



Illustrations created by Anna Loveday-Brown

## Editorial

### Peasants' seeds - rights and power

The age-old process of creating and developing diversity in the fields has led to the development of a series of legal bases aimed at guaranteeing the **exercising of collective rights**, allowing for on-going co-evolution. Nation-states are responsible for determining how natural resources should be used and distributed, the rights that should provide access, use, and control of these resources, and who holds these rights. The balance of power within Nation-states and between states has now changed the nature of these rights, by **imposing Intellectual Property Rights** on seeds, and trying to undo the collective rights that communities or farmers have held and that have been codified over time. Against the violation of collective rights, such as those that guaranteed - or still guarantee - access, use and control of land, water and biodiversity, it is acceptable to exercise **legitimate acts of self-defense**, even if they are in breach of regulations. The need for small-scale food producers to **recover autonomy and sovereignty** over the management of genetic resources is a fundamental tool. It is needed to adapt production to the needs of the world's population and to the incessant changes of eco-systems. This must be explained to the *ITPGRFA*.

Antonio Onorati

President of Crocevia and international focal point for the IPC for Food Sovereignty



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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### Seeds in danger!

Each agricultural seed in the world is the **product of thousands of years of peasants' work**, selecting plants to have larger fruits or more grains; adapting them to different soils, climates and tastes. Until 100 years ago, thousands of varieties of maize, rice, squashes... thrived in farming communities. Yet the **privatization of seeds** changed this drastically: In this short period, **seed diversity was lost**, for many crops as much as 80-90% of varieties. Seeds themselves also became very different: Produced by complicated processes in laboratories, they were "improved" — to have higher yields, to be uniform in shape and taste, to withstand transport, etc. — but only by breeding them to be dependent on large quantities of fertilizers and water that impoverished the soil, contaminated water, and released great amounts of greenhouse gases into the air. As peasant communities were plundered, they were left with industrial production of unhealthy and environmentally-damaging food. It is clear that **the struggle for food sovereignty is at the same time a struggle to regain seed sovereignty**.

8 March  
International Women's Day

14 - 18 March  
Fourth Session of the Governing Body of the  
**International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**  
- Bali, Indonesia

6 - 8 April  
International Conference on **Global Land Grabbing** - London, UK

17 April  
International Day of Peasant  
Struggle

23 - 24 May  
**G20 Agriculture meeting**  
- Paris, France

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<http://www.petitiononline.com/dakar/petition.html>

## Who we are

In the last years hundreds of organizations and movements have been engaged in struggles, activities, and various kinds of work to defend and promote the right of people to Food Sovereignty around the world. Many of these organizations were present in the Nyéléni Forum 2007 and feel part of a broader Food Sovereignty Movement, that considers the Nyéléni 2007 declaration as its political platform. **The Nyéléni Newsletter wants to be the voice of this international movement.**

Organizations involved: Development Fund, ETC, FIAN, Focus on the Global South, Food First, Friends of the Earth International, Grain, Grassroots International, IPC for food sovereignty, La Via Campesina, Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres, Oxfam Solidarity, Real World Radio, Roppa, The World Forum Of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers, Veterinarios Sin Fronteras.

**Now is the time for Food Sovereignty!**



## Glossary

**Benefit-Sharing** is a mechanism within the UN Seed Treaty. It recognizes companies' "benefits" (profits) from the sale of seeds, plants, or their products. In compensation for using their seeds, these "benefits" are to be "shared" with peasant and indigenous communities. But peasant seeds are community resources without a single owner or monetary value! This is why many farming communities refuse Access and Benefit Sharing.

**Biotechnologies** are techniques through which living organisms produce new substances. Ancient biotechnologies include the fermentation of beer or cheese. Today there are many new biotechnologies developed and privately owned by companies and that present many risks, combining substances that did not exist in nature before.

