

# Fostering Evidence Based Biosafety Regulations and Policies for Transformational change in Africa's Agriculture

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27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> September 2017

## NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency



# Key Policies at African Union level

- Policy interest in developing Africa's Agriculture has been on the high from the top most organ (Assembly)
- The positions of other organs such as the Council of Ministers eg (AMCOST)



# Continued

- The 2003 Maputo declaration ,and
  - Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP)
  - Every member state committed to devote up to 10% of their National budget to the Agricultural sector
    - The Africa Model Law on Biosafety from AUC was adopted at this summit for the reason of the above recommendation
    - At the Maputo summit of 2003 the development of Biosafety Regulatory Systems were part of the recommendations



- The 2014, Malabo Commitments through the
  - Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) where the commitments laid down approaches and strategies in achieving Elimination of Extreme Hunger, Malnutrition, Poverty and increased prosperity



- **Agenda 2063, of 2013**
  - **ASPIRATION 1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development**
    - 11. By 2063, African countries will be amongst the best performers in global quality of life measures. This will be attained through ..., **increasing agricultural production; investments in science, technology, research and innovation; ....**
    - 13. **Africa's agriculture will be modern and productive, using science, technology, innovation ....**



- The African Ministerial Council on Science and Technology (**AMCOST**)'s has resolved to 20 year biotechnology strategy and Mandated African Biosafety Network of Expertise (ABNE)
- **Note:** This was an acceptance that Biotechnology is with us and we can try to harness it safely.



# Biotechnology from AU/NEPAD Perspective

- **Biotechnology** flagship program is one of the thirteen researches and development program under the Consolidated Plan of Action for Science, Technology and Innovation.



- Under the NEPAD African Bioscience Initiative (ABI), four biosciences networks have so far been established on the basis of geographical delineations as follows:
  - The Southern Africa Network for Biosciences (SANBio) for Southern African countries;
  - Biosciences Eastern and Central Africa Network (BecANet) for Eastern and Central African countries;
  - West Africa Biosciences Network (WABNet) for West Africa countries, and
  - North Africa Biosciences Network (NABNet) for North African countries.



- ABI networks mentioned above carry out several research programs depending on priorities identified by the regions. The core missions identified for these regions are as follows:
  - Southern Africa: Health Biotechnology
  - Central Africa: Forest Biotechnology
  - Eastern Africa: Animal Biotechnology
  - Western Africa: Crop Biotechnology
  - Northern Africa: Pharmaceutical Biotechnology



# The Safe Use of Biotechnology in Africa

## “ BIOSAFETY ”

- If we all recall, in 1992, the international community recognized the need to regulate modern biotechnology, termed genetic.
  - And consequently in the year 2003 the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the CBD was negotiated came into force.
- Concerns over their possible environmental and health implications stimulated regulatory mechanisms for
  - food safety and
  - environmental risk assessment.



# Domestication of International and Regional Model laws

- 89% of African countries that are signatories to the [Cartagena Biosafety Protocol](#) have been making slow progress towards developing the key Components of the NBF, which comprise of:
  - a policy on biotechnology
  - laws and regulations on biosafety constituting a regulatory regime for biotechnology
  - an administrative system for handling applications and issuance of permits
  - a mechanism for public participation in biosafety decision-making.



