



**Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations**

Speech given by FAO Assistant Country Representative **Mr  
Geoffrey Chomba** on behalf of the  
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)  
**Country Representative, Mr. George Okech,**

At the Biosafety Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Training  
Workshop

4 April 2018, Cresta Golf View Lusaka, Zambia

The Executive Director of the National Biosafety Authority (NBA) Mr  
Lackson Tonga

Distinguished members of Scientific Advisory Committee of the NBA

NBA staff and Technical Committee

Stakeholders in Biotechnology and Biosafety

Colleagues and Consultants from FAO – Dr Masami Takeuchi and Dr Bert  
Popping, Dr Helen Kajuju National Biosafety Authority of Kenya; Other  
colleagues from FAO

The media

May I simply say, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the United Nations to the biosafety risk assessment and  
risk communication training in Lusaka, Zambia.

Whereas food security is at the heart of the FAO mandate, food safety and  
quality of food is of course an implicit component on that mandate. And  
yet, ensuring food safety to protect public health and promote economic  
development remains a significant challenge in both developing and  
developed countries.

FAO recognizes that biotechnology potentially provides powerful tools  
for the sustainable development of agriculture, fisheries and forestry, as  
well as the food industry. 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 urbanized population in the next millennium.

However, FAO is also aware of the concern about the potential risks posed by certain aspects of modern biotechnology. These risks fall into two basic categories: the effects on human and animal health and the environmental consequences. Care must be taken to reduce the risks of transferring toxins from one life form to another, of creating new toxins or of transferring allergenic compounds from one species to another, which could result in unexpected allergic reactions.

As you know, the relevant government agencies need to be able to demonstrate to their own populations as well as their trading partners that can guarantee a safe food supply, prevent and control zoonotic aspects of public health, ensure the sustainability of agriculture, safeguard terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments, and protect biodiversity. This is a huge challenge and one that, in most countries, competes with several other important priorities for national attention and resources.

To overcome such challenges, FAO continues to assist its member countries, particularly developing countries, to reap the benefits derived from the application of biotechnologies in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. It also assists developing countries to participate more effectively and equitably in the trade in international commodities and food.

FAO provides technical information and assistance, as well as socio-economic and environmental analyses, on major global issues related to new technological developments. For instance, together with the World Health Organization (WHO), FAO provides the secretariat to the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), which has established an ad hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnologies (TFFBT). Government-designated experts in the task force will develop

standards, guidelines or recommendations, as appropriate, for foods derived from biotechnologies or traits introduced into foods by biotechnological methods. Codex is also considering approaches that will allow the consumer to make informed choices.

FAO is constantly striving to determine the potential benefits and possible risks associated with the application of modern technologies to increasing plant and animal productivity and production. To be in a position to take full advantage of the technology, countries must have the necessary infrastructure, financial support and expertise. In the case of GMOs, countries will also need to put the necessary regulatory framework in place to minimize potential risks.

To this end, FAO provides technical advice for the establishment of appropriate regulatory frameworks in the fields of food safety. National Biosafety Authority of Zambia has participated in the regional training on the same topic held in 2016 in Nairobi, Kenya where several more COMESA countries have participated and exchanged their capacity development needs and challenges. I was informed from my colleagues that this meeting is a follow up meeting to concretize the areas for improvement and take a regional collaborative approach in capacity development in the relevant areas.

I am delighted that you have been able to take time out of your busy work schedules to join us here. We hope to see the positive outcomes to strengthen the national capacity to assess the safety of foods derived from modern biotechnology and to manage better all relevant issues in protecting public health, agricultural production and the environment.

I wish you all the best during the next three days, and look forward to hearing about the outcomes of this workshop. Thank you.