**Genetic engineering** is a type of *biotechnology* that takes the genes (part of living cells) of one organism and put them into another. For example, genes from a bacterium are put into a maize plant, so that it will produce an insecticide. Genetic engineering presents health and environment concerns. When they cross with other plants through pollination they can cause 'contamination', endangering peasant varieties that are the source of diversity. **Genetic marking** is a technique that puts an invisible mark within a plant cell, that can only be recognized in a laboratory, so companies can identify a seed as theirs.

**Patents and Plant Variety Protection** are two types of laws that protect the inventors of new technologies. They are both considered a type of **Intellectual Property Rights**. Each of these identifies a company or plant breeder as exclusive owner of a plant or a breeding technique for a certain time. Farmers who use a "protected" seed must pay a fee. Both of these laws allow companies to have *monopolies over plants and make money with them*.

Around the world, exist ca. 1300 **Seed Banks** that store seed collections, some of them are public others private. The thousands of crop varieties developed over millennia by farmers were kept within communities themselves. This is now referred to as **in-situ**, in-place or on the farm. **Ex-situ**, or off-site banks appeared in the 20th century. Although they are hailed as an excellent solution for saving seeds, the plant diversity they hold is "frozen in time". Seed banks often have bureaucratic processes that make them more accessible to seed companies and researchers than to farmers. **Community seed banks** are other ways of keeping local seeds available for farmers.

**Green revolution** is the name of the agricultural modernisation programme - initiated by Northern institutions - that swept across the South, in the 1960s /1970s. The method: Initial subsidies and credit are made available to farmers. The conditions include replacement of farmers' seeds with hybrids and GMOs, mandatory use of fertilisers and pesticides, mechanisation of production, and consolidation of land ownership. Once farmers are trapped in the system, subsidies are withdrawn, and farmers become indebted. Other impacts are the degradation of land, the exhaustion of water supplies, and biodiversity loss (*source: GRAIN*).

## The seed industry: a history of plundering

Although the private seed business is now valued at 32 Billion USD annually, it is important to remember that for a very long time, no one could do good business with seeds because farmers did not buy seed from the industry. In order to create an industry, **peasant communities had to be dispossessed**.

One way to appropriate farmers' seeds has been through **new breeding technologies**. Among the most successful of these was the creation of **hybrid seeds**, already in the 1930s. Hybrids are the product of complicated crossings of plants of the same family, resulting in crops that can have higher yields—but only for one generation, so that it is impractical for farmers to save them. Thus, farmers could be pressured into buying industrial hybrids. Industry technologies adapted farmers' seeds to withstand high doses of fertilizers; they made plants grow quickly, fruits large, and the shape of the plants identical, in order to allow harvesting by machines. The result of these "improved" varieties has been lower nutrition, environmental pollution and replacing peasant farming by capital-intensive agriculture. The newest of seed technologies make it easy to restrict the use of seeds by using *genetic or molecular markers* to mark or 'tag' industrial seeds in the laboratory. The use of seeds bred using these technologies is illegal, unless farmers pay licensing fees. These include *transgenic* crops but also many other *biotechnologies*. Often, these new technologies are subsidized for a short period by government programs. Once farmers have lost their native seeds to disuse and become dependent on them, companies step in.

Another way to marginalize farmers' seeds and ensure a stronghold of commercial technologies was to pass laws claiming that farmers' varieties **were not good enough** and must be prohibited. Many reasons were given: That farmers' seeds, in their diversity, could not produce the identically-shaped and tasting varieties interesting to supermarkets; that farmers' seeds had lower yields and were prone to pests and diseases; that they could not withstand the high amounts of fertilizers and pesticides that were used in industrial monocultures, etc.. In order to claim private seed ownership, *patents* were issued for industrial varieties (especially in the United States), while Europe developed a system of *plant variety protection*. The *Green Revolution*, largely a process of imposing industrial seeds in the global south, then pushed for the recognition of private property 'rights' of plant breeders and industry worldwide. The International Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties, or *UPOV*, was signed in 1961. Today this agreement goes as far as to restrict farmers from re-sowing their seeds unless they pay fees to recognize "the legitimate interest of the breeder". Private property on seeds is also backed by the TRIPS agreement of the World Trade Organization, forcing member countries pass 'effective' laws to protect the seed industry. In trade agreements, implementing property rights over seeds has been a condition for countries of the global South where these laws do not yet exist.