# African Model Law on Biosafety

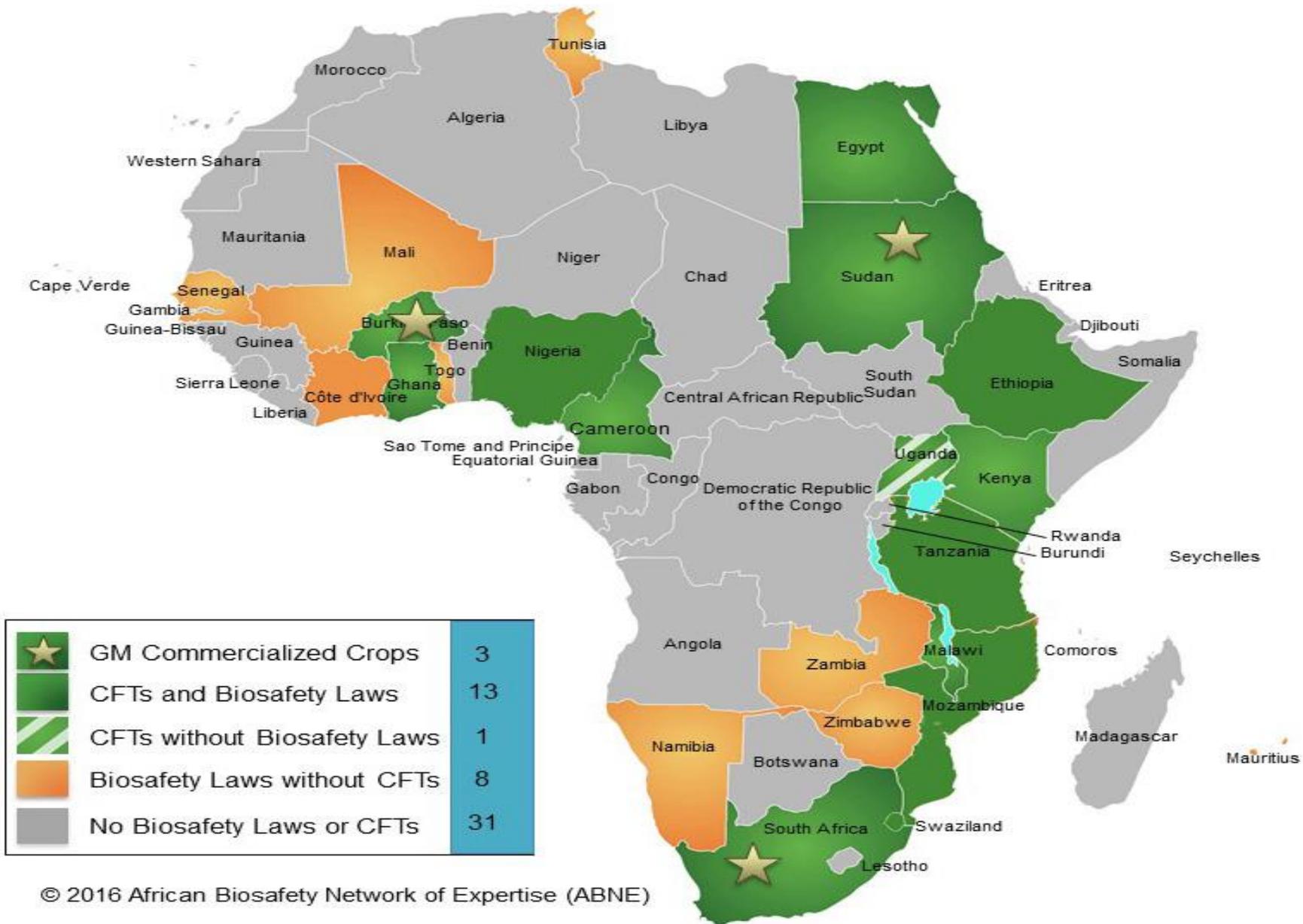
- It embodies strict view of precautionary principle as framed under **Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration**, and adopted under Article 1 of the CPB.
- The CPB text states;
  - Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.
- The strict nature of this model law did not only apply to LMOs but also products of GEOs.
- The revised Africa Model law of 2007 and 2011. However, these Model Laws have remained strict and go beyond the requirements of the CPB.



# Current Status Biosafety Regulation in Africa

- Countries are at different levels of Progress
  - No Biosafety laws and Confined Field Trials
  - Have Biosafety laws but No Confined Filed Trials
  - Confined Field Trials but No Explicit law
  - Have Explicit law and Conduct Confined Field Trials
  - Have Explicit law and Have Products for Commercial Release





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# CO-EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH IN POLICY AND REGULATION DEVELOPMENT

- Adoption of a **CO-EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH** in which the function of regulation is to promote innovation, while at the same time safeguarding human health and the environment.
  - Provides a balance for the interests of various players



# Evidence Based Policy and Biosafety Regulation In Africa

- **Evidence-based policy** is a term often applied in multiple fields of public policy to refer to situations whereby policy decisions are informed by rigorously established objective evidence.
- 'evidence based policy' is often a (stated or unstated) concern with **fidelity to scientific good practice**, to reflect the belief that social goals are best served when scientific evidence is used rigorously and comprehensively to inform decisions, rather than in a piecemeal, manipulated, or cherry-picked manner.



# Lukewarm Reception to Evidence Based Policy Decisions in Biosafety Regulation

- Policymaking is decidedly political because it involves choices between multiple competing social concerns;
  - The lack of an agreed set of goals in most policy decisions means that there are likely to be multiple bodies of evidence relevant to policy debates, speaking to different social concerns, which policy makers must consider and value.
  - The promotion of parallel types of evidence as 'best' for policy makers to consider, including scientifically rigorous evaluation studies such as randomized control trials to identify programs and practices capable of improving policy-relevant outcomes.



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- Policies that are concerned with human rights, public acceptability, or social justice may require other evidence than what randomized trials provide, or may require moral philosophical reasoning in addition to considerations of evidence of intervention effect (which randomized trials are principally designed to provide)
- But in all, Good data, analytical skills and political support to the use of scientific information, as such, are typically seen as the important elements of an evidence-based approach.



# General Challenges

1. Many countries are constrained with lack of the required physical infrastructure.
2. While science is moving forward, in some countries the inability to evaluate the potential environmental and food safety risks (that might be posed by biotechnology-derived products) is delayed decisions about whether or not to utilize these products.
3. In many countries, there is no credible resource base currently available to decision makers that would provide science-based regulatory data and information with a focus on biotechnology products for Africa.



# Continued

4. The cost of constituting a functional regulatory system. It is absorbing in terms of cost and as such some countries ignore it completely
  - Policies
  - Legislation
  - Implementing regulation
  - Administrative
  - Evaluation and review
  - Process to arrive at a safe decision
  - Capacity for compliance and investigation
  - Capacity to check for review
  - Appeals



# Conclusion:

- *Policy and Regulation that is grounded on scientific evidence Biosafety remains ideal for transformation of Agriculture for a country.*
- *But it remains a big challenge for decision makers to wholly rely on evidence based approach as Policy making is Political as it demands consideration for several other competing interests*
- *Therefore, with these challenges presented to policy makers in the decision making, Evidence-Based Policy and Biosafety Regulation in Transforming Africa's Agriculture remains a tall order unless other approaches are deployed to inform and support policy makers to have relevance to science based best evidence.*



# Thank you

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