

OVERVIEW OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN SWAZILAND

The Swaziland biosafety framework is in the advanced stages of development, draft policy and legislation have been prepared and are in the process of being presented to cabinet.

Due to a lack of awareness of biotechnology, there has not been much public discussion on biotechnology, although some of the more advanced commercial farmers have some understanding. Some small scale farmers have expressed an interest in GM cotton for example, and these either know about it from activities they have had with seed companies or from relatives in South Africa. (It is suspected that some GM cotton is being grown by farmers along the border with SA but this has not been confirmed).

Very little attention is given to biotechnology in the media environment at present, possibly because of lack awareness. There is an ongoing effort to address this.

Not much impact has been made on the public understanding and opinion of biotechnology, as only a very limited number of people have been contacted. Through the UNEP-GEF funded biosafety framework development project as well as the newly formed Regional Agricultural and Environmental Initiatives Network for Africa (RAEIN-Africa), there is now a concerted effort to develop outreach materials and to reach a wider range of audiences.

Some of the external national/international events and trends that have affected biotechnology in Swaziland recently include the developments within the EU on biotechnology and biosafety, as Swaziland is a major trading partner with the EU. The food crisis within the country as well as other SADC member states has highlighted the need to address biotechnology and biosafety in Southern African countries

The main challenges and opportunities expected in the next 2 years in Swaziland include:

- Implementation of the regulatory framework which is being developed
- Developing the human capacity for biotechnology in the country

Swaziland ratified the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol on the 13th January 2006.