

# **PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMESA POLICY ON BIOTECHNOLOGY AND BIOSAFETY**

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# About myself

- Currently work as Program Manager, Agrobiodiversity and Biotechnology Program at ASARECA
  - Come from Uganda
  - Started my career entomologist with International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in Nairobi, Kenya
  - Served as Associate Executive Secretary Uganda National Council of Science and Technology
  - Coordinated BIOEARN Programme
  - Was National Project Manager, UNEP/GEF National Biosafety Framework Biosafety
  - Serve on several scientific bodies and committees
  - Practice commercial farming activities privately

# Presentation



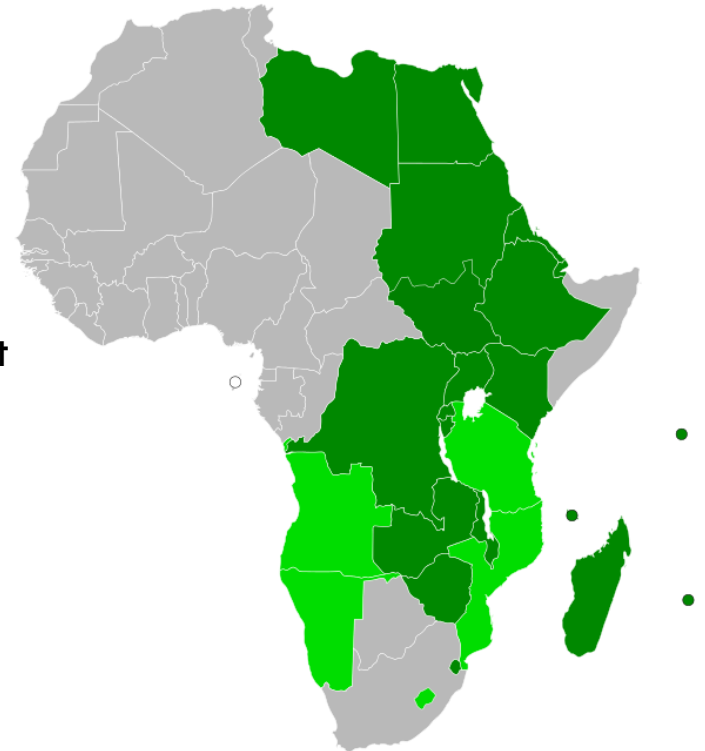
- About the COMESA REGION
- Justification for COMESA involvement in Biotechnology and Biosafety issues: RABESA Initiative and Rationale
- RABESA Objectives
- Major Outputs of the RABESA Initiative
- Expected Impact
- Challenges and Lessons

