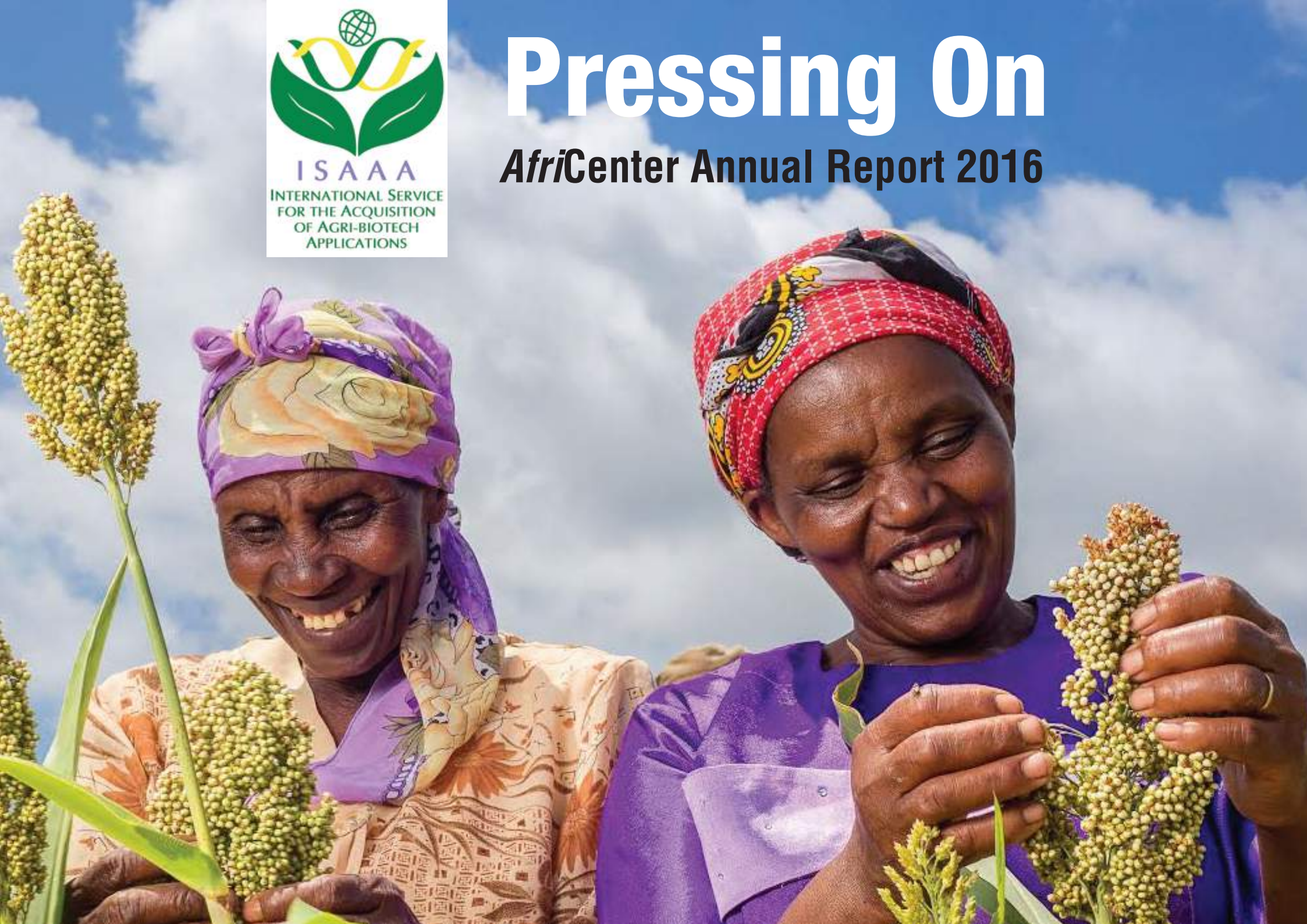
ISAAA
INTERNATIONAL SERVICE FOR THE ACQUISITION OF AGRI-BIOTECH APPLICATIONS

# Pressing On

## *Afri*Center Annual Report 2016



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## VISION

A food secure Africa free of hunger and poverty.

## MISSION

To share knowledge on agricultural biotechnology and biosafety through strategic communications and outreach for informed policy and choice.

# Approach

To achieve its mission, the *Afri*Center focuses on the following thematic areas:

Sharing knowledge on all aspects of crop biotechnology for informed policy and choice

Strengthening capacity for effective science communication

Engaging policy makers in order to create an enabling environment for crop biotechnology development

Forming strategic partnerships that capitalize on the comparative advantages of public and private sectors in the agri-biotech and biosafety continuum

Facilitating international representation of Africa's agri-biotech and biosafety agenda.

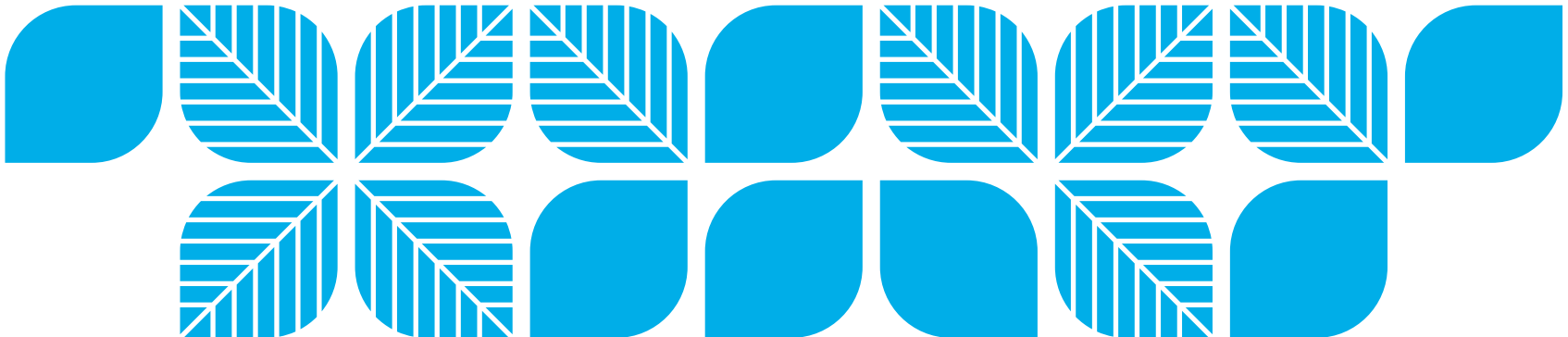
# Capability Statement

ISAAA is exceptionally designed to provide communications and policy support services on all aspects of crop biotechnology and biosafety. It does not generate or own any agri-biotech products. This high degree of independence makes ISAAA's operations credible as it interfaces with various institutions and partners that serve developing countries.

ISAAA *Afri*Center has a team of multidisciplinary experts who develop and implement strategic development communication programs that are well focused for maximum impact. The team provides communication and policy support services to promising projects across Africa and offers trainings on effective science communications. A number of *Afri*Center staff are certified to conduct net-mappping that help in identifying relationships between and among stakeholders for effective outreach.

Further, *Afri*Center co-ordinates seeing-is-believing biotech study tours for Africa's key agri-biotech stakeholders. We are often contracted by different actors to facilitate such visits for experiential learning on all aspects of agri-biotech and biosafety. Given the controversial nature of agricultural biotechnology, the Center has a rapid response mechanism to address contentious issues when they arise.

