

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE NATIONAL
BIOSAFETY FRAMEWORK CONSULTATIVE
WORKSHOP BY THE ASSISTANT MINISTER OF
AGRICULTURE HON. P. L. SIELE AT SEBELE
(NATIONAL VET LAB)
ON 4TH APRIL 2006**

Director of ceremony,

The Regional Coordinator of UNEP-GEF Biosafety,
Mr Charles Gbedemah,

Deputy Permanent Secretary Ministry of Agriculture,
Dr Micus Chimbombi,

Honourable Councillors,

Directors here present,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

I feel greatly honoured to be here on the occasion of the National Biosafety Framework Consultative workshop, which is the last level of the development of the Biosafety Framework for Botswana.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your presence and participation in this workshop is a clear indication of your unwavering commitment and dedication to establishing a framework for this country. I have been made to understand that a National Biosafety Framework is a combination of policy, legal, administrative and technical instruments that are put in place to address safety for the environment and human health in the application of modern biotechnology.

The policy component of the National Biosafety Framework seeks to promote the development and application of biotechnology, taking into account the protection of biological resources to ensure their sustainable use, and protection of human health while minimizing the potential adverse socio-economic impact of biotechnology. The policy on biosafety provides the rationale for the development of a

regulatory regime that is part of the components for discussion at this workshop.

The regulatory regime comprises legislation, laws, acts, regulations, and guidelines, with follow up systems to monitor the effects of biotechnology on the environment, human, animal or plant life or health and enforce compliance.

The administrative system includes establishing an institutional body (competent authority) responsible for processing requests for use of biotechnology including placing on the market, intentional introduction into the environment, and field trials, of biotechnology products. The procedure for handling notifications and requests for permits and risk assessments in decision-making is also outlined in the administrative system.

The National Biosafety Framework also provides for the mechanisms for public awareness, education and participation on matters pertaining to Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Public involvement in the decision-making process on GMOs is considered critical. It is the public that is to choose what is appropriate for it.

Overall, this framework will lead to regulation of the use of modern biotechnology in order for the country to benefit from this science. It is necessary to note that there are advantages as well as potential detrimental effects of modern biotechnology that should be considered.

I believe many of you are aware of the use of modern biotechnology in the fields of medicine, Agriculture, mining and energy as well as industry. Many products have been developed for use in the field of human and veterinary medicine and other products have also been developed for various specific needs

such as microorganisms developed for purposes of degrading oil which can play an important role in cleaning the seas and the environment in the event of oil spillages and highly specific medicines that do not have impact on non-target organizations.

Whereas we note the advances in these fields, there are concerns relating to potential risks associated with the application of modern biotechnology. This is what brings about the issue of biosafety, a term used to describe the safe application of modern biotechnology, to reduce or eliminate the potential risks resulting from such technology and its products.

Ladies and Gentlemen

During the two days you will be gathered here you will deliberate on the key components of the National Biosafety Framework with the view to ensure that all the necessary elements are incorporated, that will

ensure that Botswana can protect its people and the environment from the potentially hazardous effects of modern biotechnology. You will also ensure that National Biosafety Framework will provide an enabling environment for the country to benefit from this science for our peoples prosperity.

I therefore wish you fruitful deliberations and it is my hope that your workshop will provide a good forum for contributions of the stakeholders to the National Biosafety Framework. I therefore urge you to participate freely and constructively.

Let me end by expressing gratitude to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for their generous support by providing funds for the development of the National Biosafety Framework. I wish to also thank the National Coordinating Committee on Biosafety for providing valuable technical advice to the Competent

Authority – the Department of Agricultural Research on issues relating to Biotechnology and Biosafety. Finally, I want to thank you all for having spared your valuable time to participate in this landmark workshop.

I now consider it my singular honour and privilege to declare the workshop on the National Biosafety Framework officially open.

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