# About the COMESA Region

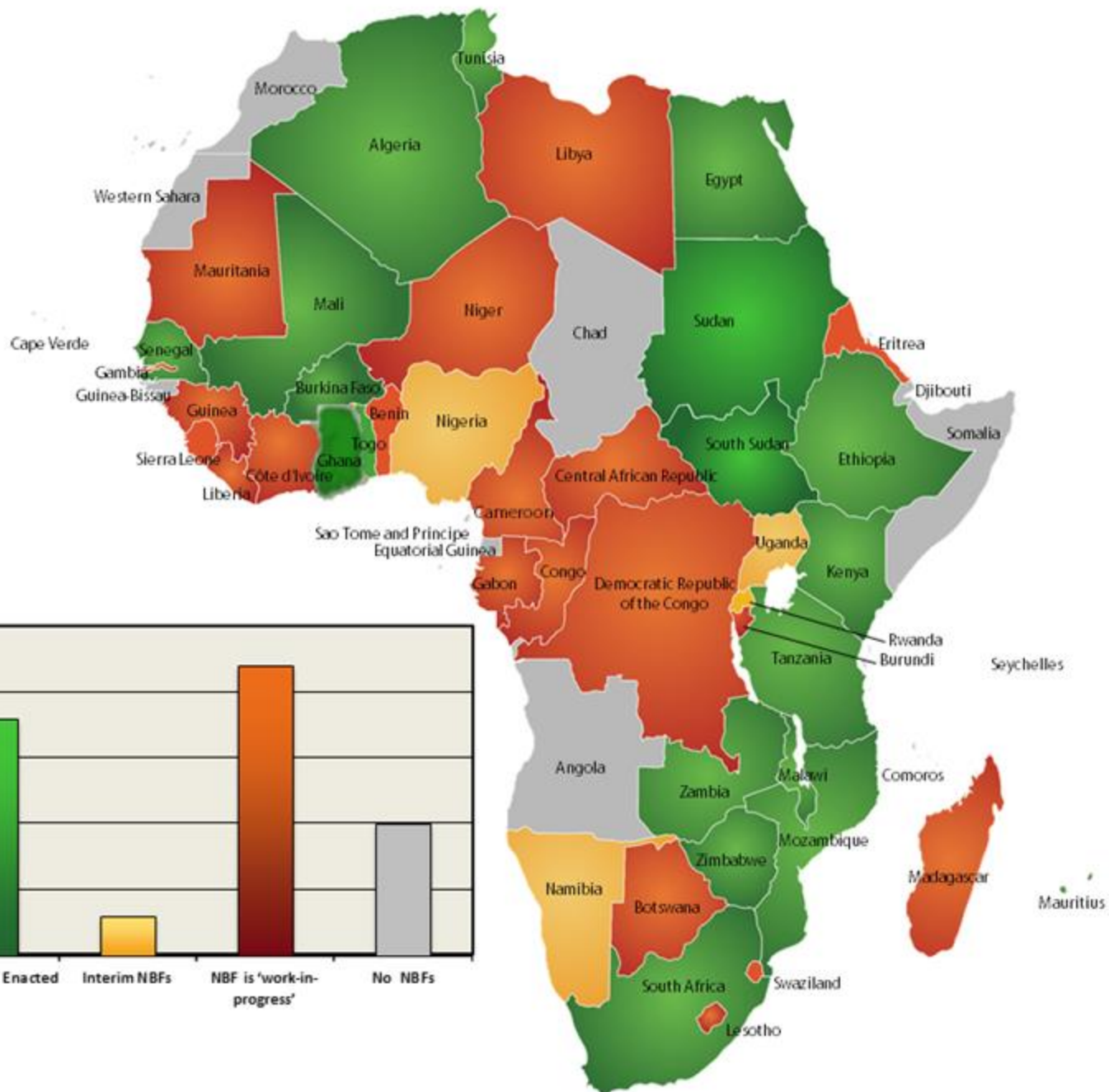
## Quick Facts

- ❑ Formed in December 1994 as Preferential Trade Area (PTA) but the
- ❑ Common market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) was launched in 2000.
- ❑ Largest regional economic organization in Africa, with 19 member states and a population of about 490 million
- ❑ Covers a total land area almost 13 million km<sup>2</sup>
- ❑ 90% of the land area is yet to be exploited
- ❑ Total GDP of over US\$ 388 billion
- ❑ Total exports from the Region: US\$ 21 bn per annum
- ❑ Total trade goods around US\$ 60bn per annum

## COMESA Countries



# Current status of Development as of NBFs March 2012



# Justification for COMESA involvement in Biotechnology and Biosafety issues

- Article 129 of the COMESA treaty stipulate cooperation in agricultural development, science and technology domains, to increase agricultural production and attain regional food security
- Article 1301(a) urges member states to cooperate in specific fields of agriculture, including harmonization of agricultural policies towards a common agricultural policy
- Article 14 of the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol states that countries may enter into bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements and arrangements to manage trans-boundary movement of GMOs
- Best Practice for regional organizations (Southern Africa Committee on Biotechnology and Biosafety (SACBB), European Union, European Food safety Authority (EFSA), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD))

# RABESA Initiative

- RABESA - is acronym for **Regional Approach to Biotechnology and Biosafety Policy in Eastern and Southern Africa**
- Conceived as Project at the request of COMESA Ministers of agriculture in 2001 to:
  1. Guide the safe development, application and transfer of biotechnology
  2. Support member state regulatory institutional frameworks
  3. Provide for coordinated and supportive action in several areas
  4. Manage intra-regional trade in products that may contain GMOs

