial support to the AUC-based PACA Secretariat, and to country-led aflatoxin control action plans.





## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Aflatoxins, highly toxic fungal metabolites produced by certain strains of *Aspergillus flavus* and related species, have become a major food safety challenge for Africa. Studies of prevalence of aflatoxins in crops and livestock and human exposure to aflatoxins show the widespread occurrence of aflatoxins in African diets. Aflatoxins cause liver cancer and are associated with adverse health effects, including immune suppression and childhood stunting. Aflatoxin contamination in food limits access to markets and the incomes of millions of smallholder farmers. Aflatoxin contamination in key value chains undermines food security and nutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>1</sup>

With this background, in March 2011, participants in the 7th Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program Partnership Platform (CAADP PP) urged the African Union Commission (AUC) and the NEPAD Agency to establish an Africa-led, Africa-owned partnership to support management of aflatoxins in Africa.

During the same year, based on a year of exploratory research and discussions with the African Union Commission and a broad range of African stakeholders and global experts, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (the Foundation) awarded Meridian Institute a grant in November 2011 to support the creation of the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA). The award enjoyed broad support from key stakeholders for the formation of PACA.<sup>2</sup>

In this brief, we describe the approach the AUC and Meridian Institute used to build the effective, multi-stakeholder partnership for the six year period, from 2011 to 2017 (PACA Phase I). Principles, as well as the steps and stages of aflatoxin management, are included in the following documents: [PACA Strategy 2013-2022](#); [Overview of PACA Interventions and Results](#); and the [Progress Update PACA Phase I and Scope and Approaches of PACA Phase II](#).

<sup>1</sup> C.P. Wild, J.D. Miller, J.D. Groopman. 2015. Mycotoxin control in low- and middle-income countries. International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) Working Group Report 9. Paris, France.

<sup>2</sup> The award also supported implementation of several early-win, pre-harvest ([Aflasafe](#)) and post-harvest ([Storage and Drying for Aflatoxin Prevention: AflaSTOP](#)) aflatoxin mitigation projects.

## 2. PACA'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To achieve the goal of effectively coordinating sustainable aflatoxin control in Africa, stakeholders identified the need to create a partnership structure for multi-country collaboration and comprehensive aflatoxin management. Working with many stakeholders, AUC leadership in the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) and Meridian Institute coordinated their partnership building, strategy development, capacity building, and resource mobilization expertise to create the following fundamental attributes where PACA should:



Stand as an Africa-owned and an Africa-led partnership;



Leverage and be embedded in existing structures, including the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP), AUC leadership, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), National Government Ministries; and emerging national and regional food safety systems;



Promote an evidence-based comprehensive approach to aflatoxin mitigation, using all available research and information to advance solutions across value chains;



Foster collaboration across agriculture, health and trade sectors to ensure effective aflatoxin mitigation in all relevant sectors;



Involve relevant stakeholders, including the AUC, RECs, global and African private sector agribusiness, farmer organizations, consumer organizations, researchers, and governments;



Enhance existing capacities to minimize the harmful effects of aflatoxin and, ultimately, other food safety challenges.

A diverse range of African and international organizations had been working on aflatoxin mitigation for many years, at the time of PACA's inception. However, these efforts were dispersed and limited in scope. Representatives of a cross-section of key stakeholders acknowledged that there was a need for a coherent continent-wide approach to aflatoxin control to drive the much-needed systemic change going beyond fragmented and scattered efforts, by building awareness, sharing information, and catalyzing actions at all levels to fully manage and control aflatoxin.

Following the 7th CAADP PP, the AUC formed an interim Steering Committee (SC) to design the PACA partnership and plan its official launch. After one year of stakeholder and interim SC meetings, a multi-stakeholder structure was agreed upon. In conjunction with Africa Food Security and Nutrition Day, on 31 October 2012, the PACA SC was officially launched and on 1 November 2012, the AU Joint Conference of Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Trade approved the establishment of PACA, this decision was endorsed by the African Union Executive Council through Decision No. EX.CL/768 (XXII).

