

# **Monsanto : les semences du coton OGM appauvrissent le Burkina Faso**

mercredi 27 juin 2018, par [GATTI Marta](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 18 juin 2018).

**Le rapport du Réseau mondial pour le droit à l'alimentation et à la nutrition envoie un avertissement aux autres pays africains qui ont adopté des OGM. Maigres gains, endettement des acteurs de la filière, réduction de la biodiversité et menace sur le droit à l'alimentation sont les effets constatés après huit ans d'utilisation des semences OGM du coton Monsanto.**

From [Tlaxcala.org](http://Tlaxcala.org)

The adoption of Monsanto's BT cotton would have had serious economic and social consequences in Burkina Faso, particularly for the rural population. This is denounced by a recent report published by the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition, [« Business Profit or Diversity of Food Systems ? »](#) . But let's proceed in order.

BT cotton, literally *Bacillus Thuringiensis*, is a cotton that contains repellent toxins for certain types of plant pests. This raw material was introduced in Burkina Faso in 2008 as a solution to revive production. But, by the age of eight, in 2016, Ouagadougou announced the abandonment of this GM cotton. A decision prompted by declining production and the poor quality of the final raw material.

And today, at a distance of two years, here is the study that investigates the consequences of these choices and appears as a warning for other African countries that have adopted varieties of modified seeds. Among the countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have introduced modified seeds are South Africa and Sudan.

## **GMO seeds of Monsanto cotton, patents and pesticides**

The text focuses on the impact of the spread of commercial seeds in Burkina Faso, the first country in West Africa to adopt GMOs and BT cotton. From 2008 to 2016, the country has focused on the cultivation of GM cotton, marketed by the multinational Monsanto.

The adoption of these seeds stopped in 2016, when the biggest producers of this raw material announced their suspension, due to the poor performance of the LV cotton on the market and the degradation of the quality of the raw material.

In the report, we see that the case of Burkina Faso is an example of farmers' dependence on patent-protected varieties, accompanied by technological packages composed of pesticides and fertilizers. Network researchers point out that there is still no official study on the ecological and economic impacts of LV cotton in the country.

## **Indebted and dependent peasants in Burkina Faso**

The high cost of seed of BT cotton marketed by Monsanto has in many cases led to the debt of

producers and the various actors in the sector. The introduction of GMOs has aggravated a system of farmer dependence, already present with the spread of commercial varieties.

In many cases, farmers would have received seeds and pesticides on credit before sowing, only to pay at harvest time. With this procedure, everything is fine as long as the harvest is good, but things get complicated in the event of a bad harvest. Not only do peasants get a lower gain, but they also have to pay back seeds and chemicals, often at a fixed price. Some of the farmers interviewed said that they did not feel free to choose whether or not to adopt GMOs. Despite the failure of BT production, Burkina Faso would be ready to adopt new modified seeds.

The farmer associations involved in this study said that they felt deprived of control over seed production and selection. They further explained that commercial varieties are short lived and need to be re-purchased every two or three years.

### **Development cooperation supports seed under patent**

The report denounces the fact that, during the 2015/2016 agricultural campaign, Burkina Faso subsidized \$ 30 million worth of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and commercial seeds.

According to this document, aid programs and projects of international development cooperation would also promote the dissemination of patent-protected seeds. In some cases, training courses on the use of pesticides and fertilizers are planned for farmers. The goal of the Burkinabe government is to spread the use of improved seeds, guarantee food security and modernize the agricultural sector.

### **Right to food and biodiversity in danger**

According to the report, hybrid and commercial seed support programs would endanger the right to food and nutrition, especially for the rural population who base their diet on local seeds. Modern seed systems would also be a threat to biodiversity and the very existence of traditional varieties.

The document also highlights the responsibility of States. According to the researchers, there would have been no application of the precautionary principle before the large-scale introduction of GMOs into the cotton sector.