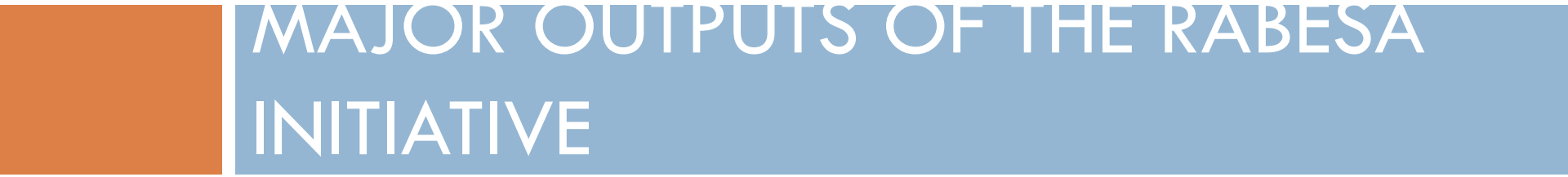
# Rationale for RABESA

- Need to develop regional policies to address trade and impact of GMOs on trade
  - Diffusion of GMOs was likely to impact on trade and access to emergency food aid
  - Efficiency in decision making-minimized costs and time taken to make approvals
- Inherent regionality of Biosafety and Biotechnology issues
  - Environmental impacts cut across member state borders
  - Food safety issues are similar across the region
  - Commonality of food consumption patterns
- Inadequacy of financial resources at member states level for development/implementation of national biosafety systems
  - Sharing regional expertise and infrastructure
  - Enhanced information sharing and coordination on trans-boundary movement of GMOs



# Project Objectives

1. Undertake stakeholder analysis on opportunities and challenges related to biotechnology and biosafety in region
2. Estimate impacts of GM crops on farm incomes
3. Estimate potential commercial export risks associated with planting of GM crops in the region
4. Estimate impact of restrictive GM policies on access to emergency food aid
5. Review a range of regional policy options and common position towards GM crops for the COMESA countries



# MAJOR OUTPUTS OF THE RABESA INITIATIVE

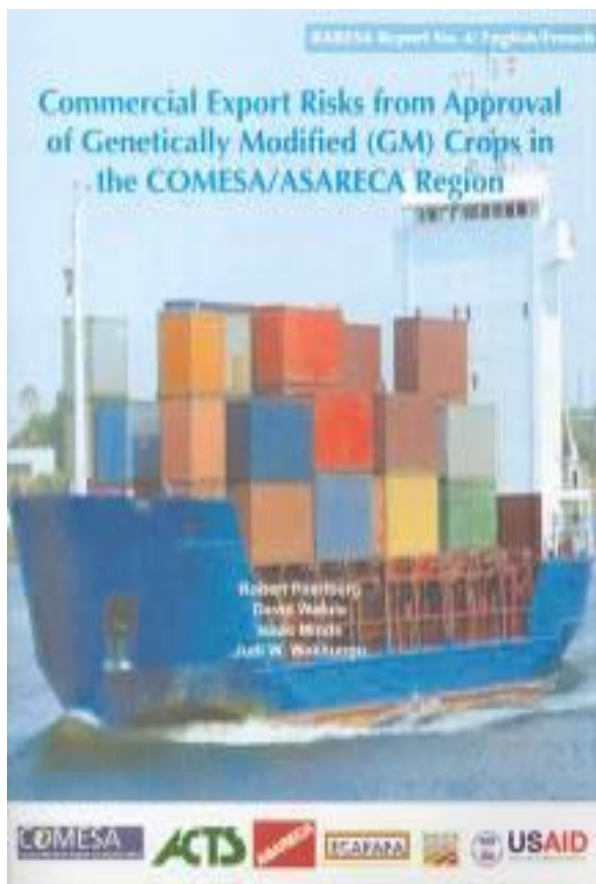
# OUTPUT 1

Policy studies centered around analysis of:

- ❑ Potential farm incomes gains from adoption of GM crops in the COMESA region
- ❑ Magnitude of income gains from adoption of GM crops in the COMESA region
- ❑ Magnitude of commercial export risks associated with GMO's
- ❑ Delivery of emergency food aid with GM content

