

GOVERNMENT, SAY “NO TO GMOs”

We concerned individuals, professionals, civil society organisations, farmers’ organisations, faith based organisations and farmers collectively stand and condemn the hasty push for lifting of the ban on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Zambia.

We recall that in 2002, the Government of the Republic of Zambia rejected the GMO maize that was offered by the United States of America following the droughts of 2001/2002 rain season and consequent maize shortage in the country. Since then, the Government has strictly maintained the ban on the introduction of GMOs through trade, food assistance or cultivation. We fully support Government’s stance on taking precautionary approach with regard to GMOs in the country.

However, we are deeply concerned that some sections of society are now hastily pushing Government to lift the ban on GMOs without due consideration of many unanswered and very serious questions about GMOs. We reiterate our earlier position (as of 2002) to strongly oppose the introduction of GMOs for the following reasons:

1. The potential of GMOs to harm both human and animal health. There is no evidence to guarantee the safety of these crops to humans as well as animals. The BT Soya beans have been abandoned due to allergies it caused to most consumers in Brazil. The liver cells of mice fed on Roundup Ready soya beans showed significant changes. Livestock died in India while grazing Bt cotton crop residues.
2. Negative impacts on the ecosystem. GMOs have potential to harm other untargeted species in the surrounding areas as is the case of pollen contamination from Bt maize on Butterflies. Likewise, Bee colonies in Europe were found to collapse much earlier if feeding on GMO Maize. (Interview by Christof Potthof with the bee researcher Prof. Dr. Hans-Hinrich Kaatz, University of Halle-Wittenberg <http://www.mol-ecol.uni-halle.de/staff/kaatz-hh>, October 2009). There is also a danger of many unforeseen impacts on the environment in general that can come with the introduction of GMOs.
3. Patented GMO seeds could replace standard seeds and this will create economic hardships for many small scale farmers in the long run. We fear that ownership of the seed industry will be in the hands of a few international corporations and we shall lose our own seed sovereignty consequently food sovereignty. This may compromise national security as decisions on food systems will be handled by international corporations such as Monsanto. It is likely that once dependency is created, the international corporations with patent rights will manipulate seed prices to suit them and this will adversely affect the small scale farmers. Moreover, we fear that suicidal genes may even be introduced in the seeds to limit the viability of the seeds to one season. This means that GMO crops will only bear sterile seeds that cannot germinate if planted. In North America, the price of GMO seed is now extremely high. The prices of these seeds have tripled in the last few years. Kasisi has produced a yield of 9.8 tons of an open pollinated maize (Afric 1) using organic principles and organic cotton production yielded up to 2.5 tons per hectare in the last six years. So it is a myth that hybrid seed is needed for high yields.

4. There is a danger of genetic contamination especially for cross pollinated crops. This will create many challenges with regard to identification as well as labeling. It will be very difficult to grow organic crops because they will be contaminated by GMO cross pollination. Contamination will also harm local cultures, traditions and marketing systems. Extinction of our indigenous crops is another situation that introducing GMOs will bring in the long term.
5. GMOs are not the answer to increased productivity of our crops in Zambia. The yield potential of crops in Zambia using available technologies has not been fully utilized. The 2.8 million metric tonnes of maize produced in the country was without any GMO use. Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre is able to produce 8ton/ha of maize organically in their demos. The Conservation Farming Unit is also able to produce high yields without GMO seed. In addition, there are many examples of failure of Bt cotton to out yield conventional varieties, the development of more serious pest problems and increasing indebtedness of Bt cotton farmers in Asia and Africa. The Makhathini Flats in South Africa where Zambian parliamentarians were taken in 2004 to see how Bt cotton impacts on the lives of smallholders is a case in point. See Review of African Political Economy No. 109:497-513 © ROAPE Publications Limited, 2006 'Can the Poor Help GM Crops? Technology, Representation & Cotton in the Makhathin Flats, South Africa' By Herald Wilt, Rejeev Patel & Mathew Schnur. Also see article 'Bt cotton has failed admits Monsanto' reported by Dinesh C Sharma, India Today, March 6, 2010. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/site/story86939/india/Bt+cotton+has+failed+admits+monsanto.html>. Old man Dunavant who founded that company in the USA complained that the quality of GMO cotton was inferior in length and strength. Kasisi's organic cotton demonstrations are able to produce more than 3 tons/ha.
6. Zambia has a potential to market its products outside the country and overseas because of the Government policy on GMOs. The lifting of the ban would create risks to marketing given the preference of consumers for organic produce. The Organic Movement in Zambia has registered an increase in demand for its products as a result of the Governments stance on GMO. The local, regional and international market does not want GMO products, if they have the choice. Far from enhancing our trade opportunities, it will restrict them. Zambia has a lot of respect in the international community for the stand they took in 2002 against GMO's. This could be used to marketing advantage. Alternatives such as reviving Zambia's textile industry with organic cotton for the expanding global demand for organic textiles could be looked into.
7. Zambia needs to adequately develop institutional and human capacities that can competently inspect, monitor and regulate the activities of GMOs in the country. Without this capacity, there is a danger to the country as many international institutions may use this as a channel for dumping GMOs in the country.
8. Cotton should be considered a sensitive crop in Zambia as it is used as stock feed and oil for human consumption and cotton seedcake is a valuable protein for livestock. If we introduce

Bt cotton for instance, do we have evidence-based safety assurances to the health of humans as well as livestock?

We are worried that lifting the ban on GMOs in Zambia will have serious implications on the economy, political, social and environmental situations and on the livelihoods therefore, of all Zambians especially the small scale farmers. We therefore support the Government's stance on banning GMOs.

For all the reasons put forth in this statement, we therefore urgently call upon all concerned farmers, individuals, professionals, Zambian scientists, civil society organisations, faith based organisations, political parties, churches and community based organisations to be aware of this critical issue and to come forward and join with us as we strongly say **NO** to the lifting of the ban on GMOs in Zambia.

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