



14 June 2021

Zaab's Objection to and Position on the draft Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy

Background

The Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (Zaab) has been a constant and key stakeholder in the field of biosafety and regarding the use of Modern Biotechnology (that produce Genetically Modified Organisms - GMOs) since 2010.

The Zaab has actively engaged whenever the opportunity and space was made available, in the review processes of the Zambia Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy, starting with the National Biosafety Authority (NBA) and COMESA meeting in 2017, and subsequent Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) technical drafting process in December 2020. The Zaab has conceretedly expressed its stakeholder interest in this process. The Zaab raised substantive concerns over the contents and intentions of the various Revised Policy drafts, in 2017, 2018, and again in 2020. In 2021, Zaab was then not included in the final drafting process, nor the development of the Policy Implementation Plan.

Despite these ongoing engagements and detailed submissions, Zaab's main concerns have not been addressed in the final draft of the Revised Policy, which will be validated on 14th June, 2021, before going to Cabinet for approval.

We therefore cannot support this Revised New National Policy.

As such, we, the undersigned, reject the final draft new Zambia Biosafety and Biotechnology Policy (BBP). The Policy revision process has been flawed, omitting key stakeholders, lacking inclusion of fundamental issues and concerns raised resulting in a final national guide that in fact does not represent the interests of the people of Zambia. The health, wellbeing and nutrition security of consumers (thus all Zambian's) through the contamination of the food system, and the rights and livelihoods of smallholder farmers, is of particular concern.

Further to this, we raise the following concerns on the contents of the final draft of the Revised Policy, which:

1. falsely asserts that GE and Genetically Modified (GM) crops will benefit smallholders; safeguard against the changing climate; and address complex political-economic development challenges including food security, environmental degradation and poverty.
2. Has abandoned the precautionary stance of the previous National Policy position, in favour of creating incentives for foreign experimental research and profit for industries (whilst undermining farmer driven innovations/indigenous knowledge with foreign technology).
3. Shifts from the aim of *protecting against harm* and the unknown outcomes that occur with old *and* new technologies, to instead *promoting* the use of Modern Biotechnology (and production of GMOs), under the *false* assertion of the benefits to broad social-economic development. This is not the case, world over.

4. Expressly gives intention to recall and replace the current legislation, particularly the Biosafety Act of 2007, in order to reduce current protective measures and access foreign donor financing for experimental research and release of live genetically modified organisms into Zambia's environment, agriculture sector and food system.
5. It shifts policy focus from biosafety, "GMOs" and "modern biotechnology", to a generalised framing and use of "biotechnology", that includes conventional breeding technologies. This wrongly implies that GMOs are as safe as other forms of biotechnology, such as tissues culture, hybridisation of crops, or even fermentation as has been alluded to in some of the technical discussions. This is a well-known and commonly used strategy by GE industry to cause confusion and weaken regulatory systems, and gives reason for concern regarding the outside interests being prioritised in this policy review process.
6. Will fundamentally weaken systems of provisions of liability and redress, that is the key mechanism through which farmers, consumers and natural ecosystems are protected from the array of unknown and unintended outcomes of GE particularly in the long term. This is evidenced in the "Legal Frameworks" and "institutional Frameworks" Sections on pages 5 and 6 respectively of the draft policy that describes the provisions as "too strict and stringent" and not in line with the more recent Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol.
7. Is focused on production at the neglect of nutrition, and the evidence that supports this stance is not based on the local context. The 'Situation Analysis' section in the draft Policy does not address the lack of nutritional value of GMO crops (such as the Maize grown in South Africa); and does not provide convincing arguments to justify adoption of Genetic Engineering in Africa as a whole and in Zambia in particular in terms of impacts on cost of production, yields, nutrition and incomes.
8. Does not take cognisance of the documented effects of GMOs on the environment. The analysis does not provide an analysis of the benefits vs potential risks posed introducing live GMOs in the environment.
9. It facilitates the Patenting of genetic resources, that are the common property of human kind, and belong in the hands of farmers. This enables privatization of the means to life, supports corporate capture and control of food and production systems, and directly undermines human rights. Power will shift from local farmers to corporates, thereby compromising the food security and sovereignty of the country.
10. It broadly promotes the benefits of GE as described by the producers of GMOs, without interrogating the many problems and risks associated with the technology. These include but are by no means limited to:
 - a. increased indebtedness of farmers; reduced quality and productivity of crops;
 - b. development of insect and weed resistance;
 - c. loss of export and internal markets for farmers and Zambian commodity traders of GMO free and organic crops and products; and
 - d. widespread Human Rights infringements, including undermining the Right to livelihoods, Right to a Clean Environment, Rights of Rural and Indigenous Peoples, the Right to Food, and the Rights of Children (particularly regarding health and long term contamination of the environment).