To broaden its expertise and optimize performance, *Afri*Center works with a network of Associates who contribute to its mission through involvement in various programs, on a need-basis. The Associates come from reputable public and private institutions from across the globe and are drawn from various disciplines that complement the Center's areas of focus. The *Afri*Center is seen as a one-stop shop for current agribiotech and biosafety information in the continent.



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# Directors Remarks
# Pressing on…


A successful journey begins with the end in mind. So, regardless of the challenges and set-backs agri-biotech faces along the way, we must resolve to keep **pressing on** for the sake of small-holder farmers and their families.

At the *Afri*Center, we believe that our work would be incomplete without delivering the benefits of biotechnology tools to farmers. We envision a food secure Africa free of hunger and poverty, and strongly believe that modern agricultural technologies could play a fundamental role in helping the continent achieve that vision. In that regard, our efforts are channeled towards creating an enabling environment for agricultural biotechnology to thrive in Africa.

The fiscal year 2016 witnessed major challenges in the agri-biotech and biosafety landscape. Counter-productive debates and political misgivings, mostly propagated by European groups, continued to slow down progress. Exported ideologies from the west maintained confusion and complicated policy choices across Africa. We saw the European parliament adopt a report on the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN) stating that any support to African agriculture should be confined to low skilled subsistence farming level — the very practices that modern-focused farmers are trying to move away from. Setbacks were also observed in Burkina Faso whose government decided to put a hold on cultivation of Bt cotton due to fiber length issues observed in current varieties.

Despite all this, it was evident that when those in positions to speak up for the plight of Africa's small-holder farmers come together, the possibilities are endless. They create movements that are necessary to shift the narrative towards progressive farming and respect for choice and opinions.

This past year and in early 2017, Tanzania and Mozambique planted their first GM maize confined field trials under the Water Effcient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project. In the same light, Malawi approved the general release of Bt cotton, while Kenya and Nigeria's biosafety authorities granted approval for environmental release of Bt maize and Bt cotton. That notwithstanding, many countries continue to face serious institutional challenges that have created an impasse in as far as the commercialization process is concerned.

Eight countries conducted trials on traits of relevance to African challenges in 2016. The research focuses on key food security crops. As a result, Africa could contribute 5 new biotech crops to the global biotech basket in the coming years. The biosafety regulatory landscape also recorded significant developments. Ghana issued guidelines for general release, while 5 countries - Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Togo and Zambia – are working to operationalize their biosafety laws to pave way for research and eventual planting of various GM crops.

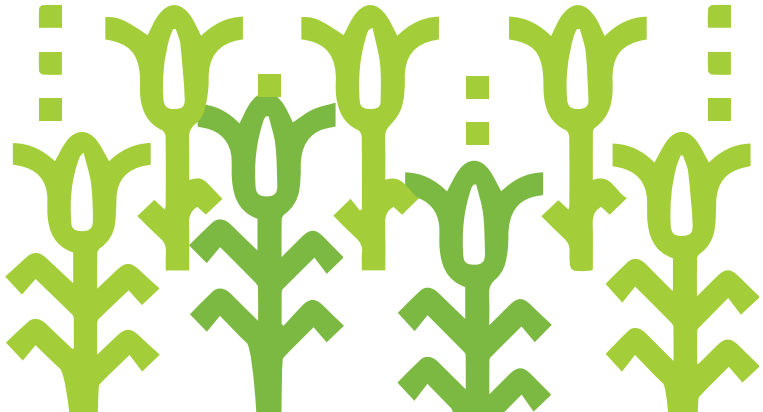
2016 was an exciting year at ISAAA *Afri*Center. We are humbled by our modest contribution towards the creation of an enabling environment for biotechnology development in Africa, as detailed out in this report. None of that would have been possible without the support and belief of our partners and investors. Our desire for this continent remains consistent: to deliver biotech seeds into the hands of farmers for enhanced agricultural productivity. However, for this to happen, we must keep **pressing on** past the set-backs, with Africa's small-holder farmers and their families in mind. We urge you to keep walking this long and arduous journey with us.

Dr. Margaret Karembu
Director, ISAAA AfriCenter

# Knowledge Sharing for Informed Policy and Choice

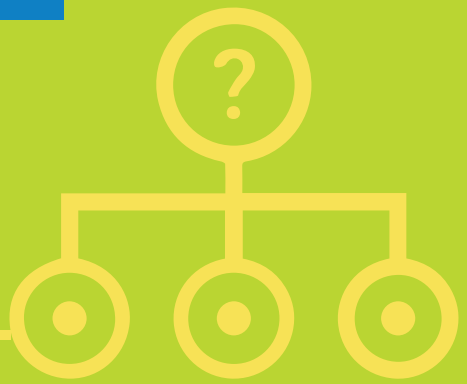
*Afri*Center's work on knowledge sharing is inspired by the need to transform the agri-biotech discourse. Our goal is to share credible information to diverse audiences in order to facilitate informed policy and choice. The Center's knowledge sharing initiative is driven by a strategic communications and policy outreach strategy.

We strive for a debate that is informed by credible scientific information and evidence. This information is shared in a structured and systematic way that cultivates public trust and encourages recipients to ***#TalkGMOFacts.*** Ultimately, we aim to create a reliable knowledge base to champion evidence-based decisions.



# Launching the Brief

## The Problem



The potential of agricultural biotechnology for social and economic development in Africa remains abstract.

To date, only four countries - South Africa, Burkina Faso, Egypt and Sudan - have placed biotech crops in the hands of farmers. In 2015, only three countries, Burkina Faso, South Africa and Sudan grew biotech crops.

Evidence from the continent to support the technology's benefits is limited. For Africa's policy makers to appreciate the technology's value, they need access to credible scientific information on global trends and attributes of the technology within the social and economic contexts.

## Our Intervention

ISAAA tracks progress on the global status and economic benefits of commercialized biotech/GM crops on an annual basis. The annual review, which is ISAAA's flagship product for knowledge and information sharing, also highlights on-going biotech/GM crops research activities around the world. It uses case studies, farmers' testimonials and policy pronouncements to showcase the technology's benefits and demand. The Brief has retained its reputation as the standard reference for biotech crops by media, academia and governments

To get this information to key decision makers across Africa, *Afri*Center launches the report in select countries. The Center also re-packages the Brief into easier to use knowledge products that are more accessible to policy makers, and translates its top-ten facts into local dialects to maximize reach.

In 2016, as the world celebrated two decades of commercialization of biotech crops, ISAAA captured these milestones in the "20th Anniversary (1996 to 2015) of the Global Commercialization of Biotech Crop Highlights in 2015 (ISAAA Brief 51)."

# To popularize Brief 51, *Afri*Center:

**01.** **Physically launched it in nine African countries.**
This was complemented by a **virtual launch** which 15 journalists from the region participated in.


These launches enabled biotech issues to penetrate the news agenda.

**64 million media impressions** were made through stories that covered the events. The launches also created a **platform for policy pronouncements** in support of the technology.

**02.** **Re-printed and widely distributed** over 1000 copies of the Brief to offices of the 54 African Heads of State and Governments, Parliaments and University libraries.

**03.** **Repackaged the Brief** into simplified **easy-to-use knowledge products** and its top ten facts ranslated into **16 African languages** to reach out to grassroot communities.

# Success

The global adoption trends captured in the report address misconceptions about Africa being a testing or dumping ground for GM products by revealing progress from other continents.

The Brief provides key decision makers with evidence from adopting countries that enables them to make informed decisions.