PACA partners had been demonstrating effective methods for aflatoxin mitigation, in particular by scaling up effective pre-harvest biocontrol technology such as Aflasafe, and promoting storage and drying interventions. During PACA's early years (2012 – 2013), AUC and Meridian's partners built on the existing momentum to establish the PACA structure for continental coordination, demonstrating a comprehensive, effective approach to aflatoxin control, and strengthening the evidence-based information on the prevalence of the problem and available solutions. PACA created and tested a framework for assessing socio-economic impacts of aflatoxin contamination and a framework for country actions in [Nigeria and Tanzania](#), for example.

Adhering to these principles and through these activities, the AUC and Meridian established governance structures, a clear strategy, and implementation capacity at the continental, regional and country-level to try to build sustainable and effective controls for aflatoxin in Africa.

### 3. ESTABLISH GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

At the outset, Meridian supported the AUC and stakeholders across Africa (African governments, private sector partners and organizations, farmers organizations, civil society and development partners) to provide strategic direction and oversight of PACA activities. Initially, stakeholders established a multi-stakeholder interim Steering Committee to guide a consultative process and select a host institution. The interim Steering Committee identified the African Union Commission (AUC) as the custodian of PACA. By integrating PACA into the AUC, it augmented its capacity to create change by leveraging the AUC's political and convening power to build awareness of the aflatoxin problem,

prioritize aflatoxin mitigation among RECs and Member States, advocate for an enabling policy environment and catalyze efforts to implement aflatoxin control and management activities.

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), a flagship program of the AUC, provided the framework for embedding PACA to ensure sustainability and African ownership. CAADP as a notably successful program of the AUC, contributed to policy changes in countries, improved coordination and collaboration between sectors, and demonstrated alignment to country priorities through National Agricultural Food Security Investment Plans (NAFSIPs). The PACA initiative, as a flagship program of the AUC, integrates aflatoxin and other food safety issues in the CAADP framework. As a result, an increasing number of agricultural, nutrition and food security fora are discussing aflatoxins amongst other food security and food safety-related issues.

### 4. CREATE A BROADLY SUPPORTED PACA STRATEGY

To ensure the maximum impact of PACA resources, AUC and Meridian convened a Strategy Workshop in 2013 that engaged 110 stakeholders from across Africa to develop a 10-year strategy for PACA. The PACA Strategy set out a comprehensive set of Strategic Thematic Areas (STAs) and Key Results Areas (KRAs) that covered all activities required to mitigate the harmful effects of aflatoxins. The 10-year PACA Strategy guides actions by all partners on the African continent. The PACA SC developed a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework aligned to the 10-year PACA Strategy and the CAADP Results Framework to ensure progress and accountability.



## 5. ESTABLISH A PACA SECRETARIAT AT AUC

Based on the framework of the PACA Strategy, the PACA Secretariat identified a narrow set of roles to support African governments' effectiveness by serving as convener, knowledge manager, catalytic support provider, and short-term technical assistance provider (figure 1, below). The PACA Secretariat described its strategy in the [Refined Mid-Term Strategic Direction \(RMTS\)](#) that prioritized interventions for the 2014-2017.

To support the implementation of PACA activities, stakeholders agreed that during the early years of PACA I, Meridian Institute would support AUC in providing a Secretariat to coordinate and drive PACA activities. The PACA SC supported the creation of a small, technical secretariat within the AUC with requisite technical expertise to operationalize PACA. Meridian Institute and AUC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in September 2012, to enable the transfer of operating funds to the AUC and to provide ongoing support by Meridian Institute to assist the PACA Secretariat during its start-up phase. AUC established the PACA Secretariat within DREA. The AUC provides leadership, strategic and organizational support.

