



**PRESS STATEMENT: 30<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2015**

## **CIVIL SOCIETY OUTRAGED AT SECRET GM MAIZE TRIALS**

We, the Tanzania Alliance for Biodiversity (TABIO), are outraged by plans by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Cooperatives and the Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) to conduct open field trials of genetically modified (GM) drought tolerant maize and insect resistant GM maize at Makutupora, Dodoma, as reported in the East African Newspaper of 27th October 2015. While these trials will start in April 2016 there has been no consultation with concerned stakeholders, civil society organizations, farmers and consumers as required by law. The application for regulatory approval has not been made public and no environmental impact assessment has been carried out, both of which are required by the national biosafety regulations.

The GM drought tolerant maize is part of the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project being implemented in South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique, which offers the 'royalty free' GM drought tolerant maize to smallholder farmers in Africa as a 'Climate Smart' solution to abiotic stresses such as drought. So far, a massive US\$85 million has been injected into the WEMA project, while the US-based Monsanto seed and chemicals corporation has "donated" its drought-tolerant technology, which contains a bacterial "coldshock" gene (csp), its insect resistant Bt gene, (Cry1Ab), and technical expertise.

The GM drought tolerant maize is really a hoax to enable foreign seed companies to secure intellectual property rights to Tanzania's best indigenous drought tolerant maize varieties. TABIO Coordinator Abdallah Mkindi explains, "The real solution to prepare for climate change is to support smallholder producers to sustain and increase agricultural diversity and resilience, do away with harmful chemicals and place smallholders at the centre of control over their resources and decision-making."

In South Africa, the commercial release of the GM drought tolerant maize has been taken on appeal by the African Centre for Biodiversity. According to Mariam Mayet of the African Centre for Biodiversity, "The GM drought tolerant maize is a sham; it has not undergone proper risk assessment anywhere in the world and has no history of safe use." Evidence from the Union of Concerned Scientists shows that the GM drought tolerant transgene confers just 1% increase in yield, and then only under 'moderate' drought conditions.

Tanzania consumers, farmers and scientists should be aware that GM crops have failed to deliver the promised yield increases, or pesticide reductions in African countries. In South Africa it has been reported that pests have become resistant to the GM Bt maize. Further,

biotech industry claims of consensus on the safety of GMOs are not supported the peer-reviewed evidence. A joint statement signed by over 300 PhD independent scientists concludes that the scarcity and contradictory nature of the scientific evidence published to date prevents conclusive claims of safety, or of lack of safety, of GMOs. Strong scientific evidence on the long-term safety of GM crops and foods for human and animal health and the environment should be obtained in a manner that is honest, ethical, rigorous, independent, transparent, and sufficiently diversified to compensate for bias.

GM maize has been banned for cultivation in several European countries including Germany, France and Italy because of food safety and environmental concerns. In more than 60 countries around the world there are significant restrictions or outright bans on the production and sale of GMOs.

Solutions to agriculture and food security must be ecologically sound and sustainable. A review of 286 ecological agriculture projects in 57 countries show 116% increase in yields for African projects, and 128% increase in East Africa<sup>1</sup>. That means ecological agriculture more than doubles farmers' yields. According to the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, new scientific research increasingly shows Agroecology offers far more environmentally sustainable methods that can still meet the rapidly growing demand for food<sup>2</sup>.

What the farmers need in Tanzania and Africa is not just increase in yields. According to MVIWATA, "Farmers need markets for their produce, and they need affordable credit, infrastructure like warehouses, irrigation schemes and rural roads to transport their produce to the markets. These are the challenges that the government is yet to address but instead scientists are rushing to adopt technologies that do not meet farmers' priorities."

We call upon the Vice President's Office - Division of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives, as well as the Commission for Science and Technology, to urgently ensure that the national regulations are fully implemented and, that the public is given a chance to comment on the proposed trials and participate fully in the decision making process as required by the Biosafety Regulations. We further request that a comprehensive environmental impact assessment is done before any field trials are carried out or GMOs and their products are introduced into the human food and animal feed supply.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://unctad.org/en/docs/ditcted200715\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/en/docs/ditcted200715_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tni.org/en/article/un-only-small-farmers-and-agroecology-can-feed-world>