## The UN Seed Treaty

This **plundering of seeds** did not go on without discontent. In addition to farmers' resistance (see below), many countries of the global South—the very countries that had a great seed diversity within their territory—began to protest. They were not necessarily protecting their farmers but their potential national businesses, seeing that a few countries of the north had free access to their seeds as the basis with which all industrial seeds were developed. This led to a series of "Seed Wars" within the UN, in which issues such as the rapid extinction of farmers' seeds and the way that companies had access to them were debated. After 25 years, an International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), or simply the UN Seed Treaty was signed. In March 2011, the Governing Body of the UN Seed Treaty, composed of 127 contracting 'parties' (countries) will meet for the fourth time in Bali, Indonesia.

The UN Seed Treaty is an agreement on how countries can give each other access to public seed collections of many important crops, but not all. It does not include the vast seed collections of private companies, but in fact provides mechanisms for companies to access other seeds. The idea is that crop diversity will be conserved by creating a pool of money based on the profits of marketed products which were produced with the seeds they had access to. It is a very tricky system with many exceptions and loopholes that can be seen as "a dream come true for the corporate seed industry"<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, the Treaty does recognize Farmers' Rights, as the right to "save, use, exchange and sell" their seeds. But even if countries were willing, the Treaty can do very little to ensure them, as they are subordinated to national law. Behind the flowery language of "recognizing the enormous contribution" and "promoting... the participation of farmers" and *in-situ* (on-farm) conservation, there are no mechanisms to ensure that any of these rights can be implemented in binding legal ways. Under *Benefit-Sharing schemes*, in the future farmers may be offered a few cents in exchange for privatizing their heritage and livelihood. Further, most of the minimal funding within the treaty ends up going to research institutions and not to farmers themselves. Instead of making sure that seeds come back

1 - *The FAO Seed Treaty. From Farmers' Rights to Breeders' Privileges*, GRAIN, 2005  
<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=411>



to farmers' fields, a trend is that they end up in bureaucratic *seed banks* that most farmers cannot easily access.

## Farmers' struggles for Seed Sovereignty!

Despite the labyrinth of technologies and laws, it is important to remember that these are not the only spaces where struggles for seeds can take place. The UN Seed Treaty is a tool that may allow small modifications within a very constrained margin; it cannot change the big picture. For farmers, especially for women farmers, who are traditional seed keepers, the struggle for seed sovereignty is much larger: It is a struggle for their livelihood, a way of life and culture. For everyone, it is a struggle for diversity as the basis of life. Protests, action, reproducing seeds are all forms of resistance against control by corporations. We must not become legal or technology experts to oppose the laws and technologies that legitimate the plundering of peasant communities and the environment! And we must talk about seeds: To people in cities and non-farmers who do not immediately realize why politicising seeds is essential. And we should not only be defensive but also offensive: saving and exchanging seeds everywhere possible, fighting against the seed industry, creating peasant seed systems again. **Seed sovereignty is about defending, producing and taking back.**

## Who owns nature?

Company – 2007 seed sales (US\$ millions) – % of global proprietary seed market

1. Monsanto (US)	\$4,964m – 23%	6. KWS AG (Germany)	\$702m – 3%
2. DuPont (US)	\$3,300m – 15%	7. Bayer Crop Science (Germ)	\$524m – 2%
3. Syngenta (Switzerland)	\$2,018m – 9%	8. Sakata (Japan)	\$396m – <2%
4. Groupe Limagrain (France)	\$1,226m – 6%	9. DLF-Trifolium (Denmark)	\$391m – <2%
5. Land O' Lakes (US)	\$917m – 4%	10. Takii (Japan)	\$347m – <2%

**Top 10 Total - \$14,785m – 67%** [of global proprietary seed market] Source: ETC Group

## The scaring path towards bio-uniformity

Only **12 plant species** (maize, rice, wheat, soybeans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, banana & plantains, sorghum, cassava, millet, sunflowers and canola) define global production.

**Small-scale farmers breed 5000** domesticated crop varieties, **but only 150 plant species** are used by industrial food chains to supply consumers.

**2% is the annual decline** in genetic diversity of leading crops and **3/4 of the seed pool diversity** for these crops **are already extinct.**

Global biodiversity has declined by 30% in the last 35 years\*. In agriculture **75% of crop diversity has been lost in the last hundred years\*\***, a process that goes hand in hand with the development of agribusiness and the decrease in small-scale family farming. As the list of unfulfilled international targets grows, the international community has so far failed to open their eyes to what needs to be done. Small-scale farmers and communities that practice agroforestry, traditional fishing and pastoralism are still the main keepers of living natural biodiversity, and need to be supported with all available means.

\* More data in *Who will feed us?*, ETC Group, 2009

\*\* *The Living Planet Report*, WWF, 2010

\*\*\* *The State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* – FAO, 2010

*Short stories from Africa, America, Asia and Europe, resistance and alternatives: the international struggle against the privatization of life.*

## Voices from the field

### Evolutionary Plant Breeding: Gene banks that evolve in farmers' fields

Maryam Rahmani, CENESTA, Iran

Farmers who do their own breeding believe strongly in the need to bring biodiversity back into their fields. Many are convinced of the effectiveness of planting mixtures of varieties to bring resilience to their crop. However, with the increasing pressures of climate change, as well as economic pressures such as removal of energy subsidies in Iran, the question is how to introduce biodiversity most effectively and in a way that promotes farmers' autonomy. Vast mixtures of segregating populations have been called "gene banks that evolve in farmers' fields". With the help of the *Participatory Plant Breeding programme* of ICARDA, farmers in Iran, Algeria, Jordan, Eritrea and Morocco have been planting an "evolutionary population" of 1600 F2s (the second generation after a new cross has been made) of barley for the past 3 years. The expectation is that these populations will slowly adapt to the different conditions in which they are resown each year. For example, farmers who are looking for drought-tolerant varieties can plant the population under drought conditions, for salt tolerance in salty soils, etc. In addition to letting the populations **evolve in their fields**, farmers can select the best spikes **to make new mixtures**, or compare the selected spikes and choose the best ones through a *Participatory Plant Breeding programme*. In Iran, farmers have for the past 2 years also planted an evolutionary population of wheat from the *Dryland Agricultural Research Institute*, and plan to make new evolutionary populations composed of landraces. Photos at <http://behnejadgar.blogfa.com/>

### Community seed bank system in Ethiopia

Regassa Feyissa, Ethio-Organic Seed Action (EOSA), Ethiopia

Farming communities **have always conserved diverse seeds** in their back yards, fields and in their traditional storage facilities (clay pots, gourds, underground pits, etc). This is a **more dynamic** conservation system as the seeds in farmers fields are made to adapt to constant environmental changes and management pressures through active use. It is unfortunate that formal research institutions found it difficult to see how the peasant's conservation system might be

incorporated into the formal ones. The decline in the productivity of narrow genetic based varieties - accompanied with climate chaos, requires the availability of as much seed diversity as possible in order to develop adaptable crop types and varieties at farm community level. However the formal genebanks hold samples in a very small quantity, often not tested for current environmental conditions as these seeds were collected some years ago. So it will also take years to develop adaptable varieties from such samples and to multiply seeds to distribute to farmers. This indicates the necessity to link the formal genebank system to the community level seed networks. Ethiopia's experience - after the tragic drought in 1984 - **led to the development of community seed banking system**, a collective approach for maintaining the genetic diversity in crop species and as back-up for local self-sufficiency in planting material in cases of crop failure. This approach, to date, has lifted over 15,000 households to the level of being seed secure in the program sites of EOSA. It has also enabled restoration of displaced diversity and strengthen conservation practices and local knowledge of peasants.

