

OVERVIEW OF BIOTECHNOLOGY IN ZIMBABWE

The biosafety regulatory framework was initiated in the early 1990s, and in order to establish a Biosafety Board, the Research Council of Zimbabwe needed to enact a law that could empower them to do so. To accomplish this, a decision was made that the existing Research Act of 1986 would be amended in order to include terminology that could cover this aspect. The Research Act of 1986 was finally amended in 1998 after 6 years of consultation. The Research Act governed biotechnology research and biosafety in Zimbabwe. It falls under the Research Council of Zimbabwe which reports to the Minister of Science & Technology in the Office of the President and Cabinet. It must be noted that this document became available before the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) was passed in January 2000. Consequently issues relating to trans-boundary movement, packaging, labelling, liability and redress, advance informed consent (AIA), notification and the Biosafety Clearing House (BCH) mechanism are not adequately addressed. With funding from the UNEP-GEF the Board therefore developed the National Biotechnology Authority Bill.

Zimbabwe passed its Biotechnology Bill in 2006, it is called the National Biotechnology Authority Bill and it seeks to establish a body responsible for managing the import, research, development and production of biotechnology in Zimbabwe. The Minister of Science & Technology Development, Dr Olivia Muchena said biotechnology had the potential to greatly contribute to economic development, particularly in the agricultural and health sectors. The law seeks to ensure that biotech activities do not come with adverse effects on health, the environment, the economy, national security and social norms and values. Under the Bill, a National Biotechnology Fund will be established to promote the marketing and production of transgenics in addition to stimulating demand for research into modern biotechnology. The fund would consist mainly of levies and the Minister of Science and Technology Development, for the benefit of the fund, would be empowered to impose these levies on producers, processors or buyers of any product of biotechnology.

Zimbabwe has done some research in agriculture and animal diseases, it has developed mechanisms for testing for genetic modification and biotechnology. An MSC Course in biotechnology is offered at the University of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe has signed the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol and ratified it on the 25th February 2005.