
Community Experiences on Indigenous Seed Sovereignty & Seed Savers Rights

A Project through Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (2024)

Using Diversity Regional Meeting
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SEED SOVEREIGNTY

**in its most basic form,
is the “right of a
farmer to save, use,
exchange and sell their
own seeds.”** (First Nations
Development Institute)

India’s ‘National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) has over 4,00,000 accessions of 1586 species.

ICRISAT holds 25,000 Indian varieties of dry-land crops.

Many thousands of our crop seeds have ended up in distant gene banks: IRRI in Philippines, CIMMYT in Mexico, or Fort Collins in USA.

All such varieties from India, rightly belong to our farming and indigenous communities!

Policies, Laws & Government Actions

- International agreements like the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)
- United Nations Declaration on Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), 2018.
- Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) on seeds and genetic resources.
- The Seeds Act, 1966
- Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act (PPVFR Act)
 - Rights of farmers to save, use, and exchange seeds
 - Plant variety protection and intellectual property rights
- Biological Diversity Act, 2002
- National Seed Policy, 2011
 - Promotion of hybrid and GMO seeds
 - Impact on traditional seed systems and farmer rights
- Seed Bill, 2019 (Proposed)



**HOW DO ANY OF
THESE LAWS AND
POLICIES IT IMPACT
OUR COMMUNITIES?**

CORPORATE CAPTURE OF SEED IS JEOPARDISING FARMERS' SOVEREIGNTY



ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

WHAT IS A SEED LAW?

Seed laws are developed by governments and industry to control the formal or commercial seed sector. They also determine country and commercial seed industry standards that regulate the quality and purity of seed varieties.

Seed laws deal with

- 1 variety release systems;
- 2 seed certification;
- 3 seed quality control procedures; and
- 4 quarantine and phytosanitary systems – to control diseases and pests.

There are national variety release committees and seed certification institutions and systems that work with the procedures relating to seed laws. These procedures work in favour of private seed companies, who want to commercialise improved seed so that they can make a profit.

In order for seed to be approved for marketing in a country, it must meet special criteria, or standards, called DUS. (DUS stands for *distinct, uniform and stable.*) Varieties of seed that have been approved are listed in a **National Variety List or Catalogue**. Thereafter, the seed varieties must be certified according to strict rules and procedures that measure seed quality and purity.

A Seed Law is an instrument used to replace and undermine the farmer-managed seed system. This is having a negative impact on the diversity of local varieties and farmers seed systems, and even on household income and food security.



STOP SEED LAWS THAT CRIMINALISE FARMERS & DEFEND LOCAL SEEDS!

Seeds are under attack everywhere. Under corporate pressure, laws in many countries increasingly put limitations on what farmers can do with their seeds and with the seeds they buy. Seed saving, a thousand-year-old practice which forms the basis of farming, is fast becoming criminalised. What can we do about this?



DEFEND FARMERS' OWN SEED SYSTEMS

Farmers' fields are the first line of defense against bad seed laws. This means organizing to harvest, collect, multiply, divide, store and use local farmers' seeds. It is very important that women and young people are all involved. You can start a project with neighbors or local associations, talk to market or other vendors, get schools or your work place involved, etc. Seed fairs and visits to farms and gardens are an important part of this work.

STOP "MONSANTO LAWS"

Law opponents criminalizing farmers are under no light cover before they become written into law. If public opinion is against them, they become more costly for governments to push through. Organize other farmers, make videos, talk to the media, organize direct actions...

JOIN FORCES WITH OTHER FARMERS

In many other countries, farmers are fighting very similar laws. Learning from them and their experiences, good and bad, can be very helpful. Even if we have different concerns, we can build common fronts against the seed industry and the governments acting in their interest.

BUILD ALLIANCES WITH OTHER MOVEMENTS

Local alliances can be built when people understand that seeds affect everyone's well-being, not only farmers. The struggle for seeds can be linked up with farmers' wider struggles, since there is no food sovereignty without seed sovereignty. Seed struggles can also be supported through a range of other fights, such as campaigns and actions against free trade agreements, assembly resolutions, new patent or intellectual property, climate change, land laws, etc.

UNDO THE PROPAGANDA

Seed companies and governments present seed laws as protecting consumers, ensuring quality yields, saving yields and feeding the hungry. We need to debunk these myths and show that the agricultural firms are promoting big profits and generating hunger. These laws are only meant to extract wealth from rural communities and transfer it to corporations.

TRY TO GET POSITIVE LAWS

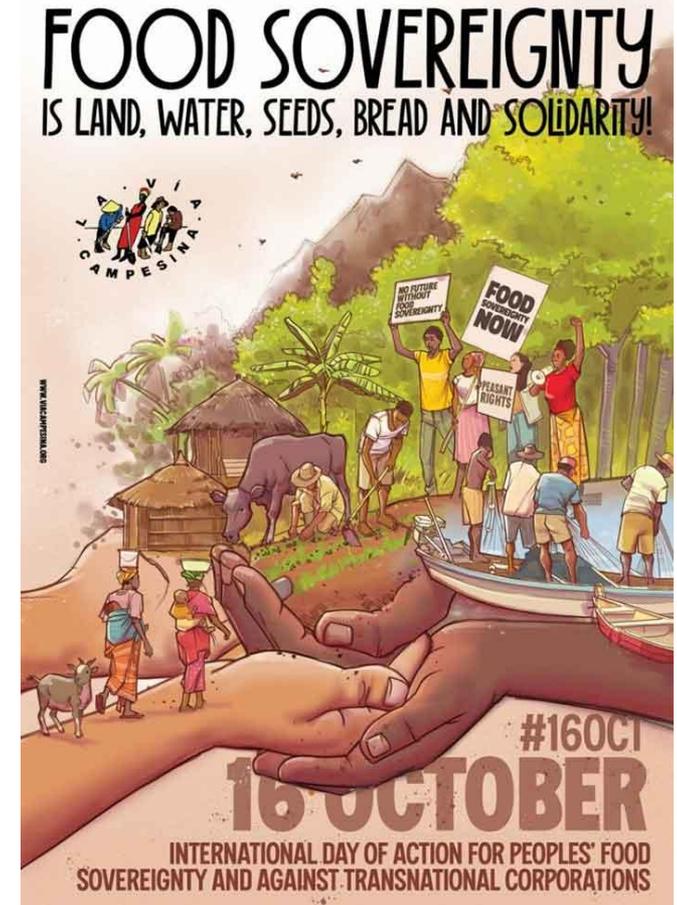
In some cases, it may be possible to obtain favorable laws, programmes or tools that "protect farmers' seed systems." These 2004 Free seeds, laws respecting farmers' rights or "provisions that promote local varieties and farmers' seeds." In other cases, such laws or legal efforts may exclude people, divide communities, marginalize farmers in legal bureaucracies, create contradictions or be a waste of time.

GRAIN



Issues / Concerns regarding Indigenous Seeds & Seed Savers

- Conservation of Heirloom Seeds by Communities. Conservation of Traditional Seed varieties being up by research institutes
- Big Private Players and Global Policy
- Role of Civil Society Organisations to strengthen farmers' networks
- Markets demands and pressures
- GMO debates : Involves the digitizing of the genetic sequence information of seed/plant varieties. This Digital Sequence Information (DSI) is being used by corporations for selective manipulation to claim patents/Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).



WHY IS A WIDER NETWORK NEEDED? WHAT ROLE CAN IT PLAY?

Declaration on Seeds and Farmers' Rights, 2023

by Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch | Sep 9, 2023

- Seeds and plant propagation materials, is our **collective heritage**. It is our duty to preserve them for future generations.
- International treaties and national laws have failed to effectively **safeguard our rich heritage of plant varieties**; and the registration of heritage crop varieties in private names under 'Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act'(PPVFRA), violates our traditional collective rights.
- We assert our sovereign rights to freely plant, use, reproduce, select, adapt, save, share, exchange or sell our seeds, without restriction, and we resolve to work for the **decentralized conservation, regeneration and sharing of our biodiversity by farmers, gardeners and indigenous communities**.

WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES FROM YOUR AREAS?

WHAT ARE THE THREATS TO SEED DIVERSITY?

Declaration on Seeds and Farmers' Rights, 2023

by Bharat Beej Swaraj Manch | Sep 9, 2023

- We reject attempts to **privatize/usurp India's genetic commons** and bio-cultural heritage, and create Intellectual Property rights over life forms.
- We believe the state must **safeguard natural farming rights**, prevent any theft or **bio-piracy of our genetic wealth**.
- A National Bio-safety law and mechanism for its effective implementation is essential to comprehensively guard against the threat of GMOs, GEOs, and technologies like CRISPR.

ARE OUR COMMUNITIES MOVING AWAY FROM NATURAL FARMING AND INTO MORE CHEMICAL FARMING?

WHAT ARE THE MARKET PRESSURES IN YOUR AREA?

ARE THERE BIG PLAYERS WHO ARE INFLUENCING FARMERS & BREEDERS BEHAVIOUR?

Declaration on Seeds and Farmers' Rights, 2023

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- We call upon the Indian government to create an **open-source National Biodiversity Heritage** Registry, protected from any private/corporate Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs); and to aid collaborative documentation and sharing of our biodiversity and related knowledge.
- Indigenous/local communities stand for continued **community access and community benefit**.
- We call upon all concerned citizens to join in a people's movement to **document, publish, propagate** and share our collective wealth of biodiversity, knowledge and bio-culture wherever possible!

WHAT ARE THE ACCESS AND BENEFIT SHARING MECHANISMS IN YOUR COMMUNITIES CURRENTLY?

WHAT KIND OF DOCUMENTATION MEASURES WILL BE USEFUL IN YOUR AREAS?

Community Conservation Measures



HAVE LOCAL DIETS CHANGED DRASTICALLY? ARE TRADITIONAL SEEDS EASILY ACCESSIBLE?

WHAT KIND OF SEEDS' CONSERVATION INITIATIVES ARE BEING TAKEN UP IN YOUR AREAS?

CAN NETWORKS EXIST AND CAN WE STRENGTHEN THEM?