Contents: Page
1. African Countries at Crossroads 2
2. What is the cost of not adopting GMOs? 2
3. A common regulatory approach and policy position 2
4. Regional Bio-Safety Research Partners 2
5. Regional Bio-Safety Project Coordination 2
6. Stakeholder consultation 2
7. Key project activities 3
8. Project co-ordinator’s profile & publications 4
9. Feature Article 4
10. Publications 4

Editorial
The role of biotechnology in spurring agricultural-led economic transformation and sustainable development in Africa is subject to furious scientific debate and intense public controversy. African governments, therefore, face enormous uncertainty and pressure as they deliberate on national and regional policies, programmes, and regulations that attempt to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks of biotechnological innovation and products. The FANRPAN Biosafety programme is a regional analytical effort to accompany government processes with proper assessment and accurate information. The project covers three pilot countries: Malawi, Mauritius and South Africa. FANRPAN is grateful for the financial support received from Program for Bio-safety Systems (PBS), USAID and CTA.

Dr Lindiwe Majele Sibanda, CEO, FANRPAN
Developing countries in general and in particular those in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), are at crossroads as to whether or not to embrace agricultural biotechnology related applications and products such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The African continent faces various challenges, including declining agricultural productivity as well as increasing food insecurity and labour, lower environmental pollution, reduced human exposure to chemicals, increase in insect-control efficiency and increased farm level incomes. Conversely, concerns have been raised about the potential ethical, environmental and food safety threats that GMOs may pose.

**Pace of Adoption: What is the cost of not adopting GMOs?**

The pace at which SADC countries are engaging in biotechnology is a cautious and precautionary one. This is partly caused by the lag in internal policy and regulatory capacities to manage GMOs and fear of encountering difficulties in selling crops in some international markets and losing vital foreign currency. On the other hand, the cost of not adopting GMOs might be very high for the SADC countries. There is a likelihood of losing significant income gains through better technology and a danger of not being able to utilise emergency food aid from organisations such as the World Food Programme (WFP). Failure by the SADC countries to engage in agricultural biotechnology is likely to increase the technology divide regionally and globally. The cost of establishing and implementing precautionary policies and biosafety infrastructure, to assess risks that might be posed by GM crops and managing movement of GM materials across international borders, are major challenges for SADC countries.

**A common regulatory approach and policy position**

The configuration of countries into sub-regional initiatives, in this case SADC, complicates matters towards a common regional policy on biotechnology and GMOs in particular. While each country strives to establish the policy and regulatory frameworks on bio-safety and biotechnology, few have the capacity to fully enforce them. This makes the need for a common regulatory approach and policy position in the SADC region plausible through setting acceptable standards that could be approved across countries.

**The FANRPAN Regional Bio-Safety Study**

The main objective of the FANRPAN regional bio-safety research project is to document a balanced review of the technical information needed to inform SADC’s regional bio-safety policy choices responsibly. The initiative is designed to generate, for the SADC countries, new information about the possible economic and social costs and benefits of attempting to remain a “GM-free” region. This project will be undertaken in three SADC countries i.e. Malawi, Mauritius and South Africa. The three selected countries have active national FANRPAN networks, very strong national biotechnology institutions and have actively engaged in the development of functional bio-safety policies and legislation.

**Research partners and collaborators**

This project is a collaborative effort between FANRPAN and the IFPRI-led Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) and is financially supported by the USAID. PBS’s main purpose in Southern Africa is to support the USAID’s Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA) goal, through increased agricultural productivity and reduced barriers in the trade of agricultural GM commodities. FANRPAN will undertake research through its national nodes in the three focal countries represented by the University of Pretoria, University of Mauritius and Bunda College in Malawi. The technical partners include AfricaBio in South Africa, BioEroc in Malawi, and the Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute (MSIRI). The three technical partners are already involved in the on-going PBS activities in Southern Africa, supported by USAID Southern Africa Regional Office. Prof Idah Sithole, John Komen and Dr. Isaac Minde of ASARECNECAPAPA provide technical support to the project. Maybe we could say -provide additional technical support -as the before mentioned three institutions also supply technical support.

**Bio-Safety Project Coordination**

A full time Regional Project Coordinator (RPC), Marnus Gouse, has been appointed to oversee the project and is based at the FANRPAN South African node office. The RPC is responsible for supporting the in country research, linking the project with similar international initiatives, launching and managing the project website, and producing the regional synthesis reports, policy briefs and project newsletters. In the three study countries, a national consortium, comprising of a representative from the FANRPAN National Node, one representative from a national research institution with expertise in biotechnology and a government representative, is responsible for coordinating the project. The three representatives constitute the National Project Management Team (NPMT) while a National Resource Person (NRP), appointed and supervised by the NPMT, will be responsible for the country research.

