

FANRPAN

Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network

PRESS RELEASE

KENYA LAUNCHES BIOTECHNOLOGY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

"As a science trained person, I believe in facts, science-based information and not in myths, fiction and superstition", says the Hon. Kenyan Minister of Agriculture, Mr. William Ruto, at the launch of the Kenyan government's biotechnology public awareness campaign—BioAWARE-- held in Nairobi on 25 September 2008.

Kenya had approved field testing of genetically modified (GM) bollworm resistant cotton and insect resistant GM maize under existing national legislation. The Biosafety Bill, developed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology, will regulate and guide responsible and safe implementation, and commercialization of some of these products. The Bill will go to Parliament in October.

The Minister highlighted development of biotechnology in Kenya: commercial production of plants through tissue culture, crop improvement through marker-assisted selection, clonal forestry propagation, and rapid disease diagnostic tests for livestock.

"Biotechnology in the fullest sense of the word is critical for Africa's development. It is an integrated application of a broad range of scientific techniques to generate products and services that are of high medical, agricultural, industrial and environmental value to humankind", said Ruto. "Many African governments agree that the Millenium Development Goals to reduce poverty by 2015 will not be realized unless they embrace emerging technologies such as modern biotechnology".

"Poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, and climate change are serious threats that undermine achieving the MDG", Ruto said.

The Minister emphasized that the ongoing debate about biotechnology in the country and globally is a manifestation of the consequences of misinformation and poor communication. The main objective of the BioAWARE communication strategy in Kenya is to provide an all inclusive mechanism for awareness creation and raise the level of understanding and appreciation of biotechnology. The target audiences of the communication strategy will include all levels of society from the agricultural sector, ministries, policy makers, academics to farmers and civil society.

Ruto concluded: "Communication is a very strong rope that binds people together. However, it is like a hammer: if used properly it can drive a nail into the wood; if used carelessly, it can harm the thumb of the user. Thus it can repair or destroy."

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By: Dr. Wynand J. van der Walt, FoodNCropBio

The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) is an autonomous regional stakeholder driven policy research, analysis and implementation network that was formally established in 1997. FANRPAN was formed by the governments, researchers, policy analysts and farmers, private sector of 13 Southern African countries, along with other stakeholders, to develop such knowledge by strengthening the region's capacity for policy analysis and by fostering stakeholder participation in policymaking processes. FANRPAN currently has activities in 13 Southern African countries namely Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Since its inception in 1997, FANRPAN has established itself as a reliable source of research-backed policy advice and an inclusive platform for policy dialogue.

VISION: A food secure southern Africa free from hunger and poverty.

MISSION To promote effective food, agriculture and natural resources policies by

- supporting demand-driven **policy research**,
- amplifying the **voices** of farmers and civil society groups in policy debates and facilitating linkages between government and civil society, and
- **building capacity** for policy analysis and policy dialogue in southern Africa.

Prime objective of the Regional Approach to Biosafety for Southern African Countries (RABSAC) study is to identify issues like barriers to movement of technology, potential barriers to trade in GM commodities and implications for regional food security.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of FANRPAN

Regional Secretariat

141 Cresswell Road, Weavind Park 0184. Private Bag X813, Silverton 014
Pretoria, South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 845 9100. Facsimile: +27 12 845 9110
Email: policy@fanrpan.org Url: www.fanrpan.org