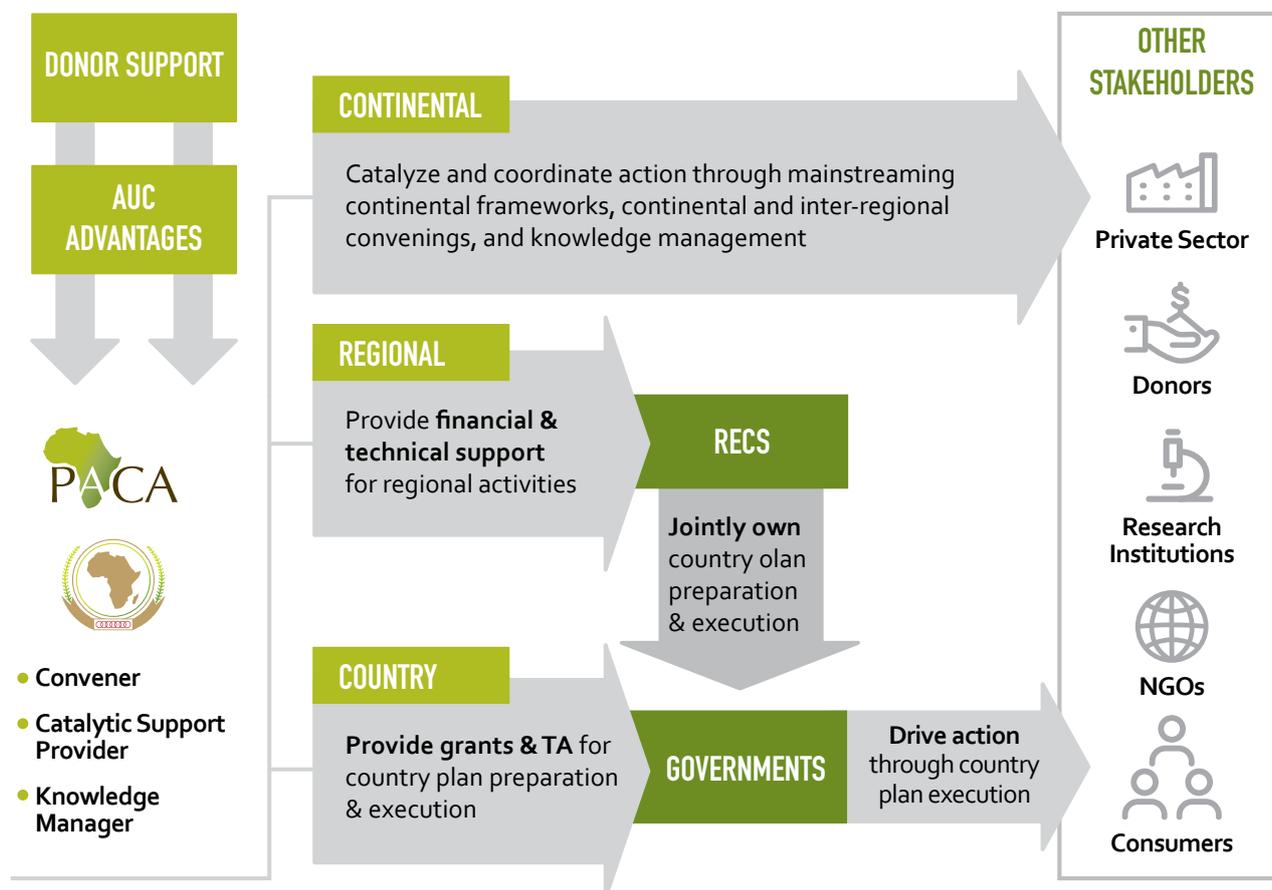
AUC and Meridian Institute agreed to a gradual transition of Secretariat responsibilities over the next three years, which enabled the AUC to gradually build up staff and

other capacity following stringent AUC procedures. Following a mid-term review of the grant in early 2014, all key partners (including AUC, PACA Steering Committee, and Meridian Institute) supported the continued and full transition of responsibilities to the AUC-based PACA Secretariat.

