

Seed for diversity: We sow diversity where others destroy it.

It is the biggest acquisition that a German corporation has ever made: in September 2016 Bayer, the second largest agrochemical corporation in the world, announced its proposed takeover of Monsanto, the American seed and pesticide producer. This would make “BaySanto” the largest supplier of seeds and pesticides in the world and result in a market concentration, and concentration of power, that threatens our democracy and our food system. That is because just a few corporations can then decide how we live, work and eat.

The planned merger of these two megacorporations exemplifies a progression towards industrial agriculture, in which there is no place for small rural farms. The negative impacts of this sort of development, driven by international agribusiness, on people and the environment are already obvious, particularly in the Global South. There are alternatives to the megacorporations’ development model – MISEREOR’s project partners around the world demonstrate that. They are socially just, environmentally sound and democratic. Not only that: they can tackle hunger, too!¹

What does the merger mean for the world’s food?

If the planned merger goes ahead, three megacorporations will in future control almost 70 per cent of the global market for seed and agrochemicals. Profits from the merger will go mainly to the shareholders, while the costs will be borne by farmers, consumers and our environment. Two megacorporations would have considerable control over the supply of seed and thus over the basis of our nutrition; this has serious consequences:

1. “BaySanto” would control 25 per cent of the pesticide market and 30 per cent of the seed market. This would make it the largest producer of seeds and pesticides in the world.
2. Genetic engineering would be accelerated and the breeding of traditional seeds would be further neglected. That endangers the diversity of seed varieties. Traditional varieties will be increasingly displaced by hybrid varieties and genetically modified seed.
3. The big corporations would increasingly focus on marketing “packs” containing their seeds and pesticides in order to boost their profits.
4. The corporation’s lobbying power would grow. That puts the licensing of agrochemicals and the requirement to license and label genetically modified plants at risk.
5. Agro-ecological alternatives, which do not need the corporations’ products, would be further neglected.

¹ Background to the campaign: The MISEREOR campaign aims to inform the German public and raise awareness of the problem of the growing corporate power of agribusiness. It focuses on publicising the negative impacts of agribusiness on small-scale farmers and the environment, using experiences documented by partner organisations. MISEREOR and its partner organisations show that there are alternatives and tried and tested solutions for “feeding the world”.

The corporations' agricultural model sidelines the majority of farmers in the Global South!

The capital-intensive farming model that Bayer and Monsanto promote is not tailored to the needs of the many small family farms in the Global South. Its purpose is merely to secure markets for their products.

In sub-Saharan Africa the number of farms managing less than two hectares is estimated at around 33 million.² They represent 80% of all farms there. For years Bayer and Monsanto have been involved in numerous initiatives such as Grow Africa and the G7's New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, a scheme for the so-called modernisation of farming in Africa. However, their capital-intensive methods are not suited to the reality of the majority of small family farms, and are above all too risky. The aggressive promotion of large-scale, capital-intensive agriculture puts the majority of small family farms at risk of losing not only their land and resources in future, but also their markets.³

Seed: Who controls the basis of the world's food?

The increasing market concentration and concentration of power, in the food and farming industries goes hand in hand with the international corporations' control over the seed sector. This has negative impacts globally on farmers as well as consumers.

How do the corporations gain control of seed stocks?

Firstly, industrial seed producers get their seeds patented as intellectual property, which, depending on the variety, can mean that nobody else may use, propagate or sell this variety of seed without the permission of the patent holder. Secondly, they request licences for the use of the seeds they produce in accordance with the protection of plant varieties (protection of new varieties of plants agreements such as UPOV 91).

In the countries of the Global South in particular, international corporations find as yet undeveloped seed markets that are potentially profitable for them. In Africa, for example, 80 to 90 per cent of seed is still produced by farmers, while in Asia and Latin America it is 70 to 80 per cent.⁴ However, the lives and livelihoods of farmers there depend on the unrestricted use of seed, and its exchange and reproduction (suitable open-pollinated varieties are selected to be saved and sown the following year).

For MISEREOR partner organisations in the Global South the corporations' seed strategies and the spread of genetic engineering have devastating consequences. Seen too in terms of society as a whole, the increasing market concentration in the seed sector threatens our food sovereignty and our democracy. Seed is the basis of our food, so if this is controlled by a few corporations it makes states more vulnerable to pressure and lobbying tactics from the private sector and enables profit-oriented companies to decide how we live, work and eat.