The trends also inspire law makers to create enabling policy environments for biotech development.

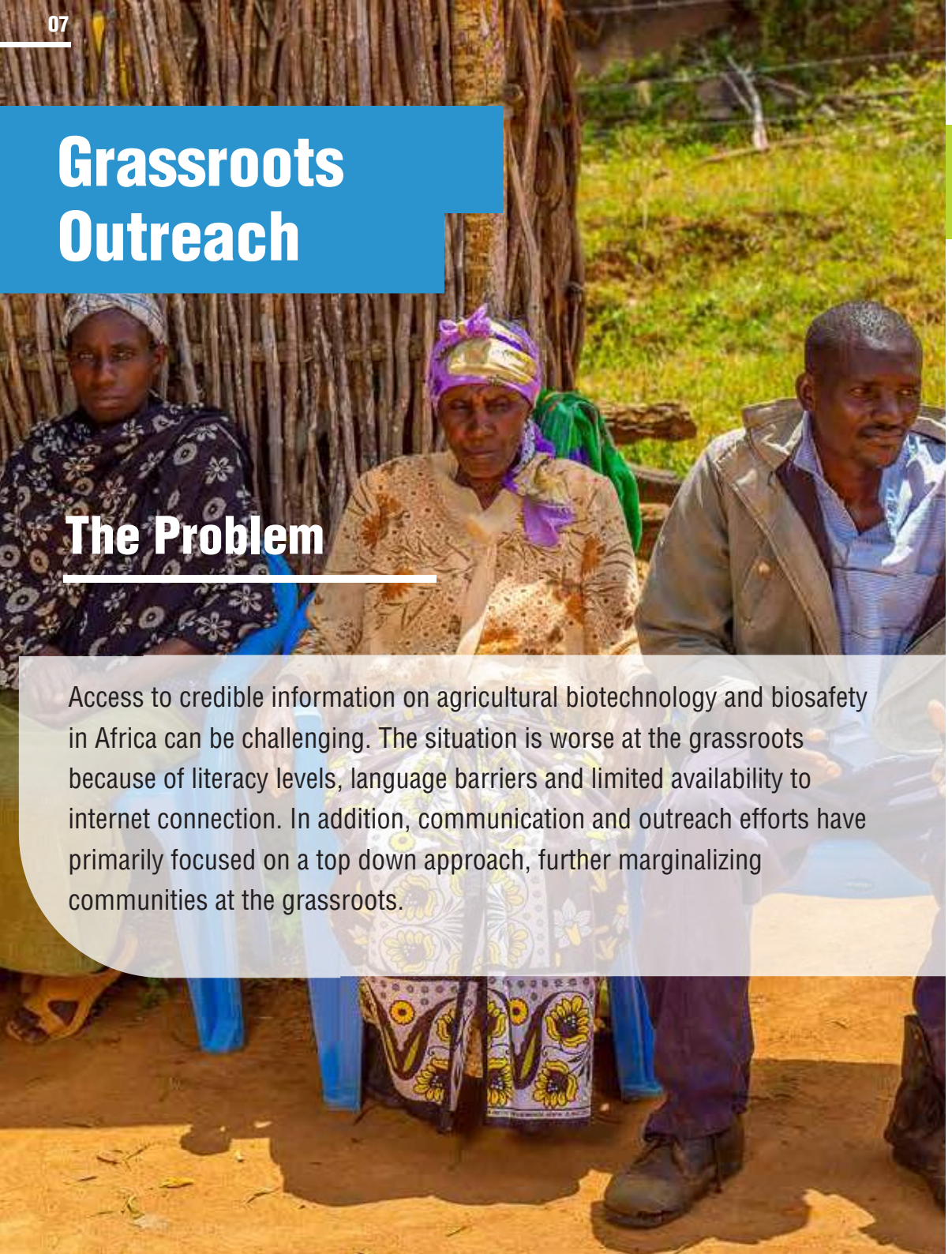
In 2016, Dr Florens Turuka, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries in Tanzania called for his government to keep up with the rest of the world and adopt agricultural biotechnology.

# Tanzania

*"Scientific findings have revealed that biotechnology is not only useful in industrial production, human and animal health and environmental protection, but it also plays a huge role in economic growth and poverty eradication. Globalization has facilitated development of various technologies in the world and Tanzania being part of the world cannot survive devoid of biotechnology know-how as a driving force to agricultural development."*


**Dr Florens Turuka, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries, Tanzania during the report launch in 2016.**

# Grassroots Outreach



## The Problem

Access to credible information on agricultural biotechnology and biosafety in Africa can be challenging. The situation is worse at the grassroots because of literacy levels, language barriers and limited availability to internet connection. In addition, communication and outreach efforts have primarily focused on a top down approach, further marginalizing communities at the grassroots.

## Our Intervention

ISAAA *Afri*Center places grassroots mobilization as one of its core tenets. To reach out to beneficiaries of agricultural biotechnology, the Center focuses on a bottom-up approach to communications and outreach. *Afri*Center participates in farmer field days, sets up exhibitions in major agricultural events, contributes to agri-biotech related discussions at the regional, national and county level, and uses creative theatre to pass the biotech message.

The Center also works closely with community-based organizations and empowers community leaders with credible information on agricultural biotechnology. In addition, *Afri*Center builds the capacity of those community leaders to effectively communicate messages on the technology and how it is regulated.

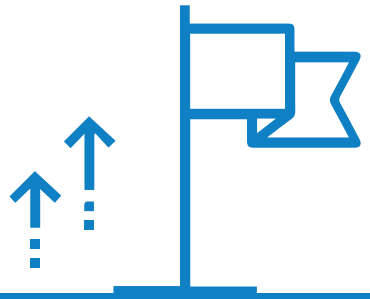
Together with OFAB-Kenya, PBS and the VIRCA Plus project, *Afri*Center held various outreach activities to share information, education and communication materials and sustain conversations with the public on GM crops. These interactions have played a key role in sensitizing communities at the grassroots and helped in clarifying misconceptions.

## To achieve this, the Center:

**01.** Set up exhibitions in four major agricultural-related events across Kenya, reaching out to over 3,000 farmers and their families.

**02.** Participated in three key panel discussions to demystify GM crops, highlighting the local, regional and global status of agri-biotechnology and biosafety, as well as the safety and opportunity costs for not adopting the technology.

**03.** Used creative theatre to demystify GM crops while sharing 2015 trends on commercialization of biotech crops during the the week-long National Science Week held by the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya.



# Success

A strong community of farmers and community leaders are now raising their voices in support of agricultural biotechnology. Increased awareness on various aspects of biotech crops and biosafety can be attributed to *Afri*Center's lead in intensified outreach and grassroots mobilization. In 2016, the Center succeeded in serving the information needs of over 5000 farmers and their families at the grassroots.

# Kenya

***"At an exhibition here at Kagio (Central Kenya), I have met ISAAA staff who have shared a lot of information on GMO maize. Based on what I've learned, I have now changed my perceptions about GM maize. I thought the maize grows abnormally. Now I know that it is a maize crop like any other. It is only that GM maize has been improved with a gene from soil bacteria which makes it resistant to stalk borers. I have also learned that when I plant the insect resistant maize, I will save money that I would have normally spent on chemical sprays against the stalk borer."***

**Nelson Muturi, maize farmer, Central Kenya, during an OFAB grassroots outreach event in February 2016.**

*"We can clearly see that these drought tolerant varieties work, we demand that the government releases the WEMA-Bt maize to avert the crop failure that we face. We know that research on these genetically engineered varieties is now complete." Mr. Mugo Magondu, a maize and cotton farmer from Central Kenya, during a farmer field day.*

# Seeing-is-Believing Biotech Study Tours

## The Problem

For many in Africa, including key decision makers and opinion leaders, GM crops remain a far-fetched idea. The continent's reluctance to adopt biotech crops means few farmers grow them, leaving limited opportunities for the populace to witness the technology's potential first-hand. Perceptions on biotech crops are therefore usually based on hearsay rather than evidence.