A competitive search and hiring of an aflatoxin expert as Program Manager to lead the PACA Secretariat team provided for an internal resource for PACA, and for effective finalization of the PACA 10-year strategy (2013-2022). During the second half of Phase I (2014 – 2016), PACA further established its continental knowledge management activities, continued to raise awareness, and further established a comprehensive approach for aflatoxin control at regional and country levels (from national policies, regulations and standards through education programs to best practices and pre- and post-harvest technologies).

In the interim period, and since the AUC-based PACA Secretariat has been in full operation, a third party has been needed to complement AUC's procurement and financial management systems. Meridian Institute has been fulfilling these Third-Party Grant Manager functions. PACA-AUC requests Meridian to execute key activities that require immediate actions which can be challenging in the AUC procurement, which follows a rigorous and long process. This has allowed for timely execution of

### The PACA Secretariat's Value Proposition



certain programmatic activities by the secretariat. AUC, as a continental body, operates under strict procurement rules that require an open process for all hiring decisions and consultant engagements, as well as strict financial controls that require high-level, in-advance approvals for certain expenditures. Although the hiring and procurement processes are very transparent, the processes are extensive and challenging for an entity that is hiring new staff, engaging in-country level activities, and moving quickly to engage stakeholders.

PACA has created an effective Third-Party Grant Management structure that includes the following features:

- AUC and the Third Party signed and implemented a Memorandum of Understanding.
- AUC and the Third Party signed a sub-grant to execute key activities that would otherwise be delayed through the AUC procurement system.
- AUC assigned a Finance Officer to manage the sub-grant and help oversee the Third Party.
- AUC-based PACA Secretariat prepared annual PACA Work Plans and Budgets, for AUC and PACA Steering Committee approval that specified the funds to be managed on the AUC budget, as well as those to be channeled through the Third Party.
- The Third Party provided quarterly financial and narrative progress reports based on a template developed by the AUC. PACA Secretariat and the Third Party conduct regular conference calls to review progress and jointly plan activities.

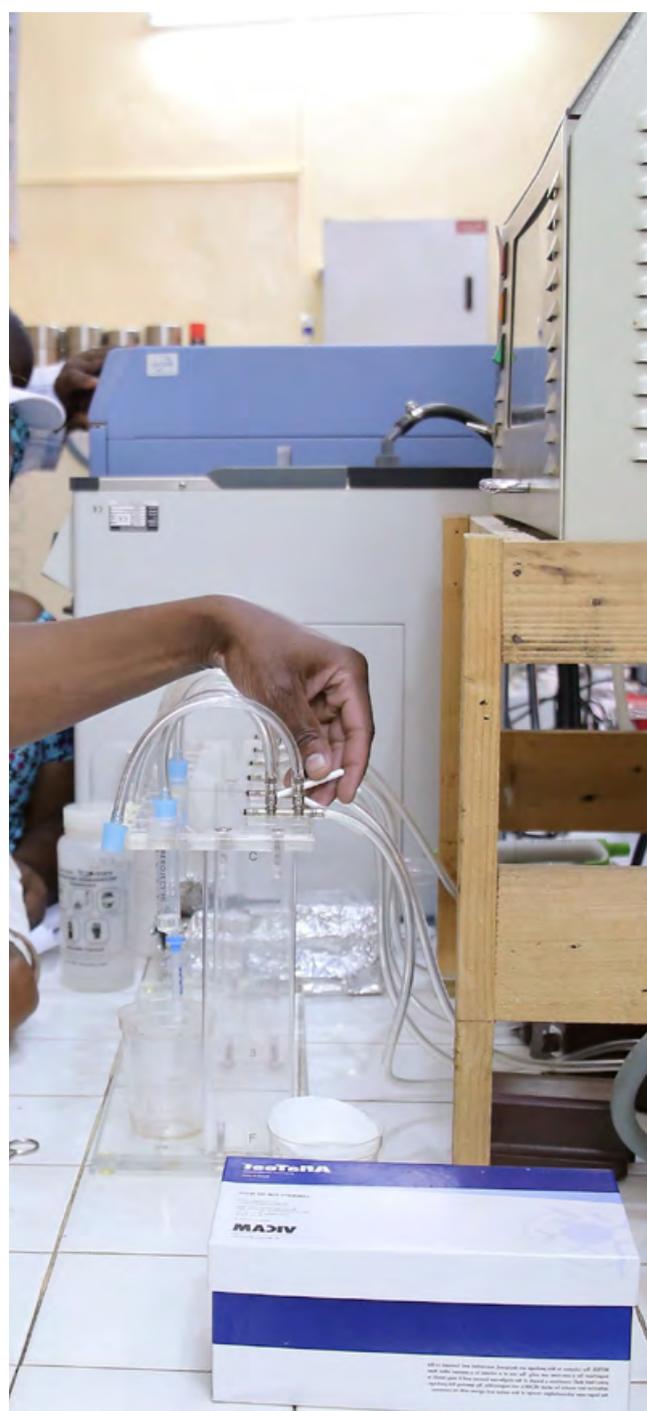
## 6. ESTABLISH PACA PROGRAM AT COUNTRY LEVEL

