RIGHT TO FOOD AND NUTRITION WATCH 2016, KEEPING SEEDS IN PEOPLES' HANDS

National Launch by FIAN INDIA
14 October 2016
Alto Porvorim, Goa, India

Eroding Seed Sovereignty and Protecting Communities Rights
The seed is the most important determinant of agricultural production, critical input and it is essential to ensure quality seeds of improved genotypes in adequate quantity. The protection of biological and cultural diversity and also right to save and share seeds in the context of biological and ecological destruction, is extremely important. Currently, indigenous, peasant seed systems-storing, preserving and local using- face severe threats of accelerated destruction of agricultural biodiversity due to the appropriation of nature, excessive exploitation of commons by industrial agriculture and big corporations, thus seed sovereignty is at put at severe risk.

A staggering 70% of the food we consume worldwide is produced by smallholders, peasant and indigenous communities, who produce a great deal of this food, have been developing and saving seeds for generations — across breadth and width of Indian States and rural terrains. They have native, collective and traditional wisdom that accumulated over practising agriculture for generations after generations. They have indigenous know-how, traditional knowledge and practices to identify quality seeds from their produces, preserve it for posterity and ability to use for quality and quantity grain produces.

Sowing seeds for malnutrition and ill health
Indian farmers use all parts of plants judiciously-grains for consumption of communities, stems/leaves for animals as fodder, leave roots for acclimatizing soil. Moreover, they detect with intuition to select quality seeds from the produces and store in localised ways and means. Seed barter system was in vogue for generations, not to be shared for price. They are the producers, custodians and also distributor of seeds to ensure food security. Nevertheless, ignoring those values and customs, laws are increasingly limiting what peasants can do with their seeds and criminalizing them, there by impeding their role as food producers and threatening our food sovereignty. The destruction of agricultural biodiversity is also rising at an alarming rate: at the end of the 20th century, three quarters of the world’s food was generated from only 12 plants and five animal species.

The capture of seed within the agro-economy by TNCs is a big setback for local seed system and this has shifted towards commercialisation and commodification of seed resources and inflicting onslaught on seed sovereignty. The farmers are being exploited without any accountability on the part of the seed companies. India has had nearly 1, 10,000 varieties of rice till 1970 and this diversity has been lost to posterity due to monoculture and hybrid crops. Now, only 6000 varieties of rice survive.

This loss of biodiversity, use of poor quality seeds which has been genetically modified, production of toxic food with excessive usage of fertilizers and pesticides have led food become toxic instead of food as medicines. This has been leading to severe implications. The statistics of hunger and malnutrition are both staggering and shocking. One in nine people on earth is currently under-nourished. 5,56,400 people die in India annually due to cancer related deaths mostly arising out of food habits and quality. 195 million people are going hungry every day in India. 165 million children are stunted as a result of under-nutrition and infection, leaving them physically and intellectually weak.

Whose seeds is it anyway? Tilting from community need to corporate greed
At present Indian seed industry is the fifth largest seed market in the world accounting for 4.4% global seed market after US, China, France and Brazil. Indian seed market has grown at 12% rate where the growth rate of global seed market is 5% while the Indian vegetable seed market is growing at a rate of 10-15% in a year. The State policies liberalized and encouraged the seed trade in India. Several private seed firms with multinational base are actively involving in vegetable seed production in India. The estimated turnover of Indian seed industry (50000m INR) is four percent of the global seed turnover (1250000 m INR).

Corporate greedy and pressure is behind these threats: seed and agrochemical transnational corporations seek to privatize, monopolize and control seeds; they are patenting every traditional species- neem, turmeric, basmati rice, and herbal plants and commodifying and commercialising the very source of life. Current business patterns pursued by corporations are aiming for a tighter grip on genetic resources/intellectual property rights of communities an indigenous people to reap even larger profits. It is now high time that the spotlight is turned on how the corporate capture of seeds and other natural resources is impacting the way in which the food we eat is produced across countries and continents.

The vegetable seed business in India, at present, amounts for 9000 million INR accounting for 18% value wise share of different crops in Indian seed business. The private sector comprises around 150 seed companies of national and foreign origin. This corporatization of seeds necessarily compels us to look at the rights of peasants and small-scale food producers overall. We must also recognize the central role of women as custodians of seed and biodiversity— they are the unacknowledged experts on these matters and must be involved in decision-making. Almost 50 percent of rural female workers are classified as agricultural labourers and 37% as cultivators in India is a testimony to this.

