

## Foreword

---

**T**he role of modern biotechnology in spurring agriculture-led economic transformation and sustainable development in Africa is subject to furious scientific debate and intense public controversy. African governments therefore face enormous uncertainty and pressure as they deliberate on national and regional policies, programs, and regulations that attempt to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of biotechnology products.

IFPRI does not imagine that it can bring resolution to these disagreements. Rather, as an international research organization with a mandate to identify policy solutions to hunger and poverty, IFPRI sees a need, and more importantly an opportunity, to help its partners. In particular, IFPRI sees the possibility that the heated debate on biotechnology in Africa might benefit from formal consensus-building platforms of the kind that have been effective in other parts of the world on controversial issues. Keen to ensure as neutral a process as possible, IFPRI committed its own resources to kick-starting the process of building such a consensus.

At about the same time that IFPRI was deliberating on its response to the challenging debate in Africa, the Harare-based Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) was also being approached by regional governments for help in increasing awareness about the range of policy issues raised by biotechnology in southern African agriculture. The Council of Ministers of Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources of the Southern African Development Community had just established a subregional advisory committee on biotechnology and biosafety. FANRPAN had been involved in a process of reviewing biotechnology and biosafety policies and clearly saw the need for awareness building about biotechnology in the region.

Based on a memorandum of understanding signed in early 2003, and with technical support from the University of Massachusetts (Boston) Dispute Resolution Program and the Boston-based Consensus Building Institute, IFPRI and

FANRPAN embarked on a multistakeholder process of participatory awareness raising, joint fact-finding, and negotiation toward consensus on biotechnology, agriculture, and food security in southern Africa. The initiative's distinguishing feature was its explicitly process-based perspective within a framework involving many stakeholders. This feature distinguished it from other efforts in Africa with similar aims, most of which were episodic and lacked a clear conceptual framework.

A carefully managed but highly participatory process was planned, involving high-level policymakers, senior representatives of a range of stakeholder agencies, and respected scientific leaders, brought together for an integrated series of round-table discussions on biotechnology, agriculture, and food security in southern Africa. The first of three interlinked policy dialogues took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, on April 25–26, 2003. Following the Johannesburg meeting, the initiative evolved into a continent-wide effort known as the African Policy Dialogues on Biotechnology (APDB), a joint initiative between IFPRI and the Science and Technology Forum of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. With additional funding from the Rockefeller Foundation's Global Inclusion Program, a second dialogue took place in Harare, Zimbabwe, on September 20–21, 2004, under the auspices of the APDB initiative. A third dialogue is planned for 2005.

This volume comprises papers prepared as input to the first dialogue. In selecting topics for background papers, IFPRI and FANRPAN noted that the appearance of agricultural biotechnologies meant that governments were required to make new and unfamiliar choices in five areas: intellectual property rights, biosafety, trade, food safety and consumer choice, and public research. IFPRI and FANRPAN also noted the need for clarity on how political, ethical, and social imperatives interact within the context of agricultural biotechnology, and the implications for policy choice. Chapters analyzing policy issues in these seven areas, along with two synthesis chapters by the editors, result in a book that should be of interest to a wide range of individuals and organizations charged with making and shaping agricultural biotechnology policy in Africa.

Biotechnology offers important opportunities to African farmers and poor consumers. But biosafety policies need to be in place in order to move forward to responsible technology utilization. Most importantly, African policymakers need to be in a position to make their own well-informed decisions on the issues. IFPRI and FANRPAN are working toward these objectives. This collection of contributions represents an important step along the way to ensuring that biotechnology policies can facilitate increased food and nutrition security on the continent.

Joachim von Braun  
Director General, IFPRI

Lindiwe Sibanda  
Chief Executive Officer, FANRPAN