PACA launched implementation in pilot countries in 2014 after an elaborate and objective country selection process that involved a broad range of stakeholders (including ECOWAS, COMESA, SADC and EAC as well as participants of a Side Event at the 10th CAADP PPM). PACA has been supporting Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, The Gambia and Uganda in implementing aflatoxin interventions at country level. PACA established country offices hosted in appropriate institutions in the various countries, with a PACA Country Officer coordinating the aflatoxin mitigation interventions. At the country level, PACA Country Officers and the PACA Secretariat works closely with RECs and local country stakeholders through a Country Steering Committee to support the preparation, execution, and oversight of country government-led, and stakeholder aligned country plans. The Secretariat's country activities build on the country planning work already underway. The country plans are being executed through a staged process:

- **Stage One:** Gather evidence to inform the plan
- **Stage Two:** Develop, validate and finalize the country plan

- **Stage Three:** Mainstream plan into national strategies for accountability and sustainability
- **Stage Four:** Build government capacity to implement the plan
- **Stage Five:** Monitor progress and advocate

PACA has found that the success and sustainability of its Pilot Country activities depends on the in-country leadership capacity of Country Officers, as well as the technical capacity of local consultants to conduct independent analysis of and planning for the mitigation of aflatoxin. The Third-Party Grant Manager has provided PACA Secretariat the flexibility to engage Country Officers and Pilot Country Consultants from the respective countries, thereby strengthening local capacity for aflatoxin mitigation.



## 7. ENHANCE IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY

In the years 2014 -16, PACA Secretariat gradually expanded its staff to the current full complement of proficient science, policy and management experts, including six Country Officers dedicated to supporting governments in their capacity to create, adopt, and implement solutions and to provide the catalytic functions described in the Secretariat's Refined Mid-Term Strategy.

PACA Secretariat and the SC forged strong working relationships with over 50 partner organizations across the continent in all relevant sectors to comprehensively address aflatoxin on the continent. As a result of PACA's advocacy and coordination work, awareness is increasing among stakeholders. More governments, Development Partners, private sector companies, and development organizations are now interested in aflatoxins. For example, private sector and development partners have channeled more funds towards aflatoxin related research on the continent since 2012 than during all of the pre-PACA years combined. And, many more organizations are now including aflatoxin control in their agricultural development or nutrition initiatives. The 10-year PACA Strategy effectively guides and directs the actions of partners across the continent.

