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## Genetically Modified Crops in Africa — NECOFAS’s Activities on the Conflicting Issue

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### Abstract

Since 1996 a great number of genetically modified crops (GMC) have been released and commercialised. New cultivars of maize (*Zea mays*), soybean (*Glycine max*), cotton (*Gossypium* spp.), papaya (*Carica papaya*), tomatoes (*Lycopersicon esculentum*), canola (*Brassica napus*) and others have been developed that carry additional genes conditioning traits as herbicide tolerance, insect resistance, or virus tolerance. From 1996 to 2004 the global area of biotech crops increased from 1.7 million hectares to 81.0 million hectares. More than 34 % of the global biotech crop area in 2004, equivalent to 27.6 million hectares, was grown in developing countries where growth continues to be strong.

The Network of Ecofarming in Africa (NECOFA), founded by agricultural scientists from nine African countries in 1999 in Ethiopia, supported by Capacity Building International (InWent) and the International Centre North South Dialogue (ICNSD), declared its opinion regarding the use of GMCs in Africa. At the biannual conference 2004 in Kumasi in Ghana, where the country coordinators of all member countries (since the establishment of NECOFA, four more countries joined the network) met to exchange experiences and consider current issues, GMCs were a major point of discussion. Outcome of this conference on “Promotion of Ecofarming for Food Security, Protection of Natural Resources, Health and Income Generation” was the Kumasi declaration. Point three of the declaration claims a moratorium on the commercialisation of GMCs until: **(a)** Bio-safety regulations and policies are in place and **(b)** all environmental and health risk issues are properly and adequately assessed by competent and independent commissions. All NECOFA member countries follow that declared need for clarification on the risks of genetically modified crops in form of information campaigns. On the example of South Africa as a country that took up very fast the commercial use of GM crops, the activities of NECOFA on GMCs are presented. The poster exemplifies the content of joint campaigns with other local and national NGOs in South Africa. Also, structure and function of the NECOFA network between 13 African countries on risks of genetic erosion and crop-to-wild gene flow caused by GM crops is shown.

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