



Updates on Plant Variety Protection

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1. Editorial

When the last newsletter was published, most countries were only facing the early stages of the Corona virus crisis. Today, as the global number of infected people is soaring, we know that the virus is likely to linger for a long time, and that the world will be a different one after Covid-19. Various articles in this newsletter deal with the impact of the crisis on our food and seed systems and the need for change (item 3 and 4). A first step towards this change would be that the countries of the North refrain from restricting farmers' rights to seed in their free trade agreements (item 2 and 5).

2. Open letter / Press Release: Stop double standards in Free Trade Agreements

250 organisations from 60 countries are calling on Switzerland, Norway and Liechtenstein in an [open letter](#) to stop imposing strict plant variety protection laws on the countries of the global South; laws with which they themselves do not comply. This demand by the EFTA countries for strict plant variety protection drastically restricts the free use of seeds, to the detriment of farmers in the global South. The right to food, food sovereignty and agrobiological diversity are all under threat. [To the press release](#).

3. The Covid-19 Pandemic and the need to change our food systems

Walden Bello, senior analyst at the Focus on the Global South, adjunct professor of sociology at the State University of New York, and an associate at the Transnational Institute, authored an [issue brief](#) in April, titled: "'Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste': The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Opportunity for Food Sovereignty". The brief focused on the way the pandemic has exposed the fragility of the corporate-dominated global food supply system and shown that it is not part of the solution. According to Bello, "while in the short term it is important to prevent disruptions so as not to create hunger and widespread malnourishment, it is important to begin the strategic transformation of the global food production system along lines designed to bring about food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty". A [Communiqué](#) by IPES-Food goes in a similar direction and recommends the following steps to build resilience at all levels: Recommendation #1: Taking immediate action to protect the most vulnerable, #2: Building resilient agroecological food systems, #3: Rebalancing economic power for the public good for a new pact between state and society, #4. Reforming the international food systems governance.

4. Seed security in the wake of the Corona crisis

Another [policy brief](#) written by Regine Andersen, research director Environment and Biodiversity at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, looks at the role of emergency aid and development cooperation for seed security in the wake of Covid-19. The brief shows that the current crisis “demonstrates how pandemics may fundamentally change societal structures for shorter or longer periods, necessitating greater reliance on local resources, including on seeds”. Andersen maintains that “the effects of climate change have shown the importance of locally adapted and adaptable crop varieties to seed and food security.” “These two major challenges to global seed and food security call for a greater focus on strengthening the resilience of local seed systems through national policies and development cooperation,” she concludes.

5. Harnessing the Multilateral Patent and PVP Regimes to Advance Food Security

Uchenna Felicia Ugwu, research fellow in International IP Law and Development at the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Law, just published her [thesis](#) on intellectual property (IP) provisions, including plant variety protection in multilateral, continental, and regional trade agreements. The thesis explores whether these provisions advance or compromise food security in West Africa. Ugwu’s conclusion is clear: “Provisions in contemporary IP agreements are not suitable for advancing food security in West Africa because they stick to classical norms for IP protection, which do not allow for the protection of traditional knowledge, smallholder farmers, local practices, and farmers’ rights. Yet these interests are essential to supporting food security in the West African region.”

6. ‘Keeping seeds in our hands’: the rise of seed activism”

A recent [article](#) by Karine Peschard and Shalini Randeria, published in the Journal of Peasant Studies looked at seed activism over the last three decades, and showed a paradigm shift from farmer’s rights to seed sovereignty. The authors, both from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, analyzed some of the main threats to peasant seeds systems, including seed and IP laws, biopiracy, corporate concentration and new genome editing technologies. They looked at strategies put into place by peasants and other activists, to counter those threats, and suggested some avenues for future research.

7. 348 organizations from 46 countries celebrate international seed day

We already reported about the celebration of the International Seed Day in opposition to the world intellectual property day in our last [Newsletter](#). The organizers have now published a final [press release and video](#).

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