



Policy coherence and the status of biotechnology policy-making, regulations and development: The experience of COMESA under RABESA Project

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RABESA Scope and Strategic Focus

To support COMESA countries harmonize
biosafety policies

Historical Background of RABESA

- In November 2001 in Kampala the COMESA Ministers of agriculture mooted the idea of harmonizing policies on GMOs at the regional level

Concerns in the COMESA community

- Increased regional integration and pursuit of free trade arrangements has made borders *porous-transboundary unregulated movement of GMOs was undesirable*
- Unprecedented diffusion rates of GMOs likely to impact on trade and access to emergency food aid in unprecedented ways

Translating Ministerial Directive to a Regional Project

- The COMESA Secretariat approached ASARECA for technical support in designing a regional project on harmonization of biosafety policies.
- ASARECA-collaborated with other partners (USAID, ISAAA, PBS, ACTS) to design RABESA with a focus on GMOs, trade and emergency food aid.
- RABESA phase I was implemented 2004 - 2006

Synopsis of Research Findings

RABESA I

Commercial export risks

- Analysis done under RABESA revealed that the magnitude of commercial risks associated with GMOs will be relatively small for COMESA/ASARECA countries.
- African countries heavily export to Europe commodities such as tea, coffee, sugar and cocoa (commodities not available in GM form)
- Intra-regional trade in commodities such as maize and cotton (available in GM form) is high in the COMESA/ASARECA region.
- Intra-regional commercial risks likely to be high if COMESA countries go for planting of GMOs
- High probability that food aid distributed is GM.

Research Findings-farm income gains

Economic analysis revealed that:

- farmers incomes in the COMESA region would increase significantly if they adopted GM insect resistant varieties of cotton and maize compared to the conventional ones (Economic analysis component)

RABESA II

- Recommendations of the RABESA regional workshop were presented at the 4th meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Agriculture held in Khartoum in March 2007
- The ministers endorsed implementation of RABESA phase II
- At the 5th meeting of the COMESA Ministers of Agriculture held in Seychelles in 2008 the need to hasten the harmonization process was reiterated

RABESA II outputs

1. Drafting of regional biosafety guidelines & policies- for handling commercial planting of GMOs, trade in GM products & emergency food aid
2. A guide on how designated regional centers of excellence can support COMESA harmonization efforts -risk assessment and management, identification and testing of GMOs and capacity building
3. Develop and implement COMESA outreach and communication strategy- the strategy defines effective mechanisms for disseminating information, fostering coordination and collaboration among different regional partners and other RECs

RABESA II outputs *cont...*

4. Biosafety Roadmap-developed and adopted

- The roadmap is a practical tool to guide COMESA member states in implementation of national biosafety frameworks. Most COMESA country biosafety regulatory systems are still at the initial stages of development.

5. Updated profile of progress in institution building and policies for biosafety in COMESA

Review and endorsement process

- Panel of experts under RABESA II has been constituted
- Role- Provide oversight and ensure that the project remains focused and consistent with the goals of COMESA
- The RABESA II outputs will be reviewed and endorsed by the COMESA panel of experts, regional stakeholders and final endorsement by COMESA Ministers of Agriculture
- Regular updates at the COMESA Technical Committee on Agri and Ministerial meetings

Expected outcomes

- Enhanced capacity of the COMESA member states to make informed decisions on handling of GMOs
- Reduced trade barriers, increased agricultural productivity and food security
- Enhanced collaboration and coordination between COMESA and other RECs
- Enhanced level of awareness and understanding of the potential impacts of GMOs on trade and access to food imports (including emergency food aid) among policy makers.

Trends in Harmonization of Biosafety Policies in Africa

- Harmonization is an emerging trend in the continent (unprecedented speed at which biotech is evolving and associated concerns)
- Efforts evident in almost all the sub-regions of Africa (ECOWAS, SADC and EAC)
- The AU encourages cooperation and coordination in matters of biosafety (Freedom to Innovate Report of AU/NEPAD panel of experts)
- AU focusing on coming up with African Strategy on Biosafety to promote and coordinate harmonization of biosafety in the continent
- COMESA largest trading bloc-provide models for other regions to follow

Conclusions

- **Biotechnology is critical to COMESA development goals**
- **There is need for more investments in agricultural biotechnology to address long-term issues food and nutrition security and wealth creation**
- **There is need to consider Socioeconomic issue in biotech R&D agenda**
- **There is need to build on existing efforts instead of starting new projects**
- **There is need to learn from what works best in Africa**

Conclusions

- **There is need to support the policy and regulatory development process**
- **There is an urgent need to work towards a harmonized approach by governments**
- **There is an urgent need for capacity building and sharing of information and resources among COMESA member states**

THANKYOU!!!