



STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP ON DRAFT BIOSAFETY REGULATIONS

3 November 2014

Welcoming Remarks

by

The Chief Executive Officer

of the

National Commission on Research, Science and Technology

Dr Eino Mvula

Director of Ceremonies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,

It is my pleasure and a true privilege to welcome you at the Stakeholders Consultation Workshop on the draft Biosafety Regulations. The National Commission on Research, Science and Technology as the Competent Authority on Biosafety issues is pleased to be here and to spearhead this initiative. The Commission has noted with appreciation the presence of many participants, which is a sign of the importance that you attach to this important field of biotechnology.

Director of Ceremonies,

Biotechnology is the use of living systems and organisms to develop or make useful products, or any technological application that uses biological systems, living organisms or derivatives thereof, to make or modify products or processes for specific use. The development of genetically modified organism (GMO) has become the contentions and most discussed aspect of biotechnology. Indeed advancement in modern science and technology offers tremendous opportunities for improving the well-being of people and environment, however it also embody risks. Therefore there is a need to ensure that adequate care is taken consciously to inform the populace of the benefits and process related to these innovation.

Director of Ceremonies,

In the case of Namibia, Government has long recognized the importance of biotechnology and has acceded to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the

Convention on Biological Diversity adopted by the Parties to that Convention. This was followed by the enactment of the Biosafety Act, 2006 (Act no 7 of 2006), which is administered by the NCRST as the Competent Authority.

The objectives of this Act are

- to introduce a system and procedures for the regulation of genetically modified organisms in Namibia in order to provide an adequate level of protection to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking into account –
 - (a) potential risks to the health and safety of humans and harmful consequences to the environment posed by genetically modified organisms or genetically modified products; and
 - (b) social, cultural, ethical and economic considerations:Provided that lack of scientific knowledge due to insufficient relevant scientific information or scientific consensus should not be interpreted as indicating a particular level of risk, or absence of risk, or an acceptable risk; and
- to provide a framework for responsible research, development and the use of genetic engineering and to manage the risks posed by or as a result of gene technology by regulating activities involving the development, production, use, import, export, transport, release into the environment, marketing and other uses of genetically modified organisms and genetically modified products.

The Biosafety Act, 2006 (Act no 7 of 2006) mandates the Commission to appoint members of the Council in consultation with the Minister.

Director of Ceremonies,

Allow me to outline what the Commission has done to date regarding the establishment of the Biosafety Council. The Biosafety Council has been appointed already this year and one of its primary function would be to finalise the regulations to the Act. This process of drafting of regulation would be participatory and would include stakeholder consultation. Upon finalisation of the Regulations, both the Regulations and the Commencement date will be Gazetted. The Commencement date gazette will also indicated the starting date that GMO's will be regulated through the Biosafety Act. While this process is on-going, the Commission has also set in place the administrative unit to deal with the regulations of GMOs in the country.

Director of Ceremonies,

Coming back to the purpose of this workshop, this a follow up stakeholders' workshop to review the draft biosafety regulations before submission to the Ministry of Justice for Gazetting as provided by the Biosafety Act , 2006 (Act No. 7 of 2006). This workshop is important as it provide opportunity for Namibia to develop regulatory instruments which would provide for safe transfer, handling and use of living GMO in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health, as required under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

As we start we embark on this process of formulating this regulatory instruments, it is important that we take into consideration the view and aspiration of the Namibian people. It is our hope that participants in this workshop would also be able to come up with ideas that could reflect the aspiration of the Namibian people while also taking into consideration the international obligations related to instruments to which Namibia has ratified.

Ladies and Gentleman,

In this connection, I urge all participants to take advantage of the presence of experts, whilst networking among yourselves, by engaging fully throughout this workshop. This, I believe would benefit yourself professionally as well as the country as whole in its quest to implement a biosafety regulatory framework that is in conformity with international obligations.

Thank you