

## **Risks and Benefits of Genetically Modified Maize Donations to Southern Africa: Views from Malawi**

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In 2001 and 2002, many countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have suffered from severe food shortages resulting in an estimated 14 million people facing starvation due to inadequate quantities of the staple maize. The international community's response has been the donation of foodstuffs, including genetically modified maize. Reactions of the recipient countries of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi have been different. Zambia appealed to the donors not to send genetically modified maize, whereas Malawi accepted the maize donations. Malawi is currently facing many public health challenges because 10% of its 10-million population is HIV-positive, maternal mortality rate has almost doubled between 1992 and 2000, and there are also an estimated 1 million orphans due to HIV/AIDS. In the European Union, genetically modified maize falls under "Novel Foods" and its marketing and distribution are strictly regulated by law. This has never been the case in the southern African countries. In this article, we discuss the ethical challenges associated with genetically modified maize donations to southern Africa. Although genetically modified food offers a way to avoid many adverse effects of food shortages, we believe that some of the ethical questions of genetically modified food donations should be solved first, under the leadership of the donor countries and partnership of the developing countries. There are fears that consummation of genetically modified maize could have adverse health effects. These fears must be addressed if the confidence of developing countries in the donor community is to be maintained.

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