

# Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa



OPEN FORUM ON AGRICULTURAL  
BIOTECHNOLOGY IN AFRICA

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES foundation



AfricaBio





## Background

Since 1996, biotechnology-derived crops have been commercially planted and their adoption has been increasing steadily. They are now planted by over 18 million farmers in 27 countries covering over 175 million hectares.

The use of innovative agricultural technologies has been identified to have potential to improve agricultural productivity in Africa and contribute to economic development of the continent. African governments and the African Union/ New Partnership for Africa's Development recognise that improved technologies are essential for achieving sustainable

food security and reducing rural poverty in Africa. However, the use of some of these technologies, such as biotechnology, attract intense debate about their safety, impact on trade and ethics. Scientific facts about biotechnology are often mixed with social, ethical and political considerations. These concerns have shifted discussions on biotechnology towards defensive debates – between proponents and opponents of the technology – a situation that fuels skewed information availability to the public in general and to decision makers in particular.

**18 million...***number of farmers growing biotech crops in 2013*

**1996...***year when biotech crops were first grown commercially*

# Enhancing knowledge-sharing and awareness on agricultural biotechnology

Biotechnology has the potential to improve agricultural productivity in Africa, however its use generates intense debate about its safety, impact on trade and ethics which skews information availability to the public and to decision makers delaying or inhibiting its adoption.

The negative perceptions and misinformation on biotechnology and especially genetic modification (GM) have led to delayed adoption of these technologies by many African countries. Currently only four countries in Africa grow biotech crops. These are South Africa, Burkina Faso, Egypt and Sudan. As most African leaders strive to make informed decisions on biotech for their countries, their capabilities are immobilised by the raging debate between proponents and opponents of biotechnology where scientific facts are often mixed with social, ethical and political considerations. In the face of a rapidly growing population, declining agricultural productivity, climate change and reduced resources available

for agricultural research, policy makers are pressed to make the right decisions and are looking for guidance.

## Project goal

OFAB aims to enhance knowledge-sharing and awareness on agricultural biotechnology that will raise understanding and appreciation of the technology and contribute to building an enabling environment for informed decision-making.

OFAB's key message is that agricultural biotechnology, when used responsibly, is safe and can deliver tangible benefits to individuals, communities, organisations and society as a whole.

**175 million hectares...**  
*the area planted globally with biotech crops in 2013*

**4...**  
*number of countries growing biotech crops in Africa in 2013*



# Implementing the Open Forum for Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa project



## Facts and figures

- Four countries in Africa namely South Africa, Burkina Faso, Egypt and Sudan grow biotech crops
- Over 175 million hectares globally were planted with biotech crops in 2013 up from 1.7 million in 1996
- 27 countries planted biotech crops in 2013
- Biotech crops are the fastest adopted crop technology from 1.7 million hectares in 1996 to 175 million hectares in 2013 according to the Global Status of Commercialised Biotech/ GM Crops: 2013

OFAB was established on in 2006 as a platform to facilitate regular exchange of credible information among stakeholders. It is a collaboration between AATF and like-minded organisations. Currently OFAB is operational in eight countries of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia.

For both policy makers and the larger public, OFAB facilitates quality engagement and conversations on the safety and benefits of modern biotechnology. This is attained within an overall goal of providing objective and compelling information on agricultural biotechnology and providing opportunity for key stakeholders to have frank discussions on the benefits and challenges of biotechnology.

## The OFAB model

The implementation of OFAB is at the country level mostly through government

bodies. This ensures that the Forum focuses on country-specific issues thus providing opportunity to generate home-grown solutions. OFAB is also multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary, drawing on a wide range of expertise. By its very nature, OFAB encourages inter-institutional networking, where different organisations participate in its management and meetings and provide input in form of content or finances. It also enjoys significant convening power, demonstrated through its track record of organising regular meetings which attract diverse audiences and speakers. This model makes OFAB flexible, responsive, impartial, inclusive and authoritative.

## OFAB management

The management of OFAB is through collaborative agreements between AATF

and host organisations/partners in the countries. The organisations serve as OFAB secretariats in the countries, providing oversight and ensuring the Forum attends to its objectives. The host institution is responsible for implementation of activities and management of the forum.

## OFAB platforms

OFAB uses various platforms to facilitate discussions on agricultural biotechnology. These include:

- Monthly meetings
- Online platforms - Social media, websites
- Grass roots community mobilisation
- Mass media
- Special engagements
- Exhibitions
- Information materials

**2006...** year OFAB was established

# Benefits of OFAB

The OFAB platform:

- Provides opportunities for stakeholders to know one another, share knowledge and experiences, make new contacts and explore new avenues of bringing the benefits of biotechnology to the African agricultural sector.
- Offers vast opportunities for broadening understanding of agricultural biotechnology in Africa and in turn, contributing to food security improvement through creating an enabling environment for responsible research, development and deployment of safe products of the technology to farmers and consumers in Africa.
- Provides opportunity to make formal presentations or hold informal discussions focusing on the relationships between science, technology, innovation, environmental protection, policy, trade, social benefits sharing and their impact on economic development.



***When appropriately integrated with other technologies for the production of food, agricultural products and services, biotechnology can be of significant assistance in meeting the needs of an expanding and increasingly urbanised population in the next millennium.***



*Food and Agriculture Organisation statement on biotechnology March 2000.*



# The Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa Partnership



- African Agricultural Technology Foundation
- Uganda National Council of Science and Technology
- Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria
- National Biotechnology Development Agency of Nigeria
- Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology
- Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Ghana
- Institut de L'Environnement et de Recherches Agricoles, Burkina Faso
- International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications
- Zimbabwe National Biosafety Authority
- Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research

## Investors

The project is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and also includes contribution from AfricaBio, (for Zimbabwe), National Biotechnology Development Agency (for Nigeria) and the Program for Biosafety Systems. Initial funding to support conceptualisation, piloting and expansion came from the Rockefeller Foundation, UK aid from the UK government and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).



*Agricultural biotechnology can be used to help farmers in African countries to produce more by developing new crop varieties that are drought-tolerant, resistant to insects and weeds and able to capture nitrogen from the air.*



*Dr. Babagana Ahmadu, Director for Rural Economy and Agriculture AU Commission remarks at the Opening of the African Position on GMOs in Agriculture October 17-19, 2006 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

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