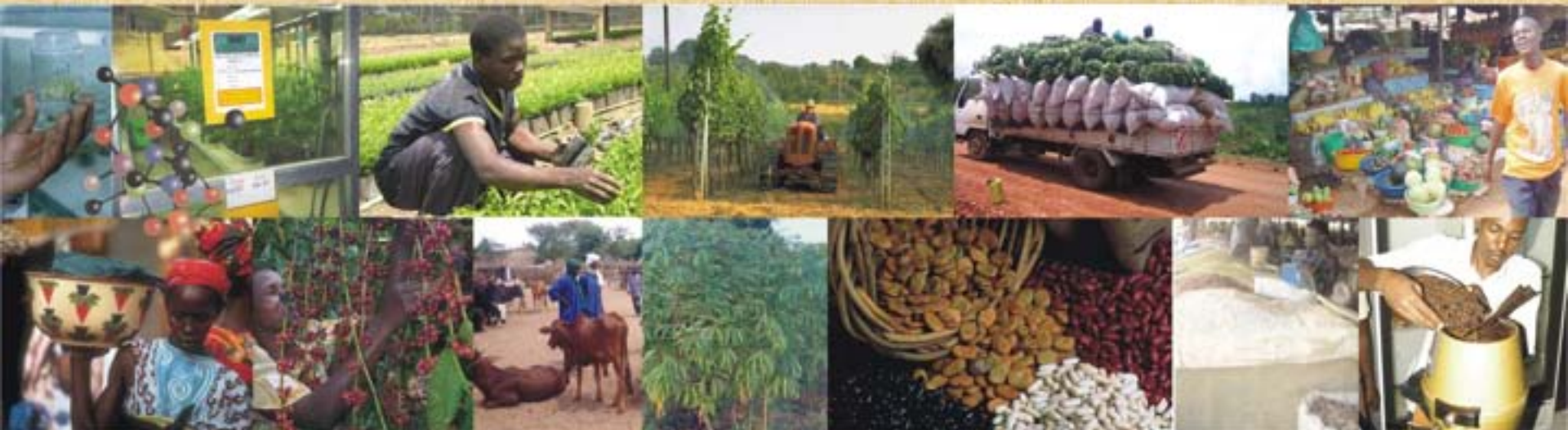


# Regional Initiatives for Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy in Eastern and Southern Africa

## The ASARECA Contribution



# Presentation

- ASARECA
- Background
- ASARECA Participation and Contribution to Regional efforts in Biosafety
  - The PBS Initiative
  - PBS/ASARECA/EAC Policy Dialogues
  - RABESA Project

# Geographic Coverage





# Background

- Agriculture is the mainstay of the majority of countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.
- 80 % of the ASARECA population depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.
- Increased trade in food staples across borders holds great potential to enhance food security and household incomes
- Population is increasing at the rate of 3% per annum compared to agricultural growth rate of 1.9% per annum.
- There is need to strive towards achieving an annual growth rate of 6% as stipulated in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture development Programme (CAADP).

# Background

- Article 14 of the Protocol advocates for regional cooperation and coordination and encourages countries to enter into bilateral or multilateral arrangements so long as they do not result in lower level of protection.
- If regional agreement does not cover major obligations, then countries have the option to move forward with national compliance in those areas.
- No region in the world has a harmonized biosafety regime, not even the EU.
- Countries are not homogenous and this should be taken into consideration in the harmonization agenda.

## Regional Efforts

- Contribution to the PBS Biosafety Initiatives
- The PBS/ASARECA/EAC Policy Dialogue
- Contribution to the COMESA RABESA Project

# Contribution to the PBS Initiatives

- Policy dialogue workshop in 2005
- Deliberated on regional approaches for biosafety regulation in East Africa.
- Recommendations/Observations
  - Countries were ready to work together on some aspects of their regulatory systems while other areas needed more dialogue
  - More progress needed to be achieved at the national level before exploring regional approaches.
  - Sharing information and conducting regional studies posed no controversy.
- Capacity building in biosafety
  - Capacity building - confined field trials (in collaboration with TPRI)
  - MSc Training



# ASARECA/PBS/EAC Biosafety Policy Dialogue

Held 12-14 September 2006

## Objective:

To examine the EAC national biosafety frameworks with respect to an EAC regional policy, legal and regulatory framework on food safety, trade, environmental and public health issues.

## Recommendations:

1. EAC should establish a multi-sectoral committee on modern biotechnology and set up a coordination desk at the secretariat
2. Policy on public awareness and participation at all stages of biotechnology application
3. Policy to enhance information sharing and networking including establishment of a regional BCH.
4. Establish EAC representation at international treaties, conventions, protocols and agreements.
5. Policies and mechanisms for better use of capacities in the region
6. Establish food safety focal points in partner states and harmonise regional food safety systems.



# RABESA Project Initiative

- Borne out of a declaration by COMESA Ministers Agriculture meeting in Kampala in 2001
- This was in response to a concern about the potential rapid diffusion rates of GMOs that could impact on trans-boundary trade and access to emergency food aid
- Ministers took cognizance of the fact that harmonization of biotechnology and biosafety policies was indispensable to mitigate potential impacts on intra-regional trade which is high and increasing
- Following the directive, COMESA Secretariat worked closely with ASARECA to design a regional project on harmonization of biosafety policies

## RABESA Phase I: 2004-2006

- COMESA and ASARECA engaged partners including the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) and the Program for Biosafety Systems (PBS) to provide technical support in implementation
- In Sept. 2003, COMESA endorsed implementation of RABESA at the maize trade policy Conference held in Nairobi.
- It mainly involved stakeholder analysis and data collection in six pilot countries- Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Zambia and Egypt
- The data focused on commercial export risks, emergency food aid and estimation of economic gains from GM crops
- This was followed by national and regional meetings organized to disseminate and discuss the findings and the regional dimensions on biosafety that COMESA should pursue
- RABESA is not aiming at common biosafety laws for all countries in the region but rather a common policy position

- Recommendations of RABESA-I were endorsed for implementation by COMESA Ministers of Agriculture in March 2007.

- This formed the basis for RABESA II.

- During COMESA Ministers of Agriculture meeting in Seychelles in March 2008 the following priority harmonization areas were identified:

1. Commercial planting of GMOs
2. Trade in GM products
3. Emergency food aid with GM content



# Components of RABESA II 2008 -

1. Establishment of regional panel of experts
2. Development of regional biosafety guidelines & policies for:
  1. Commercial planting of GMOs
  2. Trade in GM products
  3. Emergency food aid with GM content
  - **The identified potential possibilities for harmonization include:**
    - Common data requirements and/or sharing of data
    - Common regulatory procedures/decision standards
    - A Regional biosafety scientific committee
    - A Regional risk assessment expert team
    - Regional approval decisions and approval conditions
3. Strengthening designated regional centers of excellence to provide COMESA members states with support in the areas of capacity building, risk assessment and regulatory approvals.  
(KEPHIS????)
4. Development and implementation of a COMESA outreach and communication strategy

## Terms of reference for the COMESA Panel of Experts

- Panel inaugurated early in 2009
- Review and endorse regional biosafety guidelines, standards, policies or procedures that can be mutually recognized among the COMESA member states
- Engage and interact with COMESA and other RECs in high-level policy dialogue on matters related to the initiative
- Provide political support in the implementation of the COMESA advocacy and outreach strategy
- Provide recommendations for the strengthening of designated regional centres of excellence in biotechnology



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