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Expose the irony in GMO debate

EDITOR: *New Vision* of Monday July 24 published opinion pieces from two Government communicators: Denis Katungi; the media and relations manager of the Uganda Media Centre and Naomi Karekaho; the spokesperson of the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA).

Their contrasting opinions reflect how issues around biotechnology have been handled by various stakeholders. The media has been publishing GMO-related stories with different people giving their opinions, but what should legislators who are mandated to pass the law base their decisions on?

According to Karekaho, the passing of the Biosafety Bill should be stayed. For starters, NEMA has been a key player in Uganda's biosafety journey since 1996. NEMA is a member of the National Biosafety Committee (NBC) that has been giving researchers permission to conduct GMO field trials. NEMA is a focal point for the Convention on Biological Diversity, where the Cartagena Protocol on biosafety emanated from and Uganda's biosafety law is almost a mirror image of the Cartagena Protocol. Karekaho states that GMOs have the potential to wipe out small scale farmers and concludes by asking scientists to first sensitise the farmers. If people like her find it difficult to grasp the basics, how will farmers make decisions?

Katungi took a scientific approach and cited provisions in the Bill. He acknowledges that the law is in response to the Cartagena Protocol that Karekaho should have stated.

The two communicators represent the dichotomy in the GMO debate, where facts are ignored and the stakeholders are not willing to premise tostick to scientific studies. MPs should look at the facts before passing the Bill into law.

Isaac Ongu
The writer is an agriculturist

PICTURE BY DANIEL EDYEGU

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