PACA serves as a cohesive platform for focusing the resources of multiple funders and development partners towards aflatoxin control. PACA is garnering support from multiple Development Partners including European Union, Government of Germany, USAID, US Department of Agriculture, UN Food and Agriculture Organization, World Health Organization, Technical Center for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Mars, and Nestle.

At the country-level, PACA continues to work to ensure the long-term sustainability of aflatoxin mitigation efforts by developing a framework for national resource mobilization strategies. PACA's country -level committees facilitate business meetings to identify and commit resources to national action plans for aflatoxin control. For example, PACA supported the activities of the Government of Tanzania to obtain a \$20 million grant from the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) for implementation of the national aflatoxin control plan.

Based on the political leadership of the AUC and PACA's model of engaging diverse stakeholders, African ownership and leadership emerged through PACA. In fact, the AUC is promoting PACA governance system as a model for other initiatives. For example, Specialized Technical Committee of African Ministers of Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment endorsed the PACA model piloted in six countries for use in all AU member states. In addition, funders are now requiring that new proposals for aflatoxin mitigation are aligned with the PACA strategy—a successful example of PACA's success at fostering a platform for harmonization of aflatoxin control efforts.

### LESSONS LEARNED & INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

The success of PACA is largely due to the tremendous support from all of the invested stakeholders in Africa, including the Africa Union Commission. PACA's comprehensive systems approach is rooted in cutting-edge theories for creating systemic change to solve complex social problems.<sup>3</sup> PACA's aflatoxin management activities were driven by a coordinated continental approach, working within existing structures, taking advantage of the dedicated regional and country-level efforts already underway, and installing creative, new, innovative approaches to aflatoxin management. Following are some of the key ingredients for success:

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the [collective impact framework](#) identifies five key elements for social change, including: sharing a common agenda for change; collecting data and measuring results consistently; a plan of action; open and continuous communication; and a backbone organization(s) with staff and specific set of skills.



a. **PACA created a continent-wide, comprehensive program, while catalyzing actions on the ground.** PACA continuously sought to balance the need for continental activities while addressing a broad array of solutions and actions on the ground. By developing the continental and pilot country activities in parallel, PACA has been able to offer guidance and results that can be used by all stakeholders across Africa. Putting the tools in the hands of local stakeholders and offering technical resources has empowered African governments and other stakeholders to take action.



b. **Country-Plan Approach proved foundational for coordinated efforts at country level.** Using a step-wise approach for aflatoxin mitigation to guide Governments and rallying and stakeholders to develop and align around country owned action plans has been key in triggering systemic change, attracted funding allocation to aflatoxin control, and promotes sustainability. The creation of multi-stakeholder policy and technical platforms through the National ATWGs and SCs to support implementation of country plans breaks down silos in relation to food safety. In countries like Malawi where there is no food safety coordination system, this action has triggered the desire for the Government to work with all concerned ministries dealing with elements of food safety in a disjointed manner to come together and jointly plan to organize an effective food safety mechanism.



c. **AUC, serving as PACA's host institution, provides key strategic assets to advocate for and mobilize action** to control the harmful impacts of aflatoxins. By integrating with the AUC, PACA takes advantage of the convening and political power of the AUC to coordinate continent-wide efforts, raise awareness, facilitate information sharing, and catalyze action. Through the political leadership of the AUC, PACA's effort to combat aflatoxins is integrated into regional frameworks, national government policies, and other African institutions' agendas—creating an *African-led and African-owned effort*. PACA's structure, including the engagement of a Third-Party Grant Manager, allows it to benefit from AUC's convening power and political leadership, while maintaining the flexibility to efficiently implement aflatoxin mitigation programs in the countries where they are most urgently needed.



d. **Developing catalytic projects on the ground to complement continent-wide coordination and awareness-raising at the policy level is an effective approach to achieving impact and scale.** Projects such as Aflasafe and AflaSTOP helped PACA and partners catalyze early-win efforts that demonstrated impact. Aflasafe and AflaSTOP developed tangible solutions needed to manage aflatoxins. These technologies are suited for adoption by smallholder farmers who are key stakeholders in controlling aflatoxins at the pre-harvest, harvest and post-harvest phase of key value chains.



