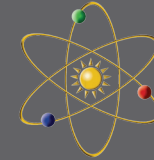


# STRUCTURE OF NAMIBIA'S BIOSAFETY REGULATORY SYSTEM



**NCRST**  
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON  
RESEARCH, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



Minister Responsible for  
Science & Technology



Biosafety Council



Secretariat



Inspectorate



Laboratory

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## BIOTECHNOLOGY & BIOSAFETY

IN NAMIBIA



# BIOTECHNOLOGY & BIOSAFETY

Biotechnology is a broad field of science, which uses living things like plants, animals and microorganisms and their biological processes to make useful products or perform certain functions. It is used in medicine, agriculture, mining and industry.

## Traditional Biotechnology (thousands of years old)

Namibians have been using traditional biotechnology for thousands of years. Communities made bread, beer and wine with yeast; they added bacteria to milk to make sour milk and used dead plant material with fungi and bacteria to make compost to return nutrients in the soil and used plants for medicines.

## Conventional Biotechnology (hundreds of years old)

As knowledge grew all over the world and in Namibia farmers and industries found safer ways to use biology to improve food. Farmers begun to select crops for their taste and resistance to disease using breeding techniques. Industries found even safer ways to use microorganisms to produce foods such as bread, yoghurts and cheese as well as in mining and medicines.

## Modern Biotechnology (approximately 40 years old)

As scientists began to discover more about DNA and its structure, it became clear that specific genes perform specific functions in living organisms (animals, plants and bacteria) and that it is possible to move these genes around to perform the same function in another organism.

This ability to transfer genes became a tool that is referred to as modern biotechnology. The organisms derived from using this tool are called Genetically Modified Organisms or GMOs. These GMOs can be GM foods or GM crops or GM microorganisms.

With the advent of modern Biotechnology it became necessary to ensure that products derived from this technology are safe to humans, animals and the environment. Ensuring safe and sustainable biotechnological practices became known as Biosafety.

## ARE GMOs SAFE?

Each new Genetically Modified (GM) crop and Genetically Modified (GM) food undergoes rigorous assessment including testing to see if the new gene have potential toxins or allergens. Though there is no technology available to provide any evidence of long term effects on human health ,animal health & the environment, every activity involved in producing GMOs undergoes a scientific risk assessment and possible consequences are investigated. If the consequences are found to be acceptable the product is approved if they are not acceptable the product is not approved.



# WHAT DOES NAMIBIA'S LAW SAY ABOUT GMOs

Countries around the world have set up national systems to check the safety of GMOs before they are distributed. Namibia is not an exception. The government of Namibia has designated the National Commission on Research, Science & Technology (NCRST) to regulate the use, production and movement of GMOs in Namibia. The NCRST is mandated to check that GMOs entering Namibia, or produced locally, are safe for humans, animals and the environment.

## THE BIOSAFETY COUNCIL

The Biosafety Council is established by the NCRST under section 19(1) of the Research, Science and Technology Act, 2004 (Act No. 23 of 2004).

The Biosafety Council consists of experts who are responsible for investigating and considering applications for permits to deal with GMOs or GMO products, and make recommendations to the Minister responsible for Science & Technology (currently the Minister of Higher Education & Innovation). Decisions by the Biosafety Council are to be taken in consultation with the public as provided for in the Biosafety Act, 2006.