## Our Intervention

Every year since 2006, *Afri*Center together with research institutions and other partner organizations in Africa have been organizing seeing-is-believing agri-biotech and biosafety study tours to countries growing biotech crops in different parts of the world.

These visits have provided experiential learning opportunities for a wide range of stakeholders. Participants get an opportunity to interact with farmers who share their practical experiences with biotech crops. The tours have proved to be highly valuable and effective in awareness creation on all aspects of crop biotechnology and biosafety.

To amplify messages and experiences gained with a wider range of stakeholders, the Center also facilitates experience sharing workshops led by delegates who participate in the biotech study tours.

# To maintain its momentum, the *Afri*Center:

**1.** Exposed over **100 of Africa's opinion leaders** including:

Farmers, members of the fourth estate, regulators and policy makers to agri-biotech and biosafety advancements through l**ocal biotech study tours.**

These tours exposed stakeholders to the country's progress and enhanced appreciation of research efforts.

The visits also revealed local capacity and built confidence with local expertise.

**2.** Facilitated over **30 delegates comprising of:**

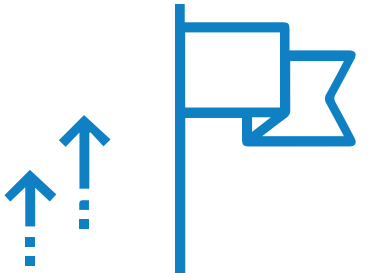
Government executives, scientists, cotton sub sector players and journalists from Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Swaziland and Zambia to **India's Bt cotton fields.**

**This was done in partnership with COMESA/ACTESA, SABC and USDA.**

**3.** Held two **experience sharing workshops**, in Kenya and Malawi, amplifying messages and experiences from the study tours with close to 80 stakeholders including farmers, government officials, journalists and development partners.

Experiences were also captured on video and uploaded on various social media channels to maximize reach.

Journalists who participated in the study tours produced stories that were featured on print and radio, further spreading the messages across sub-Saharan Africa.



## Success

From the biotech study tours, key stakeholders become enlightened about the potential of biotech crops from a practical perspective. Participants return with positive perceptions about biotech crops and an eagerness to share lessons and experiences in their respective countries.

## Ethiopia

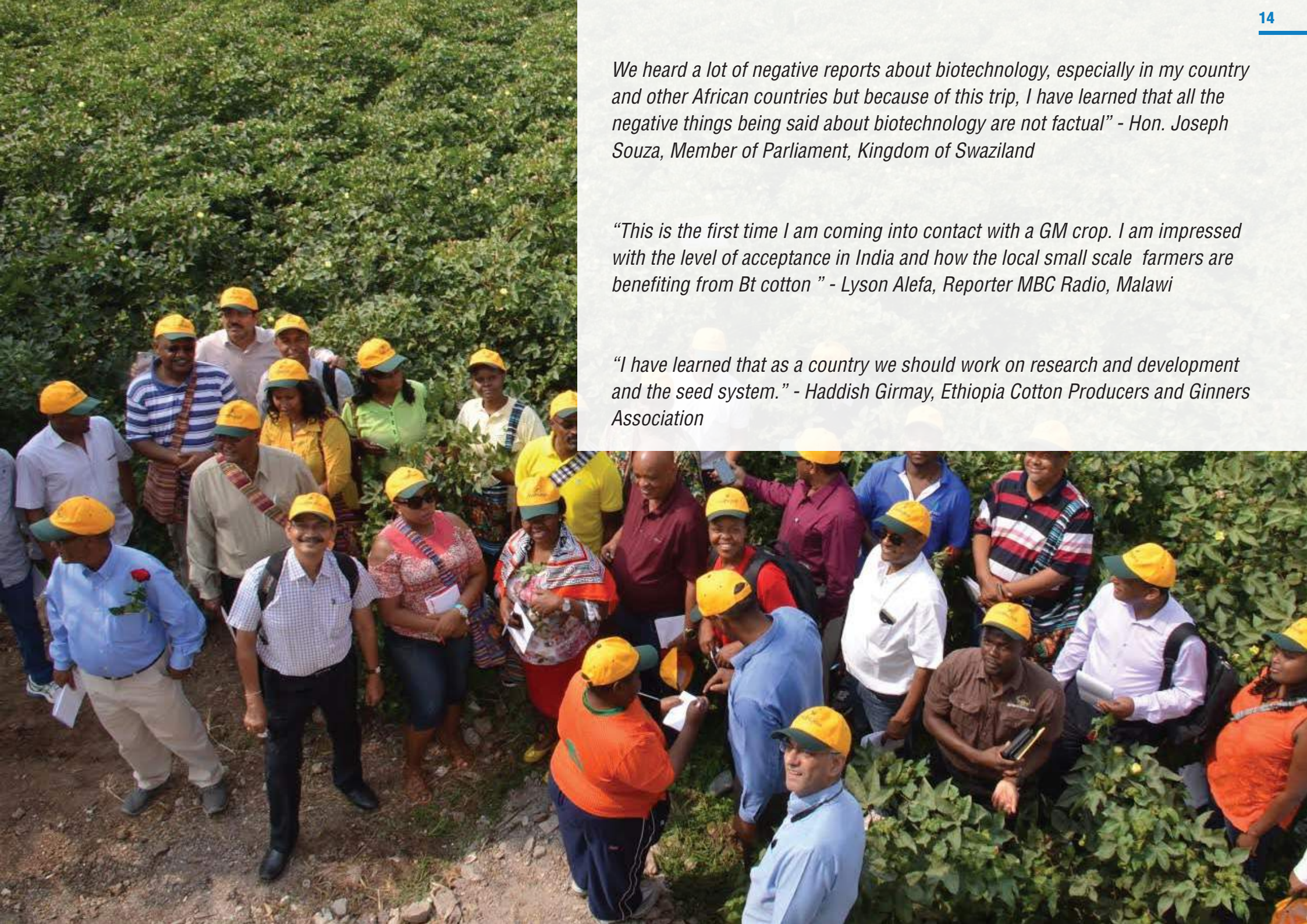
*"I have never seen a GM crop before but what I want to say is that, when people speak about GM crops and the issues of GM, they associate it with some scary things. But here, I have seen GM Bt cotton and I think yield-wise, it is very appreciable. When you compare it with other crops, these Bt crops are very productive. I think my perception initially, based on the information I had, has somehow changed. Knowledge has to be shared, if you keep it somewhere, it will not meet its purpose. On the basis of the information I have got, I will share it back to my relatives, colleagues and fellow country members."*

**H.E. Zekarias Erkola, State Minister of Cabinet Affairs, Ethiopia, during a biotech study tour to India's Bt cotton fields in November 2016.**

*We heard a lot of negative reports about biotechnology, especially in my country and other African countries but because of this trip, I have learned that all the negative things being said about biotechnology are not factual" - Hon. Joseph Souza, Member of Parliament, Kingdom of Swaziland*