Within the policy review process, there are significant issues relating to:

- The lack of wide consultation even though the contents of this policy and subsequent implementation are a matter of historic national concern, based on a strong public stance (that is now being totally re-positioned), and will fundamentally affect diverse stakeholders and future generations.
- Omission of key sector government agencies, wider academia, CSOs and farmers from the conceptualization, drafting and review processes, as well as the final validation. This was combined with inconsistent communication and involvement with those who were included in limited parts of the technical review and withholding of information.
- Inadequate time given to stakeholders to review the contents of the drafts at each stage of the review and exclusion from ongoing communication.
- The consistent lack of consideration of previously submitted substantive comments as submitted by ZAAB from 2017.

The above-mentioned lapses simply give evidence to the lack of regard for ensuring a meaningful and balanced national policy outcome. We, therefore, expressly disagree with this process in its entirety.

Our Position

We the undersigned, maintain our position that:

- GMOs are NOT the solution to Zambia's food and nutrition security, and climate change mitigation and resilience building.
- GMOs fail to address any of the Social, Economic and Environmental challenges in the Zambian context, in the short or long term, and must be seen as the hostile take-over that it is. None of development problems and National Government commitments made, will be achieved through genetic engineering, whilst instead, the wider economic, health and environment impacts will affect have widespread negative impacts.
- GMOs pose risks to Ecosystems, human and animal health, they are not appropriate for smallholder producers. GMOs contribute to corporate control of the food system and they restrict access to markets thereby threatening livelihoods
- GMO seeds make farmers indentured to suppliers to keep providing all the inputs they require all the while becoming more dependent on these supplies as soils and ecosystems degrade. They need intensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, thereby contributing to environmental pollution and the high cost of production
- To face climate change and deal effectively with environmental degradation, poverty, hunger and the extensive malnutrition due to lack of diverse diets in Zambia, it is vital to invest in farming systems that are designed to create resilience and social equity. These are farming system that simultaneously address the increasing resistance of pests and disease which are increasing with Biodiversity loss, and climate changes which include rising temperatures and erratic rainfall patterns.
- To strengthen sovereignty over our food, fiber and energy, Zambia must wean herself off chemical inputs and utilise all the diversity of plants and animals on land and water and learn to manage the whole environment holistically to ensure Regeneration. Agroecological farming systems can achieve this.

- The people of Zambia have a right to be consulted and to be heard. Farmers have the right to maintain the purity of their seed and be guaranteed protection from contamination. Consumers have the right to wholesome nutritious food. Zambians have a right that their livelihoods are prioritised and protected.

We state that:

As farmers, and as members of faith and civil society communities, it is our moral obligation to advocate for withdrawal of the draft new Policy, and lobby for a Policy framework that will facilitate a transition to sustainable and diverse agro-ecological food and farming systems. We call on the Ministry of Higher Education, our Government and our leaders to stand up for what will benefit Zambia today, and in the future. This is a window of opportunity to be courageous and innovative as we move into a new era that will benefit the health and wellbeing of current and future generations, and safeguard our beautiful land.

Zambia as a nation opposed GMOs – and citizens have a right to say no to GMOs. Therefore - as people of Faith, in agriculture training institutions, civil society, farmers and consumers alike, we raise our voice of concern and regrettably reject the new Draft Policy.

We support our leaders who have made considerable efforts to prioritise the rights of smallholder farmers in Zambia, over and above foreign neo-colonial agriculture systems that extract wealth from the poor and from the country, and undermine the health of our families, our farming systems and our environment.

We ask Zambia's leaders to remain strong; to resist and reject the unjust and unethical efforts of foreign pressure to weaken national laws for the benefit of corporate profits.

We therefore make the following demands:

1. That the entire Draft Policy be recalled because its framing does not reflect the best interests of the Zambian people (farmers, women, youths, consumers and other stakeholders) and is based on flawed contextual analysis.
2. That the ministry and its designated authority revise the current draft to revert to the original protective stance of the 2003 policy and deal adequately with the serious technical issues related to misuse of terms, false assertions, and the vastly different uses, outcomes and concerns regarding the use of Modern Biotechnology in different sectors and to different ends (use in medicine, health, environment, food production, engineering, etc).
3. Re-engage key stakeholders, including small scale farmers and consumers, women and youths, to fulfil the provisions for policy review and ensure public interest is prioritised. Nationwide consultations must be conducted, with information made simpler in translated form, for all people to understand and give informed consent
4. Maintain an outright ban of release of Live genetically modified organisms into the environment, without compromise.

END.