

## OVERVIEW OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN NAMIBIA

The Namibian Biotechnology Alliance (NABA) is running a number of activities to promote and research biotechnology. These include: driving the implementation of the Namibia National Biosafety Framework; implementing Cabinet-approved national policy and guidelines for biotechnology research and related activities in Namibia; updating the evolving national status of biotechnology and biosafety activities, plans, and institutional capacities; reviewing the technical safety guidelines for the practice of biotechnology in agriculture, industry, health, mining and other fields and continuing with awareness and education activities within the country. NABA is implementing these activities together with the inter-ministerial committee consisting of scientists from all government ministries since non governmental agencies cannot solely implement government policies.

Having succeeded in developing the National Biosafety Framework, Namibia is now addressing implementation. However, the implementation of the biosafety framework is constrained by its insufficient institutional and human resource capacity. Within the UNEP/GEF project for the implementation of the National Biosafety Framework, Namibia has to build capacity to enable it to implement its obligations under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and its national biosafety legislation. Part of this will be addressed by Namibia's first genetically modified organism (GMO) testing, training, and research laboratory that was launched in September 2004 by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry responsible for Research, Science and Technology), at the University of Namibia. The laboratory will play an important role in assisting the Namibian government and institutions involved in implementing Namibia's National Biosafety Framework.

Biotechnology research and development is limited in Namibia, however, Namibian scientists are working on projects to utilise modern biotechnology for the development of fungal resistant millet and also on bambara groundnut and marama beans in partnership with South African, Botswana and European scientists

The Namibian Cabinet approved the national policy on biotechnology in November 1999 following extensive consultation with all major stakeholders. The national policy is executed by the Ministry of Education, which is also the national competent authority for biosafety. The policy recognises that the experts in the NABA will serve as the interim body until the Biosafety Bill is passed by parliament.

The Biosafety Bill is with Parliament. The Bill was assessed by the cabinet committee on legislation before being tabled in parliament. It is likely that the Bill will be enacted in 2006. Namibia also signed the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2000 and ratified it on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 2005.