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A NOTE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIOSAFETY REGULATIONS IN ZIMBABWE AND PROSPECTS FOR HARMONISATION

S.C. MUCHENA
African Center for Fertilizer Development
P.O.Box A469, Avondale, Harare, Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

The paper provides an account of the present biosafety considerations of Zimbabwe. The draft biotechnology regulatory policies and procedures developed by the Research Council of Zimbabwe are discussed. Harmonisation of Zimbabwe's regulatory policies with those of other countries is emphasised.

Key Words: **Biotechnology, recombinant DNA, regulatory policies**

RÉSUMÉ

Le papier donne l'état actuel de mesure de biosécurité au Zimbabwe. Le projet des politiques réglementant la biotechndogie et les procédures développées par le conseil scientifique au zimbabwe sont discutés. L'accent est mis sur l'harmonisation des politiques réglementant la biotechnologie au Zimbabwe avec celles des autres pays.

Mots Clés: **Biotechnologie, recombinant DNA, politiques régulatrices**

INTRODUCTION

The Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ), in its national role of coordination and promotion of science and technology, recognised the need to develop biosafety regulations for the country. These regulations are meant to promote the development and use of biotechnology products, but at the same time ensure protection of individuals, the community and the environment. The main goal is to minimise potential hazards associated with applications of biotechnology on the one hand, and facilitating the beneficial utilisation of biotechnology on the other.

DEVELOPMENT OF BIOSAFETY REGULATIONS

The RCZ has developed draft regulations covering recombinant DNA technology in microorganisms, the use of these microorganisms for large-scale production, genetic transformation of plants and animals, and the deliberate or accidental release of such organisms and their products into the environment (Chikwamba, 1995). The RCZ has adopted two levels of committees to serve in these functions, namely the Biotechnology Safety Board (BSB) that will set policy and procedures at national level and provide technical advice to

regulatory authorities and institutions responsible for the development of biotechnology; and Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBC) at institutions carrying out biotechnology research and development work. These committees are yet to be appointed. The biosafety regulations draft document contains the terms of reference, the code of conduct of BSB and IBC members, and describes in detail the various levels of containment and biosafety practices. It is expected that the Zimbabwe biosafety regulations will be approved by the government in the near future. There is already considerable pressure from a number of institutions, such as the tobacco industry, that are developing biotechnology products.

Regarding the issue of harmonisation of biosafety regulations, Zimbabwe would like to take advantage of various forums to harmonise its biosafety regulations with those of other African member states and the rest of world. It is expected that the biosafety regulations will be reviewed from time to time to reflect changing needs and scientific advances in biotechnology.

REFERENCE

Chikwamba, R.K. 1995. State of the art of biotechnology research in Zimbabwe. *African Crop Science Journal* 3:281-288.