Top 10 Facts

ABOUT BIOTECH AND BIOSAFETY IN UGANDA

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Fact 1. Uganda has international obligations to regulate GMOs and establish biosafety systems

- Uganda is among 170 parties that signed and/or ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Uganda's Minister of State for Environment signed the Protocol and ratified it on 30th November 2001, an indication that the country is committed to ensuring the safety and prosperity of Ugandans through safe development and deployment of products resulting from modern biotechnology.
- The Protocol aims to ensure the safe handling, transport and use of living/ genetically modified organisms (L/GMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on biological diversity and human health

Fact 2. The National Biosafety Committee (NBC) has been functional since 1996

- The National Biosafety Committee (NBC) was established in 1996 under Section 5 (e) of the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) Act, Cap 209.
- The NBC regulates modern biotechnology research and application in Uganda. It is composed of specialists from all relevant sectors e.g. consumer services, trade, environment, human health, etc.
- Since its establishment, the NBC has reviewed over 20 applications for genetic engineering experiments in the field of agriculture, environment and health.

Fact 3. Uganda has a National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy

- The Government of Uganda approved the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy in April 2008.
- The Policy is implemented by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), which is the current competent national authority for biosafety in Uganda.
- The Policy aims to build and strengthen national capacity in biotechnology through research, development, application, and regulation for safe and sustainable use of modern biotechnology in Uganda

Fact 4. The Government of Uganda is committed to strategic utilization of modern biotechnology for national development

- In the last 15 years, the Government and development partners have committed more than 20 billion Uganda Shillings towards infrastructure and human capacity development for agricultural biotechnology research.
- In 2003, the President of Uganda, H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni opened the first National Biotechnology Center at Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute.
- The Government has also committed substantial investment in modern biotechnology research and development in the field of human health and environment management.

Fact 5. Human capacity and infrastructure is increasing

- At least five public institutions are conducting modern biotechnology research for agriculture development and human health interventions
- Fifteen (15) public and private research institutions have adequate capacity and are conducting modern biotechnology-based agricultural research in Uganda
- At least 145 scientists in Uganda are actively involved in modern biotechnology research and development activities in Uganda;

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Fact 6. Uganda is one of the African countries conducting confined field trials (CFTs) for GM crops

- The first CFT was set-up in 2006 to test banana for resistance to one of the major devastating diseases called Black Sigatoka.
- Uganda has since conducted 18 separate CFTs for GM crops (some GM crops have been tested for more than three times
- Uganda has the most crops under CFTs in the region including cassava, potatoes, rice, maize, and banana.

Fact 7. Biotech research is not done for only crops but also humans and animals

- There is ongoing work to test vaccines e.g. Ebola and HIV produced using modern biotechnology
- GM animals such as goats are used to produce ingredients for drugs
- GM products such as insulin are already being used in Uganda to treat diabetes disease
- GM micro-organisms are being used to remove pollutants from the environment

Fact 8. Uganda Government is supporting strategies for creating awareness on modern biotech products

- The National Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy and the proposed law provide for public participation and engagement during decision-making on application of modern biotechnology
- A number of public-sector agencies involved in biotechnology research, development, application, and regulation have made efforts to engage the public to enhance awareness on biotechnology and biosafety in Uganda.

9. Uganda has made progress towards establishing the right legislation for biotechnology and biosafety

- Government Uganda made a decision to develop a legislation for regulating biotechnology in 2003
- Cabinet approved the Principles of the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill in 2011
- The Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development presented the Bill to Parliament in February 2013 and the Bill referred to the Committee for Science and Technology
- The Committee for Science and Technology presented its report to Parliament in November 2013

10. Government needs to fast track passage of Bill to safeguard Uganda's sovereignty

- The Bill provides for regulation of all the dealings with modern biotechnology including lab research, field research, import, export, transit, general use
- Elaborate risk and safety assessment procedures are proposed in the Bill
- The Bill mandates relevant regulatory agencies to have in place relevant capacity to regulate the technology
- The Bill provides for public awareness and participation during the decision making for general use

NB: Researchers are continuously addressing the public's key concerns on biotechnology.

- Biotech researchers have conducted Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceptions survey to assess the public's knowledge on the technology

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