Obligations of States to protect peasant’s right to seed
States must thus step up and fulfil their human rights obligations by adopting stronger policies and laws that recognize and protect peasants’ rights
to save, use, exchange and sell seed, as found in the FAO Seed Treaty and currently debated in the negotiations for a UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Over recent decades, these and other rights have been increasingly neglected and negated as well by states in order to advance a corporate agenda that protect intellectual property rights, often via trade agreements and by snatching away rights from communities.

Articulation and Assertion for seed sovereignty

The Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2016—“Keeping Seeds in Peoples’ Hands”—explores ways for closing this gap and promoting a stronger agenda to advance the struggles. Seeds and agricultural biodiversity have been at the heart of social movements’ struggles for decades. Nonetheless, and despite manifold interlinkages, efforts towards the realization of the human right to adequate food and nutrition have thus far paid insufficient attention to them. “Keeping Seeds in Peoples’ Hands” explores ways to close this gap and promote a stronger agenda to advance these interconnected struggles.

It explores the articulation of seeds, land and other natural resources, assertion of peasant’s communities with the focus on human right to adequate food and nutrition. Over the last few decades, the privatization and commoditization of nature has resulted in a multiplication of local struggles using human rights against the appropriation of agricultural biodiversity, land and water resources by corporations and states. It is important to look at how are peasant movements, indigenous peoples, and other local communities resisting—and what are the alternatives they have and present?

There are ongoing global, regional and national processes shaping tenure of land, fisheries and forests, as well as on the relationship between rural and urban spaces in food systems. The participation of civil society in identifying and monitoring the primary barriers to food sovereignty is key to measuring the progressive realization of the right to food and nutrition, and to disentangling human rights monitoring from the industrialized agribusiness agenda.

Seeds are the neglected backbone of this human right, and that new ways to respect, protect and fulfil people’s access to and use of seeds, plants, and animals must take centre stage in the ongoing development of the right to food and nutrition, within the framework of food sovereignty. Need to look at how farmers’ rights to seeds are currently protected in international legal regimes and describe ongoing efforts to better protect peasant seed systems in the framework of the negotiation of a Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas at the UN Human Rights Council. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (the Tenure Guidelines or TGs) are increasingly becoming a tool for social movements to demand peoples’ sovereignty over natural resources and social justice from governments.

Find alternative and challenge narrative

Olivier De Schutter, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food (2008-2014) and member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, says: “In all world regions, communities are circumventing the mainstream food system and the striking inequalities and concentration of power that characterize it. The battle around seeds and agrobiodiversity illustrates this, better perhaps than any other part of the food system. Socio-diversity appears as a key tool for the preservation and enhancement of agrobiodiversity, and food sovereignty as a condition for the full realization of the right to food. The Watch 2016 is therefore an invitation to take action: to find alternatives and to challenge the mainstream narrative as to what progress is about and how to measure it”.

Local governance and alternatives

Need to locate the best practices of local communities in preserving seeds such as seed banks, sharing of seeds among different peasants communities, state initiatives to support peasants to experiment, explore production of seeds in organic process and a comprehensive seed policy and protective legislation to save patent rights and intellectual property rights of thousands of anonymous farmers who are inventing harmless yet quality seeds with common hood without commercial interest needs to be promoted.

There is the need to create a stronger governance framework for local food and seed systems, to reinforce the role/obligations of local governments in the transition towards territorial food/indigenous seed systems/seed processes so as to protect and promote food security and ensure seed sovereignty. What needs to be changed is the current value system that favours food and seed for profit over seed and food—rights, not commodities—for those who produce it and their heirs.
• Respect, Recognise, Fulfil FAO Seed Treaty

• Proactively finalize negotiations for a UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

• Follow the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (the Tenure Guidelines or TGs)

• The right to food is a human right enshrined in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

• It is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) as part of the right to an adequate standard of living

• CRC- many articles affirmed good nutrition should be regarded as a fundamental human right.

• The right to livelihood, land, water and food- CEDAW Article 14.