e. **Agreeing on policy recommendations and public information about the extent of the problem and feasible solutions is required to help governments prioritize aflatoxin mitigation.** By raising awareness and offering solutions to the aflatoxin problem, PACA has been able to catalyze actions by governments that had long ignored the aflatoxin problem. Pilot country and other governments are now taking action to mitigate the harmful effects of aflatoxin.



f. **Considering the private sector as a key partner in its efforts to implement and scale creates change.** Private sector engagement is critical to ensuring that solutions meet demand, can be produced locally and can be distributed to smallholders. Partnering with private sector through direct participation in decision making, as well as financial investment, creates market incentives for contamination-free crops. The private sector, especially in the form of global food companies, provides expertise on food safety controls in the supply chain that cannot be replicated by the public sector.



g. **Aflatoxin is a feasible entry point for addressing a broad array of food safety problems.** PACA demonstrated aflatoxins as a tangible continental problem with well-known solutions. PACA framed aflatoxin as part of a broader array of food safety issues with substantial actions needed to mitigate aflatoxin contamination. This approach should be used to enhance existing capacity and address broader food safety issues.

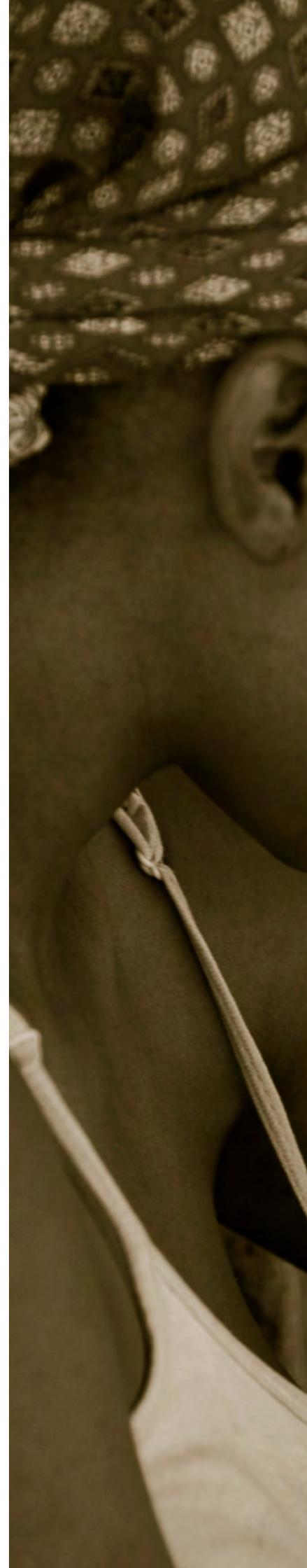
## CONCLUSION

Through the last six years of activity, PACA has become a strategic leader in the fight against aflatoxin. PACA is now the credible resource on aflatoxin and related matters for many African governments. PACA undertook early analyses to generate evidence and inform country and regional aflatoxin control action plans and created assets for aflatoxin mitigation at the grassroots level. PACA's model of enabling an Africa-owned and led advocacy and communication organization, supported by regional and country-led actions, contributed to active advocacy from key stakeholders, including public policy decision makers.

Across the continent, PACA and its many partner organizations are now working together to implement comprehensive approaches to minimizing aflatoxin contamination and exposure in some of the most affected regions in Africa.

Recognizing the assets created by PACA, multiple funders are now providing financial support to the AUC-based PACA Secretariat, and to country-led aflatoxin control action plans. PACA continues to work to create systemic changes for effective aflatoxin control at the continental, regional and country-led, grassroots level. And, with additional support, this model for managing a major food safety threat on the continent will become a broader food safety program for Africa.

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More information about PACA:  
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