**Multi-stakeholder consultation**

Multi-stakeholder dialogues will be an important component of the project’s strategy. All key stakeholders will be involved in regular dialogue, so that the analysis is firmly based on their input. Key bodies in trade, food security and biotechnology/biosafety will be engaged regularly at the relevant national, regional levels.
### Key project activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda setting and constituency building</th>
<th>Desk research and analysis</th>
<th>Empirical data collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main objective of this activity is to identify key stakeholders including individuals, institutions and organisations in the three focal countries involved directly or indirectly in trade, biotechnology and food security related issues. The perceptions and positions of the stakeholders regarding possible economic/commercial risks that SADC countries are likely to encounter if planting of GM crops is permitted will be documented and analysed.</td>
<td>Data for each of the three countries on volume, value and destination of food and feed exports will be assembled for estimation of commercial risks/export losses that the three countries may face if GM crops are released for commercial production. A literature review will broadly revolve around the implications of GM commodities on trade, farm income and food security at global, regional (African context), sub-regional and national levels. Market access barriers and consumer preferences associated with GMOs in the destination export markets will be documented.</td>
<td>Data will be collected on national food imports including emergency food aid as well as food aid policies. This activity will aim at establishing the possible food security benefits that SADC countries may gain from placing fewer restrictions on GM commodity imports in the form of emergency GM food aid. Information will also be collected on the production of main crops, including cotton and maize. The data will be used to estimate farm income benefits that might trickle down to farmers if the relevant authorities in the SADC region permitted commercial production of transgenic crops.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### National workshops

National workshops will be held in each of the focal countries. The workshops will seek to disseminate and share research findings on the implications of modern biotechnology on trade and food security in the focal countries. The workshops will also seek to capture the thoughts of these countries on the need for a regional common policy on GMOs. National workshop reports will be submitted to the SADC secretariat for onward transmission to focal points to start influencing the process aimed at forging a common position and policy on biosafety, trade and food security at regional level.

### Regional workshop

A regional workshop bringing together key stakeholders from the SADC countries and representatives from the SADC Biotechnology focal points will be convened. Stakeholders will actively participate in consolidating findings emerging from national workshops and the justification for regional policy choices. The range of regional policy options acceptable to the SADC countries will be explored. Leadership and facilitation for the regional workshop sessions will be provided by FANRPAN.

### Information dissemination

Project findings will be disseminated through a project web page on the FANRPAN website as well as through newsletters, policy briefs and a monograph on issues emerging from the project. National and regional workshop reports and the final project document on regional policy options will be submitted to the SADC Food, Agriculture and Natural Resource secretariat for onward dispatch to SADC Ministers of Agriculture.
Profile of the Regional Biosafety Project Coordinator – Marnus Gouse

Marnus has written several publications on biotechnology including:


Country contacts for project updates:

South Africa - Johan Kirsten, University of Pretoria, Email: Johan.Kirsten@up.ac.za
Malawi - Mathews Madola, Bunda College of Agriculture, Email: mathews@malawi.net
Mauritius - Balraj Rajkomar, University of Mauritius, Email: balraj@uom.ac.mu

Regional coordinators’ contact:

Marnus Gouse, University of Pretoria, Email: mgouse@tuks.co.za
Lindiwe Majele Sibanda, FANRPAN, Email: l.sibanda@fanrpan.org

Feature by Fred Kalibwani

What policies are currently. What policies ought to be.

Blinds that cover the affairs of government
Tools used by dominant groups in society to promote their interest
Instruments that serve to perpetuate and deepen existing divisions and inequalities in society
Mired in secrecy and technical language
The domain of technocrats and experts
Are complex systems
Citizens are generally excluded from the formulation process

Windows into the affairs of government
Tools used by the government of the day to ensure equity in the entire population
Instruments to redistribute wealth within society
Public documents and Popular versions written in user friendly language
Involve all stakeholders
Transparent
Participatory consultative process involving all citizens

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the author(s) and not necessarily endorsed or representative of the co-sponsoring or supporting organisations.

Funding of this publication is made possible by (CTA) Technical Centre for Agriculture, Rural Cooperation (ACP-EU) and USAID.