# 1. Commercial export risks from approval of GM Crops in COMESA

## Commercial Export Risks

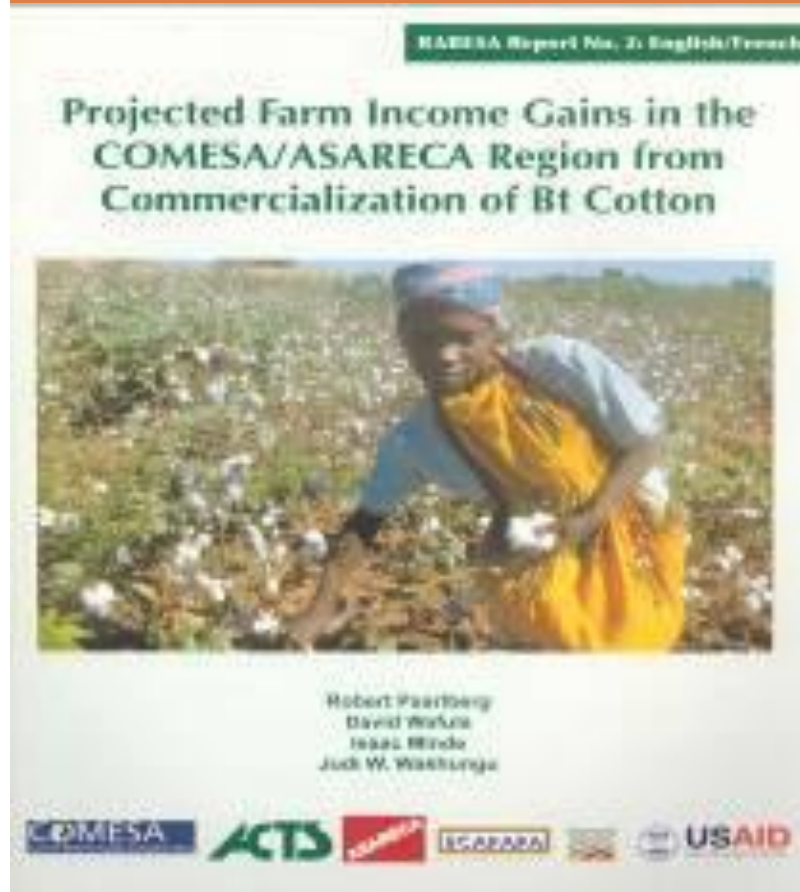


## Study Findings

- Magnitude of commercial of risks from adoption of GMOs was small for COMESA
- Intra-regional export risks were high if COMESA countries commercially plant GM maize and cotton

## 2. Projected Farm Income Gains from Commercializing GMOs

### Projected Income Gains

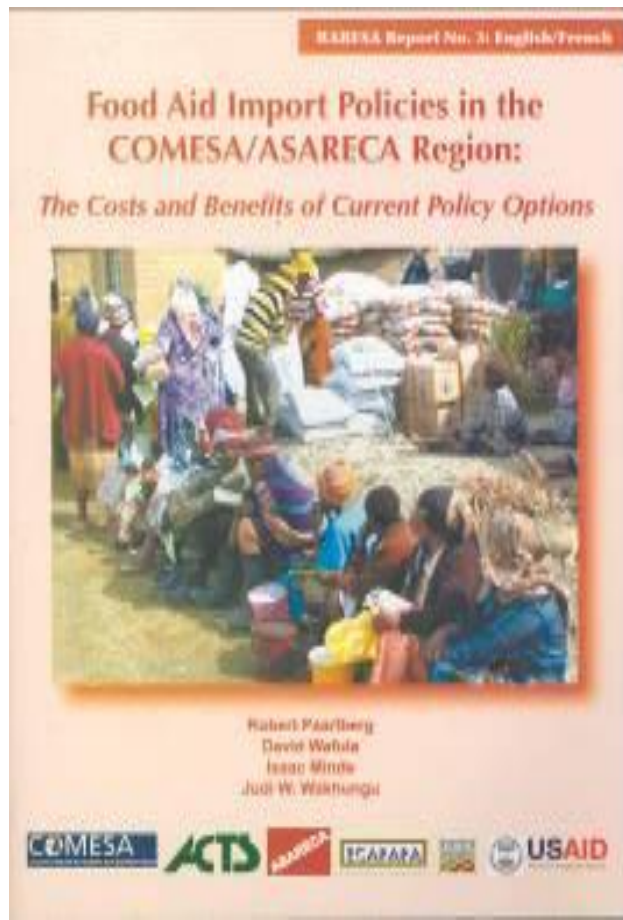


### Study Findings

- Farmers' incomes in COMESA region would increase significantly if they adopted insect resistant varieties of cotton and maize

