

GM seed variety not accepted in the SADC seed variety catalogue - for now

Sifiso Sibandze, sifiso.sibandze@gmail.com

In as much as biotechnology is described as something which is here to stay, SADC countries are not yet ready to accept the introduction of genetically modified seed varieties under the SADC variety catalogue.

This is according to FANRPAN Project Manager Dr Bellah Mpofu.

This means the SADC Seed Harmonization Policy task teams from the piloting countries Malawi, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Zambia are not touching on issues of genetically modified seed varieties. The harmonisation of the seed policies for now is for the non-GMO varieties which would be traded across the region.

“Until SADC countries have agreed to a common position on the acceptance of genetically modified varieties, such varieties will not be included in the SADC variety catalogue. In the meantime, genetically modified varieties can still be released at national level in countries allowing for this,” said Mpofu.

In as much as genetically modified seed varieties are eligible to withstand the climate change conditions, some countries in the SADC region, including Swaziland, still have no legal frameworks to regulate their introduction.

FANRPAN’s senior biotechnology, seed industry legislation expert, Wynand van der Walt, said all countries need to monitor the import of seed.

“It could be very risky if seed is imported without having a biosafety regulation framework in place. Countries with no biosafety regulations should be more vigilant on the imports by multinational seed producing companies because it might happen that genetically modified seeds illegally infiltrate countries with no biosafety regulations.

“Countries that have accepted genetically modified seed varieties at national level have to make sure that there are laws put in place to protect the contamination of the inherited seeds by the genetically modified varieties. The harmonisation system does not replace the current national seed systems. These simply create common national standards and regulatory procedures, so it is vital that the inherited seeds are protected by law,” said Van der Walt.