



Call for good governance and integrity in policy revision processes: concern over the Ministry of Higher Education proposed new National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy, December 2020

Zaab communique adopted at the 5th December 2020 Annual General Meeting, Blue Crest Lodge, Lusaka

There is no national consensus on GMOs: we maintain the Right to say No to GMOs in our food and agri-culture

We, the members of the Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity, reject the untimely and imbalanced revision of the Zambia Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy (BBP). We condemn the push by the governing ministry and its mandated agency to shift Zambia's precautionary and protective stance on the use of Modern Biotechnology. We wholeheartedly object to the clear disregard for the need for broad public consultation and participation in this significant national policy process.

The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) drafting of a new BBP included a shallow and biased number of consulted parties. The last minute invitation received by Zaab, the deliberate late and limited communication, and the disregard for wide farmer representation and diverse consumer and civil society input is evidence of the lack of commitment to develop a meaningful, inclusive and balanced national policy outcome.

The current new draft policy will shift Zambia's position on GMOs substantially. It will pave the way for the repeal of the current legislation that has been globally respected and ensures robust safety, socio-economic and risk considerations, and sound liability and redress mechanisms. None of these critical regulatory elements are envisioned in the draft new policy. The revision process will facilitate the next steps for release of living GMOs into the food and agriculture system in Zambia, and consequently into the broader environment.

We are particularly concerned about the negative impacts on the agricultural sector, loss of markets, and contamination of farmers seed, biodiversity and our natural food. There are also critical issues related to infringements on Human Rights and ecological integrity if environmental release of living modified organisms in any sector (health, mining, etc) is allowed to go ahead. Unintended outcomes of field trials and release are inevitable. The experimental research on genetically modified mosquitoes already proposed, and lessons from other countries, raises serious alarm bells about the trajectory this policy change will take.

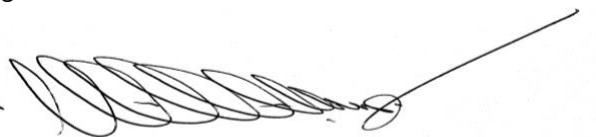
GMOs are a highly contentious issue – not just in Zambia – but globally, and there is much at stake. It is a mockery that the Ministry is positioning a sudden acceptance of GMOs without broad public participation and consultation.

We are deeply concerned with the current policy review process. The people of Zambia have a right to have their voices heard. We have a right to say no to GMOs.

We face an unprecedented ecological and social crisis. As farmers, and as members of faith communities and civil society, it is our moral obligation to advocate for an urgent transition to sustainable, nutritious and diverse agro-ecological food and farming systems. We call on the MoHE, our Government and our leaders to stand up for what will benefit Zambia today, and in the future.

- ❖ We maintain the Right to say no
- ❖ We call on the Cabinet of Zambia to reject the new proposed and unsound draft policy in its process
- ❖ We demand that the use of modern biotechnology remains contained, that no environmental release of living modified organisms is permitted.
- ❖ We insist that the precautionary approach, prior informed consent, regulatory measures, risk assessment, identification and detection, socioeconomic considerations, liability, access to information, and public participation remain at as the core policy guiding principles
- ❖ We commit to working together to support a genuine process of policy formulation based on good governance and integrity, to harness technologies that enable sustainability, transparency and accountability.
- ❖ We commit to working together in the development of legitimate and holistic technologies that will benefit smallholder farmers and guarantee healthy and nutritious food for all, now in and in the future.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Emmanuel Mutamba', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a distinct flourish at the end.

Mr Emmanuel Mutamba, ZAAB Chairperson
On Behalf of the Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity