

KILLER SEEDS: The Devastating Impacts of Monsanto's Genetically Modified Seeds in India

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Monsanto's operation in India illustrates monopolization and manipulation of the market economy, tradition, technology, and misgovernance. The world's largest producer of genetically engineered seeds has been selling genetically modified (GM) in India for the last decade to benefit the Indian farmers – or so the company claims.

In a country of more than 550 million farmers who are largely poor and uneducated and the agriculture market rife with inefficient business practices, the Indian government sought to reform the market by eliminating subsidies and loans to the farmers.

The government reform did not help the farmers. With pressure from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Indian government has “forced market liberalization on India which means the elimination of government subsidies and government-backed loans to farmers.”

Enter Monsanto with its “magic” GM seeds to transform the lives of the poor Indian farmers.

The U.S. agri-business giant took full advantage of its entry into the Indian market. It entered into an agreement with state governments including Rajasthan and Andhara Pradesh to introduce a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that dictated the terms of disseminating the GM technology in Indian market.

For Monsanto, it is one thing to convince farmers to use artificial seeds for the purposes of enriching their lives, it is quite another to manipulate nature and technology to profit from them.

Killer Seeds

The irony is GM seeds have not been effective in India and the consequences are not as rosy as what Monsanto had promised to deliver. Scathing reports of mass suicides of Indian farmers broke out as recently as three years ago when scores of farmers took their own lives in order to escape the burden of high prices and failure of Monsanto's GM seeds.

Monsanto offered its GM seeds to the farmers of India with hopes of reaping plentiful crops. Plain and mostly uneducated farmers thought Monsanto had come to provide a “magic” formula that would transform their lives. They had no idea what was coming.

Monsanto's seeds in India did not produce what the company had promised and farmers hoped. The expensive seeds piled up debts and destroyed farming fields. In many instances, the crops simply failed to materialize. The farmers were not aware that the GM seeds

required more water than the traditional seeds. And lack of rain in many parts of India exacerbated the crop failure.

With no harvest, the farmers could not pay back the lenders. Burdened with debts and humiliation, the farmers simply took their own lives, some by swallowing poisonous pesticides in front of their families. To date, an estimated 200,000 farmers have committed suicide all over India.

To add to the misery, wives inherited the debts along with the fear of losing their homes and lands. With no money coming in, they also had to pull their kids from the schools. The mass suicide among the Indian farmers is known as the “GM genocide.”

In its company website Monsanto declares that its pledge is “our commitment to how we do business.” And then there are the business philosophies with virtuous words like “integrity” and “transparency.”

Monsanto’s business practices in India quite remarkably live up to the company’s motto. It purposefully leverages its power and influence in government to penetrate farming markets with motive but without morale.

Market Power

Using its colossal market power, Monsanto craftily penetrated into the Indian markets.

Monsanto convinced the Indian government that its GM seeds would produce better crops. According to a report by Farm Wars, one former Managing Director of Monsanto claimed that Monsanto manipulated research data “to get commercial approvals for its products in India.”

Indian regulatory agencies, instead of verifying the data, simply remained compliant with the findings of what Monsanto presented. “They did not even have a test tube to validate the data and, at times, the data itself was faked,” the Farm Wars report says.

Government regulations worked in favor of Monsanto to monopolize the Indian seed market. For example, “Prime Minister’s Office” in India pressured various state governments to sign MOUs with Monsanto to privatize the seed market.

Through these “vested interests” with the Indian government, Monsanto eventually has monopolized the GM seed market for more than a decade.

Unable to purchase traditional seeds, the farmers had to pay a hefty price for the expensive GM seeds. Many farmers had to borrow money from the local lenders to buy Monsanto’s seeds. To cite an example of how expensive the GM seeds are, 100 grams of GM cost \$15 to the farmers compared with \$15 for 1000 grams of traditional seeds.

Vandana Shiva, a renowned scientist and activist in India, wrote that Monsanto had also planned to control water in India. Its aim was to control water supply through privatization. In other words, Monsanto sought to profit from water, a lifeline of Indian livelihood. By seeking control of water, Monsanto also seized the opportunity to benefit from the scarce water supply that plagues communities throughout India.

Manipulation and Misinformation

The failure of Monsanto's GM seeds was palpable. The farmers held onto their hopes for better crops after they had planted the "magic" seeds. Their crops never came. Throughout the villages in India the harvest from the GM seeds failed. The parasites destroyed the so-called "pest-proof" GM seeds.

Monsanto uses methods of manipulation and misinformation to reap their own benefits and profits at the cost of the farmers who rely on organic methods to grow their crops and animals, a tradition that existed in India for centuries.

By a contractual clause, the farmers could not save Monsanto's GM seeds for reuse after the first season.

Whether or not the farmers understood this legal binding would merit an examination to underscore the extent of Monsanto's market power and conniving business practices. Misleading and forcing farmers to buy the GM seeds through government policy and market monopoly must be purged as part of reforming the Indian agricultural market.

Action Against GM seeds

Prince Charles does not like what Monsanto is doing or causing to the lives of farmers in India. He has expressed his contempt for the "bio-tech leaders" and "politicians" who have caused suicides among Indian farmers. His charity organization promotes "long-term benefits of sustainable agriculture" that would provide "decent returns" to the farmers.

Facing pressure from the anti-GM seed activists, NGOs, and local communities, the Indian government gave in. In 2010, Indian Environment Minister issued a temporary "moratorium" on Monsanto to introduce genetically engineered egg plant seeds in India. Only time will tell how long this policy effects will last.

In a country where money, politics, and business often go hand in hand, the farmers are at the mercy of their own fate.

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