



evaluate our own products to overcome these challenges and use Bt cotton to boost the economy,” Salim said.

The National Seed Council restated their preparedness to work with the scientists to ensure that the research, release and eventual commercialisation of the crop if successful did not pose any challenge to human and the environment.

A director in the council, Dr. Abinku === said that: “NASC is a regulatory body with the responsibility of regulating seed industries in general. Generally we have observed that there are low yields coming from cotton due to biotic and insects' problems. There is also the issue of low capacity on the part of farmers. For the certification, the council has tried to build capacity for farmers and with the coming of Bt cotton there is a lot of capacity building requirement for farmers.”

As campaigners circulate letters seeking 10,000 signatures to upturn the approval given to Monstanto to commence research in Nigeria into Bt cotton, we as Nigerians must not forget our history. Yesterday Kaduna, Kano were booming cities where men, women and children were engaged in the textile value chain business, then we didn't have Boko Haram, we didn't have the religious crisis that have not only scattered these cities but made this booming cities a ghost of their past.

NGOs are good and should be encouraged but not those that feed fat on our ignorance, instil fear in us and thrive on our back to international stardom. Nigerians and especially our farmers are now wise and know what is good for them.

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Why we need

GM cotton

by Alex Abutu



Activities have commenced in the country that would cumulate in the production of the first set of genetically modified cotton also known as Bt cotton in 2019.

The decision to deploy the technology in spite of the long age controversy that has dogged it was taken after a careful and extensive examination of the sorry state of cotton production in the country.

About 40 years, Nigeria was rated as one of the cotton destinations in the world where quality cotton of high value were available but that reputation has been replaced with an abysmal record that has even made the Nigerian cotton on the global market a laughing stock.

Cotton from Nigeria are said to be contaminated, of low yield and at best farmers can only get less than half a ton per hectare while their counterparts from other parts of the world are experiencing bumper yields.

Textile industries which used to be one of the largest employers of labour in both northern and southern Nigeria are today under lock and key due to lack of raw materials and this has made Nigeria the dumping ground for substandard textile materials.

As scientists and government agencies collaborate to solve the challenges that had plagued the crop in the country, civil society organisations and media practitioners led a



campaign calling for a complete halt to moves aimed at allowing Monstanto, one of the leading companies propagating genetic engineering globally from entering the Nigeria.

Monstanto was recently granted the approval to participate in the country's agricultural scene. The approval will see them leading the efforts to introduce genetically modified cotton into the country.

The out-cry was as a result of the release permit granted to the company by the Nigeria Biosafety Management Agency (NBMA), the government Agency charged with the responsibility of regulating issues of genetic modification in the country.

The intention and content of the permit was completely misunderstood by the campaigners for obvious reasons but it is necessary to state that the release permit granted to Monsanto means that the company can go to work with collaborating research institutions in the country to research for the development of cotton seeds that can resist insects and confront the challenges that made our local cotton unproductive but not to trade in GM seeds or products.

World all over, people and authorities raise concern over genetic modified organisms regarding its impact on human and the environment and Nigeria cannot be an exception.

Although, there have not been any scientific evidence or study to show that GMOs are harmful to either human or the environment but the fear of possible impacts have continued to be peddled by those against the technology.

COTTON IN NIGERIA:

The President of NACOTAN, Anibe Achimugu said recently that Nigerians cotton farmers are not only discouraged from farming the crop but gain nothing after months of investments and sufferings.

"We have seen the benefits of genetically modified cotton around the world and it is our desire that our farmers too enjoy improved yields by planting cotton varieties that are of high grade and resistant to insects," he said.

Alhaji H.A. Kwajaffa, Director General, Nigerian Textile Manufacturers Association, also noted recently at a stakeholders meeting on the Bt cotton that: "We have a lot of opportunities to explore in cotton but we import almost 50 per cent of our seeds. If Bt cotton was good for Burkina Faso farmers for over six years then why can't we have it here. Farmers overtime have been spraying a lot and that has affected them generally in terms of cost and health."

"I was in India recently and I saw the Bt farm side by side with organic cotton. The Bt cotton as grown in India produced about 5 tonnes per hectare while our farmers here in Nigeria produce about 8kg per hectare even less than 1 tonn.

Cotton price is determined by the international market and our farmers are going

through a lot when they cannot meet up to this market all because of the quality of our seeds," he added.

Alhaji Yerima Ubah, Director of Federal Department of agriculture and the representative of the federal ministry of Agriculture at the stakeholders meeting also alluded to the fact that Nigerian farmers have suffered untold hardship in their efforts to produce cotton to meet international standard and local demand.

"Overtime, there has been a drop in cotton production from 10 to 5 per cent. We also had a technical assistant from India in area of technology transfer and capacity building for our cotton farmers. But the challenge generally is about seed quality and this, our scientists have tried but a new window will be necessary to explore," Ubah noted.

He said that the Ministry has identified seed issue as the main problem that affect yield and that it was as a result of that the ministry engaged two North East and North West cotton growing zones including private seeds company like WACOT and AREWA cotton to improve our cotton.

A cotton farmer and the Chairman Ginners Association of Nigeria, Alhaji Salmanu Abdullahi said he had invested over N5 billion in the cotton business and was worried that over the years local efforts to improve the crop had not yielded any better result.

"Today cotton farmers in Nigeria are dying in silent. They have no access to quality seeds and because of that, farmers after all efforts get less than half a ton per hectare while their Indian counterparts are getting as much as 5 tonnes.

Here in Nigeria people like to criticise but those criticising are not farmers as every cotton farmer here is looking for possible solution that will make him have bumper harvest, we are eagerly waiting for our scientists whom we have faith in to come out with the Bt cotton which have change the lives of farmers in other countries," Abdullahi said.

A renowned scientist and former director general, National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), Prof. Bamidele Solomon said that considering the long suffering and the preparedness of Nigerian scientists to participate in the global biotechnology revolution there was no need wasting time in debating on Bt cotton, it is the way to go.

"We have been expecting a time that the cotton sector will improve in Nigeria. Before the passage of the Biosafety bill, India wanted to import cotton seeds to Nigeria but we insisted we develop our own improved seeds and asked that Bt cotton CFT be sited in NABDA. The process is still ongoing but we need to speed up the process to revitalize the cotton industry," Solomon said.

Dr. Salim =====, The Bt cotton project coordinator said the Institute for Agricultural Research, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria has a team that over the years had conducted cotton research and that the coming of the Bt cotton was a welcome development.

"We have been doing all we can to improve our local cotton seed. Our researchers are doing well and we know there are challenges on Bt. Cotton in Burkina faso but we will