*"This is the first time I am coming into contact with a GM crop. I am impressed with the level of acceptance in India and how the local small scale farmers are benefiting from Bt cotton " - Lyson Alefa, Reporter MBC Radio, Malawi*

*"I have learned that as a country we should work on research and development and the seed system." - Haddish Girmay, Ethiopia Cotton Producers and Ginners Association*

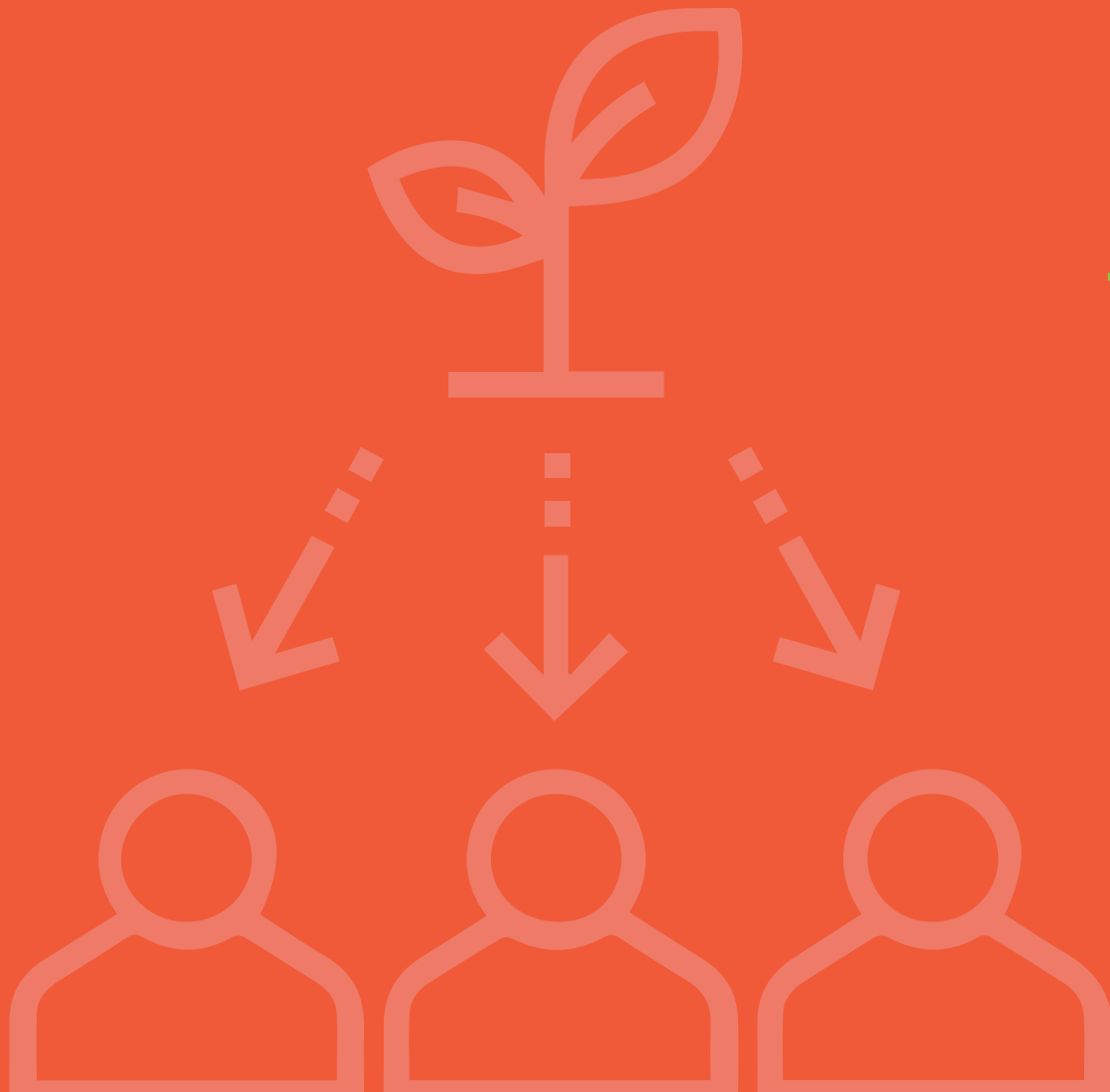


# Capacity Building for Effective Agri-biotech and Biosafety Communications

*Afri*Center has remained alive to the need of well-trained and informed partners in the field of crop biotechnology. As a result, we invest heavily in capacity building for partners who play a role in shaping public opinion and who confront agri-biotech and biosafety issues regularly.

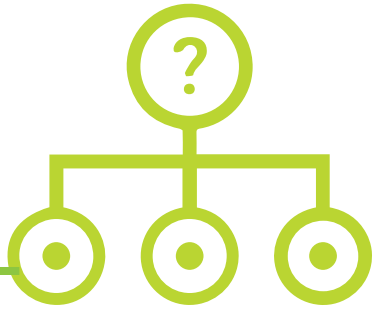
The Center conducts capacity strengthening activities on science and biosafety communications, message development, effective media relations, communicating science through new media and stakeholder mapping.

We believe that both the message and messenger combine to shape public opinion. Consequently, the Center empowers trusted sources with adequate skills to deliver credible information in a compelling manner.



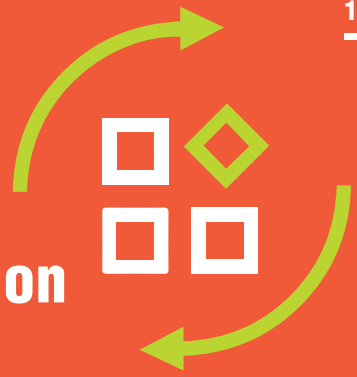
# *1.* Science and Biosafety Communication Training

## The Problem



Effective communication is fundamental for public acceptance of biotech crops. However, the poor relationship between scientists, journalists and policy makers has created rifts in science communication. This has led to superficial coverage of agri-biotech and biosafety stories and has had a negative effect on policy formulation and acceptance of the technology.

## Our Intervention



To equip those tasked with engaging the public on agri-biotech and biosafety with effective communication skills, the Center conducts science and biosafety communication trainings. The workshops follow a rich mix of lectures and practical sessions, including mock media interviews and use of social media. To ensure participants are updated on the local, regional and global status of GM crops, an overview of research and commercialization is included as part of the training package. To measure the workshop's effectiveness, participants' level of awareness is gauged before and after the training using pre and post workshop questionnaires.

## To empower those tasked with engaging the public on agri-biotech and biosafety,the Center:

Conducted **13 science communication trainings** across Africa, targeting close to **400 participants** comprising of regulators, researchers, lecturers and students from biotechnology departments, journalists, science communicators and farmers.


## Burkina Faso, Ethiopia & Nigeria

- Policy pronouncement by Dr. Ogbonnaya Onu, Honorable Minister, Federal Ministry of Science and Technology who underscored the importance of modern biotechnology in helping Nigeria feed its rising population.
- Media coverage by print and electronic media in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia & Nigeria
- Increased confidence by regulators and scientists in communicating biosafety decisions.

## Kenya

- Increased confidence by scientists and regulators in message development on biotechnology and biosafety as well as relating with and delivering messages to the media.

## Uganda Tanzania & Rwanda

- Increased confidence by researchers and regulators in message development and how to handle media interviews.

## Malawi

- Increased confidence in biosafety message development; improved skills on how to handle challenging situation with the media; wide coverage from media training including an eight page special feature on GMOs in Malawi's Nation newspaper.

