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Bio safety, biotechnology and green economy in Africa: How ready are we?

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A green economy readiness framework has been conceptualised. Such a readiness framework requires institutions, governments and other major players in the space to address six pillars related to adequate policies, political and leadership will, adequate finance, adequate capacity and capabilities to innovate to adapt to and mitigate against climate change. Having been inspired by the ongoing debates in Uganda following the drafting and cabinet approval of the National Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill in October 2012, our minds could not rest but prepare this paper to once again, warn African governments to be very careful. Where there is no vision, people perish. A world of genetically modified organisms (GMO) has become a reality and a world without traditional seed banks is fast approaching. Coupled to this is an environment of greedy multinational companies that manipulate the few and selected local high class politician and those politically connected to demonise campaigns against the 'wait' and 'be precautionous' voice of reason. The fight for and against the introduction of GMOs in Uganda has gone nasty and this is not the end. To make matters worse, very few African countries including the advanced South Africa have the capacity to monitor the spread and safe use of GMOs. Many more countries are still battling with enacting appropriate and adequate legislation against a background where citizens have been prejudiced by the abdication of the central governments' social responsibility roles. What is wrong with having a vision of a Uganda that is the global hub for organic foods? I wonder? Surely, where there is no vision, nations perish. This paper simply re-kindles debates surrounding the GMOs in Africa and the risks associated with their introduction all in the name of fighting climate change in the fast growing green global economy. Its main message is that African governments need to have a back bone to stand by what is right, adopt a precautionary stance and most importantly not be rushed into passing ill-thought out and conceived biotechnology and biosafety bills and laws.

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