

Pakistan: New Threat to our food security as MNCs trying to control food supply

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The right to food is a basic Human Right and the government has to protect right of its peoples to produce and consume food for themselves, rather than on the dictates of market and corporations. In spite of that, some multi-national corporations are currently attempting to achieve the ability to command what we eat. According to recent news appeared in *Daily Dawn* on 28th July 2013 [1], “multi-national companies including Monsanto and Syngenta have approached the Ministry of Food Security for seeking licenses to raise genetically-modified food products in Pakistan. The Ministry of Climate Change had also established a committee to review the requests of these companies and it was yet to take a final decision regarding the establishment of their plants in Pakistan”.

The issue in fact needs our serious attention seeing as some multi-national companies (MNCs) want to take over our biodiversity and the food crops. Being agent of neo colonialism, Monsanto (a \$58 billion multinational corporation) is using genetically modified food crops as a tool to have absolute control over the food supply. Monsanto has patents on all their created GM seeds and therefore they essentially own that food crops. But this is very dangerous for a country like Pakistan. How can a multi-national company own food whose only interest is profit?

Genetic modification is generally advocated for potential benefits but there is concern about their potential impact on human health and environment. GM crops carry inbuilt toxic pesticide which may pose risks to humans, livestock, other birds/animals, and the environment. Monsanto uses GM seeds which are not properly tested and no long-term tests have been done. According to a news report[2], independent studies of GM foods have shown rats to get various cancers. This study linking GM maize to cancer must be taken seriously by the regulators.

So far, small farmers have very much been affected. In India, for instance, Monsanto promised millions of farmers of unheard harvests if they switch from traditional seeds to planting GM seeds [2]. People borrowed money in order to buy the GM seeds but when their harvests failed, they were left with soaring debts. As a result, thousands of Indian farmers are committing suicide after using genetically modified crops. Additionally, Monsanto destroys farmer's lives by suing them if there is even a trace of GM crop growing found on their land; no matter if it had come from an adjacent GM farm.

The debate on GM food and corporate control over food supply is complex and has many dimensions. This article though does permit to go into a lengthy history or scientific details; let me answer some of the basic questions concerning GM foods asked by concerned friends and colleagues.

Why is GM such a dirty word? What about countries like USA where such crops are being grown?

To many folks, genetic modification is unethical and it's an act against nature. Genetic modification (GM) means artificial fusion of genes of two different species, and if GM is allowed at liberty, it is feared that it will contaminate all our precious genetic resources leading to genetic pollution. Environmentalists and the biologists confirm that whenever we mess around with nature, it comes

back with serious consequences to humans and the planet in general. Earlier, the green revolution technologies were also unnatural and have now proved to be economically and ecologically unsustainable.

Countries like USA has a problem as it heavily depends on corporate farming. The corporate sector, for their expansion, control and bigger profits, is basically coming up with all these nasty technologies. Monsanto is a US based company and a leading producer of genetically engineered seeds. Their other GM products in pine line are rather more devastating. Many strong resistance movements are going on even within USA and worldwide. Other countries like India are following GM technologies due to many specific reasons but with strong resistance in their countries from the civil society.

How can GM food companies (like Monsanto) take over our food supply?

Worldwide concern is being raised that the ultimate monopoly of Monsanto would be control of the world's food supply. Monsanto has patents on most of the GM seeds and farmers are not allowed to save seeds for their next crop; farmers have to buy seeds every time. If they control seed, they actually control food. If this continues for some years, farmers will eventually be devoid of local seeds and will be totally depending on seeds from Monsanto.

Now if Monsanto eventually demands high price of the seed or comes up with "terminator seeds", farmers would have no choice except buying Monsanto's seeds. This is how the Monsanto would ultimately have absolute control over the food supply of a country. And Monsanto, being such a gigantic corporation, very easily influences our policies, research institutions and the market system. It uses media and other market forces aggressively for the promotion of its products. The US Consulates also play hidden role in favor of their company.

What lessons can be learnt from India which allowed GM crops but have now put a moratorium on it?

For Pakistan, I think India is the best example to learn lessons because the technology has been challenged there from every aspect with concrete evidences. And despite substantial influence of Monsanto over the decision makers, the Indian Government has recently decided to hold it for a while. A number of papers and stories in this regard are available on-line and one can make a comprehensive policy brief for the Government of Pakistan against GM foods and Monsanto.

India is though more favorite seed market for Monsanto but Pakistan is also a poor populous country and is more vulnerable to bullying tactics of Monsanto. As a matter of fact, Monsanto has already penetrated into our research institutes and many dubious research trials and papers are being produced in favor of GM seeds of Monsanto. I have been part of the process of formulating "bio-safety guidelines for GMOs" during 1990s and we, on behalf of civil society networks, strongly objected the presence of representatives of Monsanto in the decision making process. A protest rally was also held in Islamabad.

In the backdrop of this, we need strong resistance through farmers, consumers, CSOs and the media to prevent our government from approving licenses to produce GM food in Pakistan. Government seems to be very vulnerable; partly because Monsanto presents Government Officials so many lucrative opportunities in the shape of projects and foreign trips, in addition to using Consulate pressures; and partly because of ignorance and presence of feudal lords in the Parliament who take care of their own interests rather than welfare of the masses.

Let's resist Monsanto, which is the most evil and unethical corporation in the world.

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P.S.

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<http://envirocivil.com/environment/new-threat-to-our-food-security-as-mncs-trying-to-control-food-supply/>

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Footnotes

[1] http://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=28_07_2013_004_008

[2] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/Cancer-row-GM-foods-French-study-claims-did-THIS-rats--cause-or-gan-damage-early-death-humans.html>