## Ghana

- Increased confidence on messaging and how to communicate risk by regulators and appreciation on balanced reporting of GMO issues by journalists.
- Articles from the workshop including on the Government of Ghana's website.

# Success

The trainings have enabled key stakeholders, including regulators, to effectively develop messages that are likely to resonate with their audiences. Scientists who have benefitted from the workshops have also utilized the acquired skills to effectively deliver biotech messages to the public and press.

# Kenya

*"The Biosafety Appeals board really appreciated this opportunity because we have to do an outreach program. We have to go out to the public and tell them what our role is. So with the communications training skill that we've attained in this workshop, we are going to sit down and compose the right messages. We've really enjoyed the training and it'll definitely be useful to us."*

**Rachel Shibalira (center), Chair Biosafety Appeals Board, Kenya, receiving certificate after a biosafety communications training for the NBA board and Appeals board in collaboration with PBS and the VIRCA Plus project.**

# 02. Building Capacity for International Biosafety Negotiations

## The Problem

Participation of African party states in COP-MOP activities has been below expectation. This low level of involvement has been attributed to lack of technical, institutional and organizational capacity, and weak co-ordination both at the party state and regional grouping levels.

# Our Intervention

For the last four consecutive COP-MOP sessions (COP-MOP 5, 6, 7 & 8), ISAAA *Afri*Center in collaboration with ABNE, national biosafety focal points and other like-minded partners have coordinated the participation of African party states through national, sub-regional and regional workshops. The objectives of the preparatory activities are:

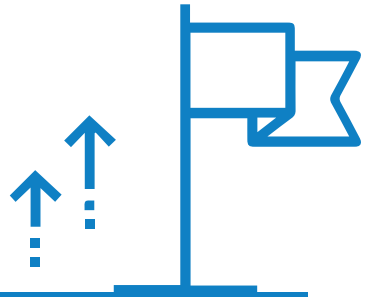
- To raise awareness and harmonize the region's position on priority items of the agenda at the COP-MOP sessions.
- To prepare the actual delegates for engagements at COP-MOP.
- To identify opportunities for effective participation based on regional priorities and capacities.

In 2016, *Afri*Center in partnership with ABNE and PRRI played a key role in preparing African delegates for negotiations on the Biosafety Protocol (COP13-MOP8) in Cancun, Mexico. The preparatory meetings provided an opportunity to raise awareness and harmonize the region's perspectives on priority items of COP13-MOP8's agenda and identified opportunities for effective participation in the international biosafety negotiations.

The Center also actively participated in COP13-MOP8 side events to dispel misconceptions that would adversely affect decisions at the meeting and attended Contact Groups' and 'Friends of the Chair' meetings convened to discuss contentious agenda items.

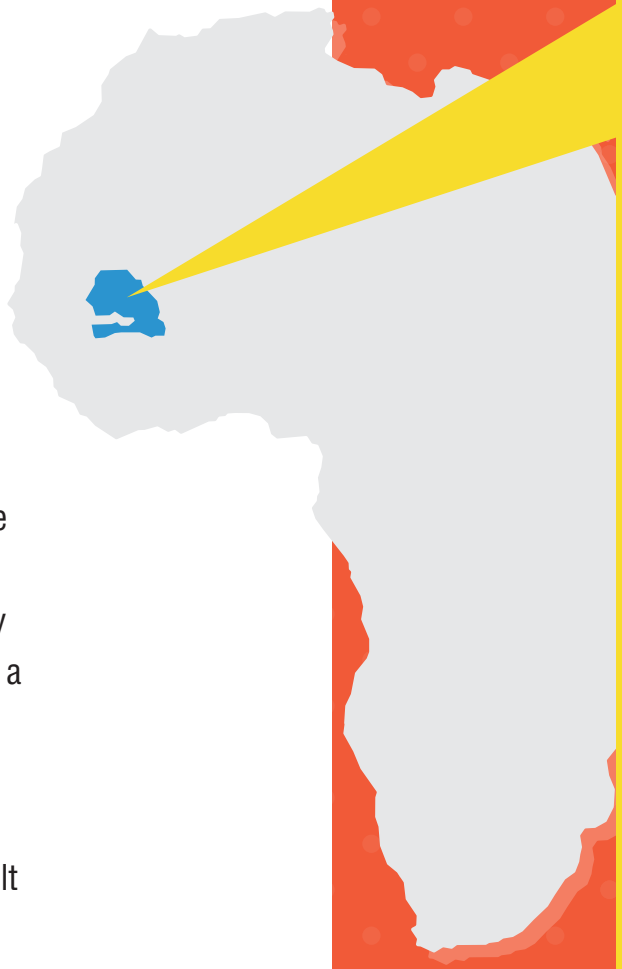
*"The Aarhus Convention is Europe-led and recently (June 2016), the European Union Parliament endorsed a report (Heubuch – A8-0169/2016 report) urging G7 members not to support GMO crops in Africa. This goes against the spirit of the Article 16 and 19 of the CBD that obligates Parties to engage in biotechnology transfer. We are concerned therefore that public awareness spearheaded by Europe will not be impartial, and may derail ongoing efforts to improve sustainability and food security through modern biotechnology. In addition, the joint collaboration between Aarhus Convention and Cartagena Protocol might not be in favor especially of the Asian and African regions, which have different needs in terms of food security and biodiversity conservation compared to European countries."*

Dr. Margaret Karembu reading ISAAA's statement on Public Awareness, Education, and Communication at COP13-MOP8 in Cancun, Mexico; December 8, 2016



## Success

The interactions and extensive discussions from the preparatory meeting enhanced participants' level of preparedness and understanding of COP-MOP's key issues. Majority of the African parties negotiated as a team and had common positions regarding various aspects of the agenda items. Generally, remarkable improvement in Africa's group participation in COP-MOP working groups was witnessed as a result of the preparatory meetings.



## Senegal

*"Senegal participated in COP13-MOP 8 through the delegation of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD). This delegation was composed of the representative of the Cabinet, Environment Watch Planning (DPVE), the Department of National Parcs (DPN) and the National Biosafety Authority (ANB). We welcome the support of ISAAA and ABNE which enabled the African delegation to strengthen itself for this COP-MOP. The African Union is to be congratulated for immense efforts made to organize regular meetings of the African Group, an initiative that has enabled the Group to improve the quality of its participation. This improvement can be found in the better organization of its members and a better coordination of meetings, more formal than usual."*

**Ousseynou Kassé, Executive Director, National Biosafety Authority, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Government of Senegal.**

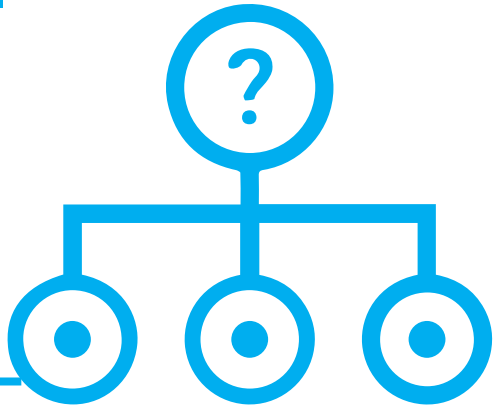
# Policy Engagement for Evidence-Based Decision Making

Effective adoption and application of crop biotechnology tools hinges on knowledgeable policy makers who are constantly armed with factual, timely and accurate information. In this regard, *Afri*Center works closely with parliamentarians and decision makers to ensure they are well-versed with advancements of biotechnology both locally and globally.

