

RESULTS SUMMARY

The Lengthy Struggle for GMO Legislation in Uganda

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PROJECT	<i>Title:</i>	Uganda Governance and Poverty Alleviation Program (UGOPAP)
	<i>Partner:</i>	Caritas in Uganda and Community Integrated Development Initiative (CIDI)
	<i>Country:</i>	Uganda
	<i>Period:</i>	2022 - 2025

CHANGE	<p>The National Biotechnology and Biosafety (NBB) Bill which would open up the widespread use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) was cancelled in 2022 and substituted by the opposite Genetically Modified Organisms Bill which is putting a ban on the use of GMOs in Uganda.</p>
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CONTEXT	<p>Under the influence of large companies developing GMOs and their associates, the Ugandan Government approved the NBB Bill in 2012. This sparked criticisms from the civil society including CIDI and Caritas Uganda which through the UGOPAP program coordinated the civil society opposition to the bill. The opposition took its departure in Uganda's signing of the Nagoya and Cartagena Protocols, fear of damage to the environment and GMOs making small-scale farmers economically dependent on certain agrochemicals.</p>
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CONTRIBUTION	<p>Under the UGOPAP program, supported by Caritas Denmark, the advocacy platform Uganda Farmers Common Voice Platform (UFCVP) together with Caritas Uganda (CU) took the lead in coordinating the resistance against the NBB bill. UFCVP arranged meetings, seminars and trainings to advocate and lobby against the NBB bill. CU and UFCVP united and led stakeholders within the trade and agriculture sector, members of parliament (MPs), academia, medical and legal practitioners and farmer organizations.</p>
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IMAGES	 <p>UFCVP chairman, Mr Felix Okwakol argued against GMOs in a meeting with parliamentarians.</p>	 <p>UC/UFCVP kneeling to the king of Bunyoro lobbying against GMOs.</p>
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[See next page for more details](#) →

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

The UFCVP, which was established by the UGOPAP (Uganda Farmers Governance and Poverty Alleviation Program), campaigned against the NBB Bill. The platform engaged with MPs and the First Lady and thereby got direct access to the President to explain gaps in the bill. Also, religious leaders were thoroughly informed about GMOs and the intentions of the bill, and they took the campaign far and wide by influencing their followers and exerting their powers on MPs. UFCVP supported the farmers to present a petition to the Speaker backed by SMSs to MPs and an open letter to the president. The platform also conducted frequent media engagements which included newspaper articles and Radio and TV talk shows to keep the debate alive. CU and UFCVP arranged and funded many meetings and seminars.

LESSONS

This example shows that change of policy and legislation can be a lengthy process, in this case from 2012 to 2022. Persistence and patience are detrimental to success. Strategic partnerships and cross-sectoral networking are vital and bring evidence and hard facts to the table, which are necessary to persuade decision-makers. The involvement of key stakeholders and the wider public is crucial to assert pressure on politicians. Several simultaneous strategies have successfully been applied, such as direct meetings with MPs, the Speaker of Parliament, and the first lady – thereby gaining direct access to the President. Public awareness raising resulted in farmers' petition to the Parliament and demonstrated the power of public opinion on democratically elected MPs.

EVIDENCE

The process of the shift from the NBB to the GMO Bill is well documented in the parliamentary records. In February 2013 the Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development presented the NBB bill for a public hearing and hence started the CU/UFCVP's campaign against it. Over the years, newspaper articles, radio and TV frequently described the actions taken to inform about the necessity to have restrictive GMO legislation. In 2017 the President after a meeting with CU rejected a bill for an act entitled the Biosafety Act 2017. With the coming of the 11th Parliament in 2021 the Speaker decided not to discuss any business from the previous Parliament, whereby any edition of the NBB Bill was finally cancelled. In 2022 allies in the Parliament of the CU/UFCVP sought leave of Parliament to draft a private members bill banning the introduction, use or trade in GMOs in Uganda. In 2022 the GMO Bill underwent different stages of legislative formulation before enactment.

DOMAINS

<i>Development strategy priorities:</i>	Insert strategy priority
<i>Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability</i>	(X)
<i>Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people's rights</i>	X
<i>Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights</i>	-
<i>Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights</i>	-
<i>Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability</i>	-
<i>Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work</i>	-