### **African agriculture, multinationals and patents**

On April 26th, on the occasion of the International Intellectual Property Day, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) released a report on the topic of resistance to the invasion of multinationals into the global system. African seeds and the construction of a peasant seed system for food sovereignty in Africa.

According to this document, even supranational African organizations such as SADC (the Southern African Development Community) and COMESA (the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) would have pushed states to approve regulations that favor the diffusion commercial seeds, to the advantage of multinationals.

### **Free Trade Treaties to Change Seed Laws**

These treaties, reads in a [statement published on April 19 by La Via Campesina](#) , « led to the collapse of agriculture and peasant and rural communities, the latter leading in turn to the loss of food sovereignty and to the ruin of rural communities surviving through agriculture ». The main global peasant movement refers to the control of the entire industry by agricultural majors : « from

seed to table ».

This thesis is also supported by the NGO Grain. Indeed, in an article published in March, she highlights the consequences of trade agreements on seed laws in Africa :

« Although each state is free to join the treaties, these countries are often forced to sign for financial reasons. »

### **The seed market and intellectual property**

However, when it comes to regulating seed transactions, you have to consider their particularities. « The seed is versatile : it can be a genetic resource on which research is based, it can be a product sold for its flour and it can be a seed that will give birth to a plant ». It is the agronomist Giuseppe De Santis, of the Rural Seed Network (Rete Semi Rurali), who says it in the Observatory of the Rights (Osservatore Diritti) : he insists on the central role of the seeds and on their polysemy when it is to regulate their use. This means that the same component of the plant has different values and markets depending on how it is designed.

The seed market is in itself atypical because, as Giuseppe De Santis says, « in theory, one would not need to buy seeds to be able to cultivate the field the following year ». Indeed, some varieties have the same characteristics as the parent who generated them.

The seed system, as we know it today, responds to the need to protect the farmer in the first place : « It protects him with regard to the safety of the seed, which must be healthy and correspond to the best yield. in the field, » says the agronomist of the Réseau Seeds Rurales. It is this requirement that gave birth to seed laws in the early twentieth century and thus to the seed market. « The market has become more and more specialized and monopolized with the green revolution, which has determined the definitive separation between farmers and the » disciplines "of seed production. In this way, intermediaries have emerged who select and improve seed.

### **In Africa seeds are the heritage of all**

« Most of the seed varieties that are marketed around the world are in the public domain, they are not patented, because they come from a very long selection process developed by farmers for millennia, » explains Giuseppe De Santis.

This is evident in the African market, as most of the 80-90% of seed comes from traditional peasant systems. « In Africa, the theme of intellectual property is a political issue, » says the agronomist, who adds : « The majority of farmers continue to use traditional seeds. » The market segment concerned by the intellectual property is still weak.

« There is, however, a mechanism for international aid and cooperation that serves as a Trojan horse for the dissemination of modern varieties of seeds. »

### **Standardized diets and reduction of biodiversity**

The reduction of cultivated varieties and the spread of modern seeds have affected the loss of biodiversity, but it is the standardization of diets that has played the essential role. This is again the agronomist of the Rural Seed Network who supports this idea : « The global food system is causing systematic genetic erosion ».

« In Senegal, in many sectors, the baguette has replaced millet, but Senegal does not produce wheat, » he says. « This has had an impact on the millet varieties that people eat and therefore are

grown. »

### **Bayer-Monsanto merger : risks of trade unions**

The conditional authorization of the European Commission for the merger between Bayer and Monsanto dates from March. The union comes in a market already dominated by a small number of groups, after the marriage between Chem China and Syngenta, Dow Chemical and DuPont. « Who controls the seeds also controls what we eat, » says the Agricultural Seed Network agronomist :

« Mergers are worrying because they are sector mergers : seeds, plant protection products and distribution ».

What is spreading through seeds is the global food model promoted by the colossal agribusiness.

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### **Marta Gatti**

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### **P.-S.**

Presse-Toi À Gauche

<http://www.pressegauche.org/Monsanto-les-semences-du-coton-OGM-appauvrissent-le-Burkina-Faso>