The Center invests in one-on-one engagements with legislators, as well as translation of complex scientific information into simplified knowledge products.

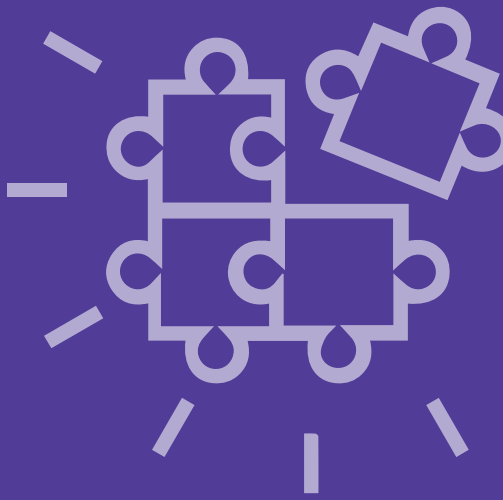
*Policy makers face the challenge of making science based policy decisions that have to rely on a strong knowledge base.*

# Policy Outreach



## Problem

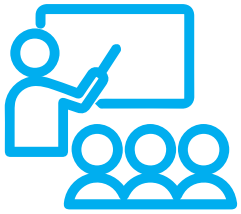
Policy makers face the challenge of making science based policy decisions that have to rely on a strong knowledge base. However, these legislators, many of whom are non-scientists, don't always have the latest and best scientific evidence to ensure informed choices. They usually have multiple sources of conflicting advice, leading to contradicting policies based on politics, individual beliefs and emotions rather than science. In addition, they have many competing interests and little to no time to read long scientific publications.



## Our Intervention

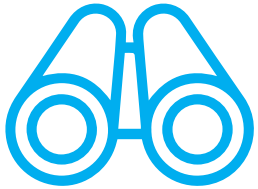
To distribute factual information on agri-biotech and biosafety to policy makers, the Center engages this key stakeholder group through sensitization workshops, round table meetings and seeing-is believing biotech study tours. The Center also translates relevant agri biotech research findings into policy briefs, info-graphics and videos. These IEC materials are thereafter shared through 'Biotech Corners' within parliamentary libraries.

# To update policy makers on agri-biotech and biosafety, the Center:

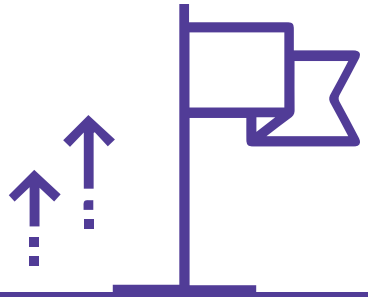


**01.** **Engaged grassroots leaders** in Kenya through two **sensitization workshops and a courtesy visit** to the Council of Governors secretariat. The workshops resulted in **positive policy pronouncements** by County Executive Committee members (county ministers) for Health, Agriculture and Environment. The county ministers, through the Chair of 47 County Executives of Health, called for lifting of the GM foods import ban. The ministers committed to engage the national government towards lifting the ban. In addition, Agricultural **County Executives** from **cotton growing regions submitted written comments in support of Bt cotton to the NBA.** This was prompted by a request from the authority for public comments on an application for open field cultivation of Bt Cotton

**02.** **Sensitized Kenyan law makers** about **two contentious clauses in the Natural Resources Bill** that could have potentially stalled biotechnology development in the country. The clauses required that field trials on GM crops and permits for material transfer agreements be subjected to parliamentary ratification. The **items were expunged as a result of intensive engagements** and team work by *Afri*Center and partners under the Kenya Biotechnology and Biosafety Consortium. Following multiple engagements, **Parliamentarians also voiced their concerns to the EU parliament on the Heubuch report** urging G7 member states not to support GMO crops in Africa.



**03.** **Exposed** close to **10 legislators and key decision makers** from **Ethiopia, Swaziland, Kenya, Zambia and Malawi to India's Bt cotton farming experiences,** as well as the country's biotech crop regulation and commercialization processes. The exposure **enlightened policy makers** and will act as a **catalyst towards evidence-based decision making.**



## Success

Investing in personal contact with policy makers, and sharing of relevant information in a timely manner, results in informed policy decisions. A case in point was the deletion of two contentious clauses in Kenya's Natural Resources Bill, and support for open field cultivation of Bt cotton by county ministers from cotton growing regions. Positive policy pronouncements and political will to create an enabling environment for biotechnology development can also be attributed to the numerous engagements with this key stakeholder group.

## Swaziland

*"We had so many talks and myths about GMOs but when we came here, we spoke to the farmers who have been growing GMO crops for a number of years, and none of the negative things that are being said about GMOs were observed. So the truth of the matter is that farmers are actually growing GMOs. One thing that I have learned is that it is not good to criticize before you actually understand the issue. Because of this trip, I am going back to my country Swaziland very much armed with knowledge, inspiration, zest and oomph to go and debate boldly in parliament on the issues of GMOs."*

**Hon. Dr. Titus Twala, Chair, Agriculture Committee of Parliament, Kingdom of Swaziland, during a biotech study tour to India's Bt cotton fields in November 2016.**

# Media Engagement for Increased Balanced Reporting on Agri-biotech and Biosafety

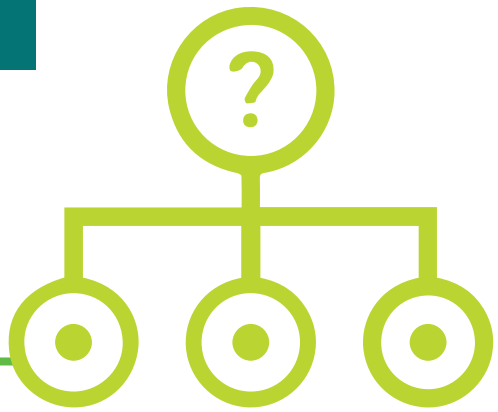
The media shapes public opinion in the way it selects, packages and presents information to its audiences. Therefore, having a group of journalists and editors with factual knowledge on agricultural biotechnology is an important asset. In that respect, *Afri*Center invests heavily in engaging members of the fourth estate in order to improve accurate reporting on agri-biotech and biosafety.

This includes holding training workshops and hands-on capacity building activities such as seeing-is-believing biotech study tours where journalists are able to interact with farmers and get first hand testimonies on biotech crops.

"As a regional body we would like to see the media conversant with scientific information and asking the right questions so as to convey a balanced message to policy makers and the public at large"

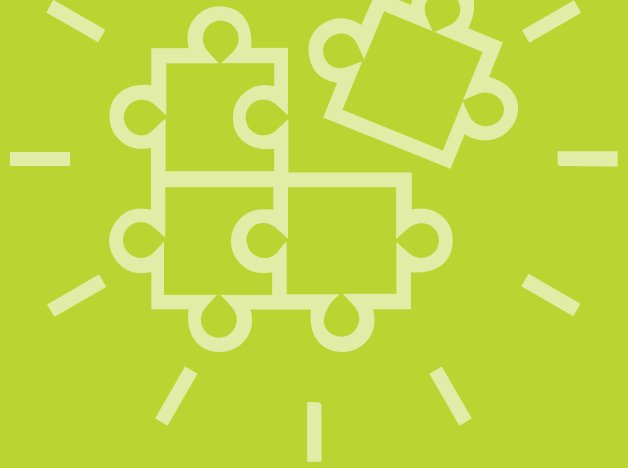
Dr. Gethachew Belay, COMESA's Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy Advisor during a media biotech study tour organized in collaboration with ISAAA AfriCenter and Malawi's Department of Agricultural Research Services.

