

OVERVIEW OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique is a country that faces frequent shortages in food production, particularly in the southern areas that are prone to drought and also to floods. In this context, the development and access to technology for food and agricultural production is of crucial importance for achieving food security in the country. Biotechnology in Mozambique still needs development to assist agricultural research. In this regard, the country needs prioritise its intervention in biotechnology. Although the role of biotechnology transformation for food security and poverty alleviation is recognised, at this point of technology development, it appears that priority should be given to tools such as tissue culture and the use of molecular markers to assist breeding in the selection process.

An important and critical step for biotechnology development is the need for the development and implementation of the national biosafety framework to address adequately and effectively biosafety and biotechnology issues in the country. A national biosafety framework is also of paramount importance if consideration is given to the fact that Mozambique is vulnerable to natural disasters often leading to the need for food aid that may be derived from transgenic crops. Mozambique is also forced to deal with biotechnology and biosafety issues due to its geographical position that makes it a transit country to other African countries of several goods, including food that may be derived from GM crops. The country has just started developing its policy and strategy in order to set up an institutional and regulatory framework to deal with biotechnology development, with emphasis on issues related to the area of biosafety.

There is an acute lack of skilled staff to conduct research on biotechnology, only a limited number of lecturers and researchers hold post graduate diplomas. Most of the work in the area of biotechnology is presently being conducted by higher education institutions, with a significant number of projects concentrated in the area of animal science. There is little use of modern biotechnology in the area of crop research, which is mainly focused on tissue culture, marker assisted breeding and diagnostics.

The main policy tools for biotechnology development in Mozambique are related to the Policy on Science and Technology (PST) and strategy for its implementation as well as the strategy and action plan for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity in Mozambique. Mozambique ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety on the 21st October 2002 and it has established the National Biosafety Working Group (GIIBS), which is tasked with coordinating biosafety activities in Mozambique.