# 3. Food Aid Import Policies to COMESA Region

## Food Aid Import Policies



## Study Findings

- Emergency food aid to COMESA account for 85% of all food aid shipments to sub-Saharan Africa
- A large proportion (about 65%) of food aid to COMESA is sourced by World Food Programme from countries that plant GMO's mainly e.g. Canada, US
- Restrictive policies would be very detrimental

# OUTPUT 2

Regional biosafety policy guidelines on:

- ❑ Commercial planting of GM Crops
- ❑ Commercial trade policy in GM products
- ❑ Access to emergency food aid with GM content

***with a view to inform science based decision making among member states***

# Summarized Procedure for approving GM Crop for Planting in COMESA

- GMO application is made to the National Competent Authority in the Member State
- Application forwarded to COMESA Secretariat for consideration by Panel of Experts (PoE)
- An opinion is communicated back to submitting country
- PoE constitutes an adhoc Genetic Risk assessment Committee (GRASCOM) to conduct risk assessment
- Outcome of risk assessment communicated to submitting member state, other COMESA countries and general public
- Submitting country takes a decision on whether or not to approve GM Crop for commercial planting



# Key Considerations : Checks and balances

- Applicant member state is represented in GRASCOM
- Applicant meets costs relating to risk assessment (determined by COMESA)
- PoE and GRASCOM is obliged to protect Confidential Business information in accordance with article 21 of the Cartagena protocol.
- PoE and GRASCOM is obliged to declare any conflict of interest
- Responsibility for conducting public consultations is the responsibility of submitting member state. The relevant public views are submitted by submitting member state or any other member state to COMESA to facilitate risk assessment process

# Procedures for Trade in GM products

- Considered under 4 categories
  1. Trade in GM Seed
  2. Trade in GM Food, Feed and Processing
  3. GM FFP in Transit
  4. FFP with low level presence of GM

# Summarized Procedure for Trade in GM Seed in COMESA

- **If GM seed has not been approved in any COMESA member state:**
  - An application is made to importing country
  - Importing country transmit risk assessment dossier to COMESA secretariat
  - COMESA constitutes a PoE to conduct risk assessment, an informed opinion is provided
- **If GM seed is approved in one COMESA member state with similar environments:**
  - PoE risk assessment is conducted, opinion given
  - Criteria for determining whether an environment is similar is established by GRASCOM referencing national seed policies and variety release procedures
- **If GM seed is approved in one COMESA member state with different environments:**
  - Importing country transmits risk assessment dossier to COMESA secretariat for risk assessment , an informed opinion is provided
  - Importing country takes decision to approve seed for planting & relay decision to applicant and COMESA

# Summarized procedure for Trade in GM Food, Feed and Processing commodities

- **If GM for FFP is approved in one member state but earmarked for trade in another member state**
  - COMESA country which originally approved commodity shares approval decision documents with receiving country and approve consignment
- **If GM for FFP is approved in non-member state for first time trading in a member state**
  - An application is made through COMESA Secretariat for an independent risk assessment by PoE and GRASCOM for an opinion
  - Criteria for determining whether an environment is similar is established by GRASCOM
- **If GM for FFP is approved in a non-member state and has been traded in a member state**
  - Approval/decision document is shared by the second member state to facilitate decision making
  - In case of any doubts, PoE constitutes GRASCOM to communicate an opinion

# Summarized Procedure for GM for FFP in Transit

- **GM FFP approved in a member state transiting through another member state**
  - Trans-boundary movement requirements under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety are observed
  - In event of objection to transit, matter is referred to POE for scientific opinion

# Summarized Procedure for GM FFP with Low level presence

- Where a consignment of non-GM FFP has low level presence of GMO as established by POE and GRASCOM and approved, **the consignment is treated as non-GM**
- Where a consignment of non-GM FFP has possible GM event approved in a non COMESA country , the consignment will be accompanied by the statement, **“It may contain LMOs FFP which ahs been approved by exporting country”**

# Summarized Procedure for emergency food aid with GM content

- An application is submitted to the importing country through an import permit
- Member state takes decision whether or not GM food aid is supplied in wholesome or milled
- Individual member countries make decisions on low level presence thresholds related to food aid with GM content
- Movement of food aid with GM content from one member state to another, is accompanied by a signed statement that the food is already released for public consumption in a COMESA member state.

