

ABNE in Africa

Building a Functional Biosafety System in Kenya

Kenya enacted its Biosafety Act in 2009 as the legal framework necessary to regulate agricultural biotechnology. This was followed two years later by the gazettment of implementing regulations in August 2011, paving way for commercialization of GM crops. Kenya therefore became the fourth country in Africa after South Africa, Egypt and Burkina Faso to open up to gene technology. With the legal framework in place, the focus has shifted to establishing the infrastructure and processes essential for an effective and functioning biosafety system and ABNE has been instrumental in giving appropriate support.

Kenya's institutional biosafety framework as outlined in the Biosafety Act 2009 revolves around the National Biosafety Authority (NBA), an agency whose mandate is to act as the coordinating institution on matters relating to the safe development, transfer, handling and use of genetically modified organisms. Operations of the NBA are supervised by a Board of Management that was appointed in April 2010. The board of management is composed of a broad spectrum of representatives from relevant government ministries, supporting regulatory agencies, scientists, farmers, private sector and consumer organizations. The board makes the final decision on behalf of the government of Kenya with respect to agricultural biotechnology. The NBA has so far only handled applications for contained and confined use of GMOs but with the recent gazettment of requisite regulations, commercialization is expected by 2014 according to government projections while importation of GM food to address the effect of drought is currently under serious consideration.

Confined field trials (CFT) Applications were reviewed and conducted for the SPFMV as well as maruka weevil resistant sweet potato and insect resistant maize (IRMA), while CFTs are currently ongoing for Bt cotton, CMV resistant Cassava and Biofortified Cassava as well as drought tolerant maize (WEMA). CFTs were also approved for Biofortified Sorghum and will begin November 2011. Since 2009 when the NBA was established, there have been more applications under consideration and that have been processed for both contained and confined activities. With the requisite implementing regulations in place, the stage is set for post-CFT activities in Kenya including importation of GMOs for food and feed.



Bt maize confined field trial



Bt cotton confined field trial

ABNE Biosafety Capacity Building Activities in Kenya



Kenyan regulators attending a biosafety workshop on risk assessment risk management and decision making processes, July 2010

Table 1 summarizes ABNE's biosafety capacity building activities in Kenya. These efforts were focused on preparing the NBA for handling and processing post-CFT applications. Kenya projects to initially commercialize insect resistant cotton and maize, followed by the other events that are currently at the confined field stage. The NBA is also considering application for the importation of insect resistant maize for food and feed.

Impact of ABNE activities in Kenya

Recognizing the importance of the National Biosafety Authority in Kenya's regulatory framework, and with the need to build its capacity to regulate agricultural biotechnology, ABNE has offered biosafety services to address NBA's capacity needs since its inception. Evidently, the NBA is progressively gaining confidence in handling, processing of applications and making decisions involving agricultural biotechnology, and is currently preparing for post-CFT applications. ABNE's expert consultation has been instrumental in the development of implementing regulations gazetted in August 2011.



Members of the Kenya National Biosafety Authority Board of Management at a biosafety training Workshop, April 2011

Table 1: Summary of ABNE Activities for Kenya

ABNE Activities	Dates	Objectives	Number of regulators / stakeholders empowered
Workshops	14-16 July , 2010, Nairobi	1. Risk Assessment, Risk Management and Decision Making Processes for Kenyan regulators	35 regulators
	5-7 April, 2011 Naivasha	2. Biosafety Regulatory Processes in Agricultural Biotechnology for the National Biosafety Authority	17 regulators
Short Courses	Michigan State University, July – September, 2011	Environmental biosafety, food safety and science and Technology communication, Agricultural biotechnology courses at MSU	7 regulators
Study Tours and Internship	South Africa and India, Nov & Dec 2010	Hands-on regulatory experience and familiarization tour of South Africa and India	4 regulators
Technical Consultation	22 Aug-12 Sept 2011, Nairobi	1. Drafting of GM food labeling regulations 2. Contributed in the development of implementation regulations for contained, environmental release, export import and transit.	Government of Kenya (National Biosafety Authority)
	Reviewed over time		
International Meetings	Various between Dec 2010-April 2011, Burkina Faso and Sri Lanka	Exposure and networking opportunities for regulators	4 scientists and regulators

Future Capacity Building Strategy

Having established the necessary legal framework, Kenya is now primed for post-CFT activities. ABNE will continue providing capacity building support to Kenya through training of regulators and expert consultation in developing requisite regulatory infrastructure and processes in readiness for the commercialization of GM crops and importation of GM products. A biosafety communication workshop for Kenya is to be conducted in October/November 2011 with the objective of training and developing a biosafety communication strategy and rollout a plan to be adopted by the National Biosafety Authority. ABNE will support NBA in communicating biosafety, an essential element of a functional biosafety system.

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