### Agrobiodiversity and participation, motors of innovation

Humberto Ríos Labrada, National Institute of Agricultural Science's Program for Local Agricultural Innovation, Cuba

In Cuba, researchers started working with farmers in 2002, collecting and evaluating maize and bean seeds of different varieties. They were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of farmers. Farmers quickly took the initiative to organize evaluation trials, **involving other crops and other regions**, as announced in *Diversity Fairs*. The researchers realized that their most important role consisted in supplying and promoting diversity and connecting the different regions of the country to disseminate farmers' ideas. This initiative made farmers aware that their most important capacity was that of generating knowledge through experimentation. The researchers realized to the importance of sharing their experiments with farmers in the field, to understand the problems and possible solutions **specific to local conditions**. This way of using, sharing and generating knowledge through joint activities is empowering for both farmers and researchers. The resulting increases in productivity and household

earnings are important. The network currently links about 50.000 farmers and involves 250 researchers and technicians. University staff are working to integrate the first lessons learnt into academic curricula. Policy makers are showing an interest in the initiative to see how the impact can be scaled-up to parts of the country where the network is not yet implanted. More at <http://www.goldmanprize.org/2010/islands>

### Farmers rights

Guy Kastler, Réseau Semences Paysannes, France

The French industry has never accepted the competition of farmers' seeds and has worked tirelessly to have them banned – first attacking the reproduction and selection of farm saved seeds. However due to the mobilization of peasants farmers it has been forced to retreat. In 1997, the industry convinced the government to establish a supplement to the catalogue – a register of heritage varieties for amateur gardeners. It then filed a court case against the association Kokopelli that was selling seeds of many “unlisted” old varieties. In 2006, Kokopelli was fined 3426 times, at the rate of 5€ . Based on this ruling, the industry sends its inspectors to farmers who exchange seeds or sell unregistered vegetable varieties – causing many farm-

ers to abandon the use of their farm seeds and return to the use of industrial varieties. The *Confédération Paysanne* and the *Réseau Semences Paysannes* have checked the legal basis for this intimidation and discovered that it is **entirely false**. European directives and French law on the catalogue use, cover only the commercialization of seeds “with a view to exploiting them commercially” and do not affect their use.

This means that:

- \* it is not mandatory to include a variety in the catalogue in order to sell the seeds for subsistence farming or non-professional gardening;
- \* farmers have the right to grow varieties of their choice, whether or not they are listed in the catalogue, and to freely sell their crops (with the exception of genetically modified crops!);
- \* farmers have the same rights as industry to exchange their seeds for the purpose of research, breeding or the conservation of biodiversity.

Since then, industry inspectors have stopped fining farmers who save, resow and exchange their own seeds. The farmers' rights are only limited when they are not implemented, and if we accept the dissuasive propaganda that misinforms us that these rights have already been lost. **Implementing our rights on a daily basis is the best way to ensure that they are legally guaranteed.**

## THE WORLD IN WORDS

### We are all migrants!

During the *World Assembly of Migrants*, which took place the 3rd and 4th of February on the Island of Gorée, near Dakar, people from all over the world came together to finalize the **collective writing** of the *World Charter of Migrants*. Freedom of movement, right to housing and work, equality of civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights, and the recognition of all identities and cultures were the main calls of the assembly. To learn more