# Other consideration for emergency food aid

- Transit COMESA countries are obliged to facilitate and expedite transportation of emergency food aid.
- The importer is obliged to comply with biosafety requirements for transportation., in the transit and destination countries
- COMESA member states are obliged to regularly inform relief agencies and other stakeholders and COMESA secretariat of any changes in their national biosafety policy, legal and regulatory systems in relation to delivery of emergency food aid with GM content



## OUTPUT 3

Review a range of regional policy options and common position towards GM crops for the COMESA countries

# Identifying a range of regional biosafety policy options for COMESA

Area of focus	Appropriate option/ Recommendation	Reasons advanced
1. Commercial planting of GM crops	Centralized regional assessment, <b><u>national decision making</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Standardized and more transparent</li> <li>● Cost effective</li> <li>● Sharing of resources, information and expertise</li> </ul>
2. Commercial trade policy in GM products	Advice/information from a central regional clearing house, <b><u>national decision making</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Regional level assessment cost effective</li> <li>● Assures national commitment</li> <li>● Information sharing</li> <li>● Capacity building</li> </ul>
3. Emergency food aid policy on GM products	Guidelines developed at regional level, <b><u>decision taken at country level</u></b> on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitate transit of food aid</li> <li>● Facilitate provision of food to the needy</li> </ul>

## OUTPUT 4

Communication strategy for advocacy and outreach regarding common approach towards biotechnology policies biosafety frameworks and general awareness

## OUTPUT 5

Biosafety roadmap to assist member countries in the process of putting in place functional biosafety frameworks

# OUTPUT 6

COMESA panel of experts in biotechnology and biosafety

# OUTPUT 7

Institutionalization of COMESA Biotechnology and Biosafety Unit under the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Africa “ACTESA” organ

# Pivotal features of RABESA policy guidelines

1. Has added value to what countries can do together for products and activities affecting GM crop cultivation, Trade and Food aid
2. Collective recognition of both benefits and potential risks associated with GMOs
3. A regional level biosafety risk assessment mechanism
4. Mechanism for capacity building
5. National level decision to underscore importance national sovereignty

# Expected Impacts from RABESA when fully operational

- Enhanced capacity of the COMESA member states to make informed decisions on handling of GMOs
- Reduced trade barriers, increased agricultural productivity and food security
- Enhanced collaboration and coordination between COMESA and other RECs on GMO's
- Enhanced level of awareness and understanding of the potential impacts of GMOs on trade and access to food imports (including emergency food aid) among policy makers



# Challenges and Lessons

- Issues of regional harmonization should be handled in a consultative, participatory, and inclusive manner
- Regional harmonization of biosafety policies is a technical and political process that requires strong political will and commitment at various levels
- Issue of national sovereignty is a fundamental and sensitive issue and regional process should not infringe on or override national interests
- Awareness and outreach efforts are necessary for countries to appreciate the benefits of harmonized approach
- Project partners with a track record of trust –key for sustained progress
- Outputs must be consistent with other international agreements and Conventions

