

Agroecology in Action

AFSA
ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

Stories from the continent

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STORIES COMING UP



Empowering farming communities agroecology training: through the success story of RUCID.



Story of Change: Empowering Tanzanian Farmers through the Healthy Soil Healthy Food Initiative.

FROM THE EDITOR

Nigeria's suspension of new GMO approvals is a turning point for food governance in Africa. What makes this story powerful is not just the policy shift, but the citizen action behind it. From grassroots rallies to expert briefings and public hearings, this decision was shaped by collective voices demanding transparency, biosafety, and respect for indigenous food systems. This article captures a rare instance where democratic pressure combined with institutional action. It reminds us that food policy isn't just about science, it's about sovereignty, trust, and who gets to decide what ends up on our plates. Part of AFSA's My Food is African storytelling series, this piece illustrates that safeguarding Africa's food future is as much about halting harmful technologies as it is about advancing inclusive, community-rooted alternatives like agroecology.

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Nigeria National Assembly Suspends Approvals of GMOs amid Public Concern

By **Mutinta Kentani**
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In a landmark decision that signals a significant shift in national food policy, the Nigerian National Assembly on May 16, 2024, officially suspended the approval of new genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the country. This decision, accompanied by the launch of a formal investigation into the country's GMO approval processes, represents a major milestone in Nigeria's journey toward more transparent and accountable food governance. The move culminated in a public hearing on November 19, 2024, where key stakeholders, including scientists, farmers, civil society groups, consumer advocates, and legal experts, gathered to share evidence, voice concerns, and call for a safer and more inclusive approach to food regulation. The suspension of GMO approvals marks a rare moment of institutional alignment with widespread public concern. For years, citizens, advocacy groups, and farmer associations have expressed unease over the unchecked proliferation of genetically modified crops in Nigeria, citing insufficient risk assessments, lack of public consultation, and the potential for environmental and health impacts.

This National Assembly action brings these concerns to the forefront of national policy discourse. It reflects a growing awareness that

decisions about what Nigerians grow, eat, and trade must be based on rigorous science, democratic engagement, and a clear commitment to food sovereignty.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ADVOCACY

This policy shift was not spontaneous. It was the result of sustained advocacy by a coalition of civil society organisations, researchers, and media practitioners under the coordination of Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF), who mobilised strategically to ensure the issue reached the highest levels of government.

In the months leading up to the suspension, advocacy groups undertook targeted visits to legislators, providing detailed briefings and urging for a pause on GMO approvals until more robust safety checks and transparent approval systems were in place. These efforts were complemented by public awareness campaigns, including rallies, press briefings, radio and TV interviews, and community sensitisation programs aimed at demystifying GMOs and promoting citizen involvement in food policy debates.

Researchers and allied experts also played a key role, preparing and submitting memoranda to the House Committee on Agriculture, detailing gaps in the current regulatory framework

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and outlining alternative approaches that prioritise ecological sustainability and farmers' rights.

PUBLIC HEARING HIGHLIGHTS GROWING AWARENESS

The November 2024 public hearing served as a pivotal moment of reflection and engagement. Speakers presented both technical critiques and personal testimonies, offering diverse perspectives on how GMO proliferation has affected local food systems, seed diversity, and consumer trust.

The event provided a democratic platform for citizens to demand greater oversight and highlighted the need for improved biosafety protocols, clearer labelling regulations, and more investment in traditional agricultural systems and agroecology.

Stakeholders emphasised that while technological innovation has a role in agriculture, it must not come at the expense of indigenous knowledge, local seed systems, or the autonomy of smallholder farmers.

CHARTING A NEW COURSE FOR NIGERIA'S FOOD FUTURE

Nigeria's decision to suspend GMO approvals does not ban genetically modified crops outright. Rather, it opens a window for comprehensive review and reform of how such technologies are introduced and monitored in the country. It is a call for science with accountability, innovation with precaution, and policy rooted in the needs of Nigerian communities.

Moving forward, the outcome of the ongoing investigation and subsequent policy reforms will be closely watched, both within Nigeria and across the continent. The country's experience could shape regional debates on food sovereignty, biosafety, and the future of agricultural development in Africa.

This development also reinforces broader continental efforts, such as the My Food is African campaign, which emphasises the importance of protecting Africa's traditional food systems, promoting local seed diversity, and ensuring that agricultural policies are responsive to the people who depend on them most.

As Nigeria takes a moment to pause, reflect, and recalibrate its approach to GMOs, it is also planting the seeds of a more transparent, inclusive, and sovereign food system, one rooted in the values of health, heritage, and human dignity.