<http://www.cmmigrants.org/goree/spip.php?article5>

### Tunisia and Egypt, the taste of revolution at the World Social Forum

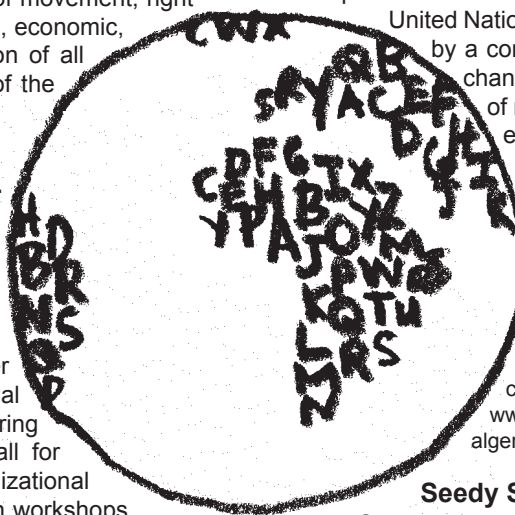
With more than 75.000 participants from 130 different countries, the 11th *World Social Forum* took place in Dakar - from the 6th to the 11th of February. Almost all the African countries (together with other continents) were present at the international meeting, and their role was fundamental during this historical moment of resistance and call for change. Although there were some organizational problems, the programme was very rich, with workshops, seminars, cultural events, thematic assemblies of farmers and women, meetings of local and international struggles, and a massive *Assembly of Social Movements* with 3.000 participants. The final declaration of the Assembly made a strong call to action and denounced the policies of the international institutions and transnational corporations; the war and all kind of violence against women; the current climate and food crisis; the imperialism and the external debt as one of its oppressive tools. It expressed solidarity with Tunisia and Egypt, because “these struggles show the road to another world, free from oppression and exploitation”. Two more days of resistance were decided during the Forum: the **20th of March** as

the *international day of solidarity with the uprisings of the Arab and African people*; and the **12th of October** as the *international day of factions against capitalism*.

The full declaration at <http://www.cadtm.org/Declaration-of-the-Social.6448>

### Speculators bet with millions of lives – just for profit!

Neither droughts nor floods have caused the current rise of staple food prices – which marked a record, exceeding the 2008 levels. The United Nations declared that the hyperinflation is produced by a combination of natural factors – such as climate change and human causes – such as the switching of many people to a more meat-based diet. However, several economists have finally begun to share the opinion that the same banks that were responsible for the financial crisis are causing the soaring of food prices **by speculation in food markets**. A reality that many social movements have long denounced. Speculators are endangering the life of millions of people, just for profit! For an analysis of the connection between inflationary prices and the current protests in North-Africa read more at <http://www.croceviaterra.it/news/pane-e-democrazia-tunisia-algeria-egitto-ed-il-prezzo-dellorzo>



### Seedy Sunday in the UK & the European forum on agricultural biodiversity

*Seedy Sunday* in Brighton/Hove celebrated its 10th birthday in February. 2,000 people came to the UK's oldest and largest seed swap. It builds solidarity among all who defend their collective rights to save, sow, swap and sell seeds: it gives strength to seed law busters. Hundreds of open-pollinated and ‘heritage’ varieties of vegetable seeds that have been officially de-listed were exchanged. A few weeks later, the *6th Let's Liberate Diversity!* forum of the European peasant seed network in Hungary, defended Farmers' Rights in Europe. *Seedy Sunday* <http://www.seedysunday.org/index.aspx>  
*Let's Liberate Diversity!* <http://www.liberate-diversity-hungary2011.org/>

### Next edition on the food system – TNCs, food markets and speculation!

Send your contributions - news stories, photos, interviews - to [info@nyeleni.org](mailto:info@nyeleni.org) by the **30th of April!**

### To read, listen, watch and share

- *Who will feed us?* ETC Group, 2009 [http://www.etcgroup.org/upload/publication/pdf\\_file/ETC\\_Who\\_Will\\_Feed\\_Us.pdf](http://www.etcgroup.org/upload/publication/pdf_file/ETC_Who_Will_Feed_Us.pdf)
- *Farmers against Access and Benefit-sharing*, Via Campesina [http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=966:family-farmers-defend-biodiversity-and-feed-the-world&catid=22:biodiversity-and-genetic-resources&Itemid=37](http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=966:family-farmers-defend-biodiversity-and-feed-the-world&catid=22:biodiversity-and-genetic-resources&Itemid=37)
- *Biodiversity and Genetic resources*, La Via Campesina Policy Documents, 2009 <http://www.viacampesina.org/downloads/pdf/policydocuments/POLICYDOCUMENTS-EN-FINAL.pdf>
- *The FAO seed treaty, from farmers' rights to breeders' privileges*, Seedling 2005 <http://www.grain.org/seedling/?type=62>

For reports and more references [www.nyeleni.org](http://www.nyeleni.org)

**One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk.** Tashunka Witko, 1840–1877