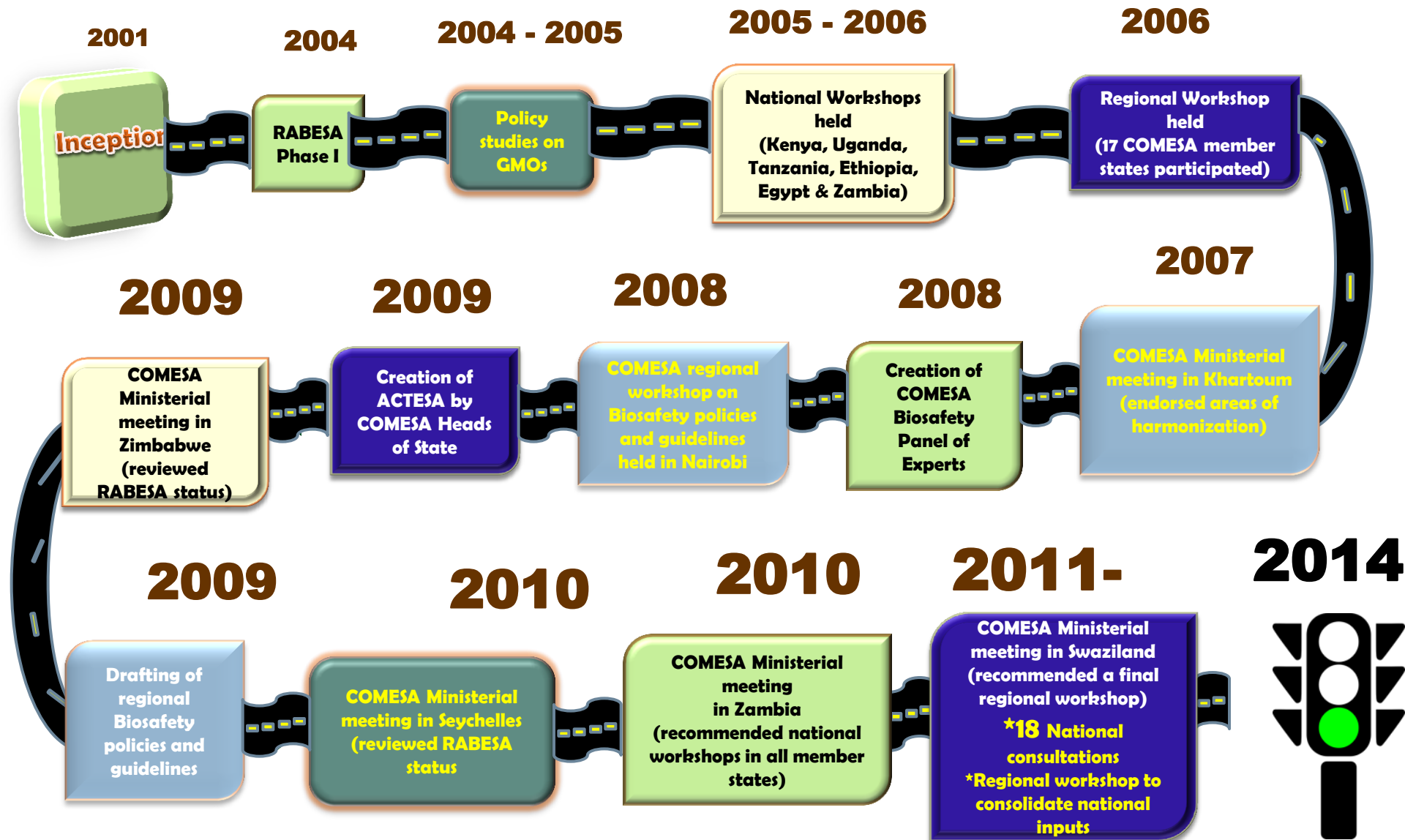
# Consistency with International Agreements and Conventions

- Biosafety frameworks at all levels (international, regional, national, and institutional) must function in tandem for a safe and sustainable access to agricultural biotechnology.
  - ▣ Convention on Biological diversity (CBD) and Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety
  - ▣ World Health Organisation (WHO)
  - ▣ Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)
  - ▣ Codex Alimentarius (International code and Standards)
  - ▣ International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)
  - ▣ World Trade Organisation agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary standards (SPS)

# Regulatory Pitfalls to Avoid

- Key issues that can lead to disagreements and stymie progress towards harmonized regulatory frameworks include:
  - Choice of terminologies
  - Consistency with international obligations
  - Cost of regulatory compliance
  - Extent and nature of data requirement
  - Choice of liability and redress regime
  - Inclusion or otherwise of socio-economics
  - Labelling
  - Level of clarity of regulations and enforceability of laws

# RABESA Project Progress: 2001 – 2014



# Confined Field Trials Priority Crops in COMESA countries

1. **Egypt**- Cotton, maize, tomato, sugarcane
2. **Kenya**- Maize, cotton, cassava, Sorghum, sweet potato
3. **Malawi** - Cotton
4. **Sudan** - Cotton
5. **Uganda**- Maize, banana, cassava, cotton, sweet potato, rice

# Implementation Phase

- Proposed Strategic Objectives
  - ▣ Reconstitute the Panel of Experts
  - ▣ Establish database for risk assessment subcommittees (GRASCOMS)
  - ▣ Develop Standard Operating Procedures for regional level biosafety risk assessment system
  - ▣ Resource mobilisation to build biosafety capacity in member states and other stakeholders
  - ▣ Raise awareness on COMESA Policy on biotechnology and biosafety
  - ▣ Monitor and improve the COMESA Policy on biotechnology and biosafety

# Acknowledgements

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# THANK YOU



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