² FAO 2009: <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/35770/icode/>

³ MISEREOR 2015: Impacts of large-scale agricultural investments on small-scale farmers in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. A Right to Food Perspective, <https://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/publikationen/publikationen/study-a-right-to-food-perspective-2015.pdf>

⁴ Grain/LVC 2015: Seed laws that criminalise farmers

Pesticides: The environmental and health costs of industrial agriculture

It is high time to move away from a farming model based on the use of pesticides. Pesticides are frequently marketed in combination with the agrochemical companies' hybrid and genetically-modified seeds, and with this comes a huge risk to the environment and the health of farmers, farm workers and consumers.

According to a recent United Nations report, 200,000 people die of acute pesticide poisoning every year. 99 per cent of these deaths occur in developing countries. This is because of inadequate government regulation of the sale and use of pesticides and the users' poor understanding of the risks of pesticides to people and the environment.

There are approximately 60 extremely hazardous active pesticide ingredients in Bayer's range. Bayer sells pesticides in the Global South that are banned in the EU because of their proven risks to health and the environment.

Pesticides used in agriculture can remain in the environment for decades; they pollute soils, surface waters and groundwater, and cause the extinction of species, so threatening the ecosystem.

The human rights to safe, healthy working conditions, clean water, food and health are threatened by the massive use of pesticides. There are alternative farming systems that function with minimal amounts of pesticide or none at all. However, they need to be given more support and publicity through research.⁵

Alternatives for environmentally sustainable and socially just agriculture

There are good, tried and tested alternatives. Agro-ecological methods enable the farmers to increase their agricultural production using locally available resources and do not require major investment. Promoting biodiversity with robust plant varieties reduces pest infestations. It is worthwhile for small-scale farmers to grow as many different crops as possible, in case of crop failures or plummeting prices.

This is how agro-ecology can provide an alternative to expensive inputs of chemical fertiliser, commercially-produced seed and pesticides. A long-term study by MISEREOR in Uganda shows that small farmers who received advice in agro-ecological methods from partner organisations made enormous progress in food security, income and therefore also in living standards.⁶

The amount of potential in farm-bred seeds is illustrated by MASIPAG, our partner organisation in the Philippines. MASIPAG, a network of farmers, non-governmental organisations and scientists, has been campaigning since the 1980s for rights and self-determination for farmers. The network works continuously to expand the collection of traditional rice varieties and organises further education courses in rice breeding for its members. MASIPAG has collected and

⁵ MISEREOR 2017: Besser anders. Mit Agrarökologie die Ernährungswende gestalten (brochure in German), <https://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/publikationen/broschuere-agraroekologie.pdf>

⁶ <https://blog.misereor.de/2017/02/20/landwirtschaft-in-uganda-der-staat-uebersieht-das-potenzial-seiner-kleinbauern/>

conserved 1313 traditional rice varieties and has bred 1288 new strains of rice with optimum suitability to the local soils and climate. Field trials of the seeds take place every year and they are being constantly redeveloped.

That is why MISEREOR is sure that:

We need agriculture to be for everyone, not for corporations! A kind of agriculture that recognises small-scale farmers and their valuable contribution to food, and involves them! For this, farmers need control of land, water and seed, and they need be able to sell their produce locally and at a fair price. Farmers have to have the opportunity to decide their cultivation methods for themselves and to develop them sustainably to suit local conditions.

Join MISEREOR in fighting for a food system that upholds the human right to food for all, that creates jobs and incomes with fair working conditions for a lot of people, that protects our environment and ensures diversity from field to fork. Such a system is more sustainable and fairer than one that is controlled by a few large companies in the food and agriculture industry. To achieve this, farmers need not only political support, but also the support of consumers all over the world!

MISEREOR demands:

It is the responsibility of the German government to ensure that German companies like Bayer respect and protect human rights in other countries. If the merger between Bayer and Monsanto goes ahead, this responsibility becomes even greater. That is why the government should:

- ...protect people everywhere by means of appropriate policy, regulation and adjudication on human rights violations by German companies – both at home and abroad
- ...reject the merger between Bayer and Monsanto and restrict corporate power through more stringent competition rules
- ...strengthen farmers' rights to freely use, exchange and sell their seed
- ...ban patents on life and regulate green genetic engineering
- ...promote breeding strategies that recognise farmers' breeding achievements, actively involve them and foster agro-ecological systems
- ...prohibit the export to the Global South of hazardous agrochemicals that are not licensed in Germany because of the high risks
- ...gradually withdraw hazardous pesticides from the market and instead promote agro-ecological farming methods
- ...support a ban on glyphosate in the EU and by doing so send a signal to governments in the Global South that they should protect their people from pesticides
- ...advance state programmes to promote and research agro-ecology.

Further information in German at: www.saat-fuer-vielfalt.de

Further information in English at: www.misereor.org/seed-for-diversity

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