# Media Outreach



## The Problem

The poor relationship between scientists and journalists has created rifts in science communication. This has led to superficial coverage of agri-biotech and biosafety stories and has had a negative effect on policy formulation and acceptance of the technology.



## Our Intervention

To improve the accuracy and frequency of agri-biotech and biosafety reporting, *Afri*Center has established a working relationship with members of the fourth estate. One way is through a scientist-journalist pairing scheme that enables these two professionals to build a cordial working relationship. The other is through a number of capacity building initiatives to sustain media interest in agri-biotech and biosafety. The Center also holds hands-on capacity building activities where journalists and editors visit laboratories, filed trials as well as farmers' fields.

*Afri*Center sustained media coverage and captured different voices across Africa speaking on the benefits of agri-biotech throughout the year. The Center also recorded increased presence on social media platforms.

## To achieve this, the Center:

*01.* **Trained over 30 Malawian print and electronic journalists on effective science reporting.**
The reporters were also trained on basics of genetic engineering and the role of crop biotechnology for national development. A practical session on how to effectively pitch science stories was included.

*02.* **Sensitized over 20 editors on on-going agricultural biotechnology** research initiatives in Kenya, as well as the country's biosafety status. The workshop provided an opportunity for **relationship building between editors and scientists.**

*03.* **Exposed more than 10 Journalists to biotech crops through our pioneer seeing-is-believing biotech study tours.** The journalists got first-hand testimonies on benefits of biotech crops.

## Success

Regular and focused engagements with members of the fourth estate have contributed to more balanced and accurate coverage of agri-biotech and biosafety issues in the continent.

# Zambia

*"Zambia has lagged behind in this area of biotechnology and I am sure they will be happy to know that whereas these technologies are being shun back home, they are the ones propelling India to higher heights. So for a country that is looking to provide employment to the youth and women, biotech is the way to go. The earlier we come out of denial the better."*

**Tembo Benedict Kanjombe, Journalist, Zambia Daily Mail, during a biotech study tour to India in November 2016.**

# Forming Strategic Partnerships to Maximize Impact

The *Afri*Center partners with like-minded credible institutions in the agricultural biotechnology and biosafety sector. These partnerships seek to ensure a coordinated approach to optimize resources and synergies expertise. Owing to *Afri*Center's policy engagement and communications track record, partners frequently contract the Center to undertake communication and policy engagement activities in support of their projects.

## The support offered includes:

**POLICY OUTREACH INCLUDING DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL STRATEGIES**

**MEDIA ENGAGEMENT INCLUDING TRAININGS ON EFFECTIVE SCIENCE REPORTING**

**SCIENCE AND BIOSAFETY COMMUNICATION TRAININGS FOR SCIENTISTS AND REGULATORS**

**NET-MAPPING AND DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

In 2016, the Center partnered with and offered policy engagement and communication services to the following projects and organizations:




















# Challenges and Causes for Optimism

Drought remains one of the biggest challenges to food security in most parts of the continent, especially in the southern and horn of Africa.  According to the United Nations, an estimated 31 million people on the continent perpetually face starvation. There is need for radical changes in the way Africa handles her food security situation. It is therefore encouraging to note that, five African countries are now channeling their efforts towards embracing products such as the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) to counter food shortages occasioned by frequent droughts.

## Major developments are taking place around the continent. These include:

1. Revision of stringent biosafety laws to pave way for GM crops research in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Mozambique. Swaziland is considering revising a liability clause in the Biosafety Act 2012, to pave way for commercializing insect resistant (Bt) cotton.

2. Political goodwill from African leaders including Kenya's Deputy President who has expressed his desire to lift the ban on GM food imports, as well as a vote of confidence from Nigeria's Minister for Environment Hon. Amina Mohammed. Hon. Mohammed declared that Nigeria is ready to deploy biotechnology to boost the country's economy. She endorsed the National Biosafety Management Agency's (NBMA) regulatory capacity.

3 Increased awareness and appreciation for the technology by policy makers, farmers and youth at the grassroots.
During a policy engagement activity, H.E. Kenneth Lusaka, a Governor from Western Kenya, stated that "biotechnology has been use in other parts of the world so I don't see why we need to re-invent the wheel. The problem with us is we waste a lot of time on side shows and things that are not going to help us move forward and move faster."

4 On-going research on GM crops with up to eight African countries conducting confined field trials on traits of relevance to Africa's challenges. The continent could contribute about 5 new biotech crops to the global basket in coming years. Commercialization of some of the on-going research is expected in the next two to five years.

5 Malawi's substantial progress in GM crops research. After approval of confined field trials for insect resistant cowpea in January 2016 and confined field trials for banana in February 2016, the Malawi National Biosafety Regulatory Committee (NBRC) approved general release of Bt cotton in April 2016.

6 Court case dismissal in Ghana. High Court dismissed request of a food advocacy organization, Food Sovereignty Ghana (FSG), to shelve commercialization of biotech cowpea and rice until provisions of the Biosafety Act were fully implemented. According to the judge, commercialization of biotech products would not affect Ghanaians and members of FSG.

7 Approval for environmental release of Bt maize and Bt cotton in Nigeria and Kenya. Kenya's conditional approvals are part of a routine regulated research process in line with national policies and laws.

Despite these wins, aggressive activism against the technology threatens to curtail progress across the continent. Very strong and well-funded anti-GM lobby groups continue to strongly oppose the technology, especially in countries where progress is being made.

Furthermore, the EU continues to send wrong signals to the continent. A case in point is the 2016 resolution passed by the EU parliament urging G8 member states not to support GM crops in Africa. The resolution calls for subsistence family farming that will perpetuate poverty and hunger. Given that African policy makers are greatly influenced by Europe, such outcomes instill fear and doubt about the technology in the continent. In addition, Burkina Faso's decision to temporarily suspend cultivation of Bt cotton is being misrepresented and exploited by anti-GMO lobby groups.

This signifies the huge task ahead for *Afri* Center and her partners in intensifying knowledge sharing and policy outreach activities in the region.

# Acronyms

AATF - African Agricultural Technology Foundation
ABNE - African Biosafety Network of Expertise
AICB – Inter-professional Cotton Association of Burkina
BecA Hub - Biosciences eastern and central Africa Hub
BICs – Biotechnology Information Centers
CBU – Crop Biotech Update
CFT – Confined Field Trial
COP-MOP - Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol
CIMMYT - International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
COMESA – Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
EBIC - Egypt BIC
ICOSEED - Integrated Community Organization for Sustainable Empowerment and Education for Development
IEC – Information Education and Communication
ILRI - International Livestock Research Institute
IPBO – Institute of Plant Biotechnology Outreach
ISAAA - International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications
KALRO - Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization
KEPHIS – Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service
MBBC - Malawi Biotechnology Biosafety Consortium
NACOSTI - National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation
NARO – National Agricultural Research Organization
NBA – National Biosafety Authority
NBMA - National Biosafety Management Agency
NBRC – National Biosafety Regulatory Committee
NPTs – National Performance Trials
OFAB – Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology
PBS – Program for Biosafety Systems
SCIFODE - Science Foundation for Livelihoods and Development
UBIC - Uganda Biosciences Information Center
VIRCA - Virus Resistant Cassava for Africa
WABIC - West Africa BIC
WEMA - Water Efficient Maize for Africa


"However long the night, the dawn will break."
-African proverb