

# SOUTH AGAINST GENETIC ENGINEERING

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## Press Release

9<sup>th</sup> November 2010

## WHO WILL PAY FOR THIS SEED BILL?

### South Against Genetic Engineering:

- **Rejects the premise of the proposed Seed Bill, 2010**
- **Demands full disclosure and informed public debate prior to any finalisation of Bill**
- **Rejects the organised entry of the private sector in India's seed production sector**
- **Demands that sovereignty of India's agricultural systems**

The Parliament Session opens on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2010 with a special day being addressed by the President of the United States of America, Mr. Barack Obama on just the previous day. The session opens on a critical note when India has welcomed an increased US investment in high technology flow, including in agriculture and nuclear energy. **The two countries have agreed to build on green revolution and food security were also discussed.**

It is in this context that the India's parliament will see the introduction of the new Seed Bill for discussion and possible passage. This comes soon after the Union Cabinet approved additional amendments to the 2004 version of the Seed Bill on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2010. In July 2010, the Minister of Agriculture Sharad Pawar had organised a consultative meeting with State Ministers of Agriculture to discuss the possible contours and content of the proposed legislation.

This version of the Seed Bill which seeks to replace its earlier 1966 version and has been framed to regulating the very basic element of agriculture in a country like India: Seeds and other planting material. India has a vibrant and thriving heritage of seed saving and local seed breeding systems which continue to be the biggest knowledge assets of farming communities. Having continued access to the seed germplasm has allowed farmers to carry on their cultivation in the most trying of circumstances. The introduction of the Seed Bill systematically seeds to take away this sovereignty from farmers, by increasingly making Seeds into mere “external input” linked with the tentative system of market supply and demand.

**The Government of India press release of October 20<sup>th</sup> 2010 has linked the amendments and finalisation of the Seed Bill to be a necessary step in the light of the emergence of “new technologies” and also the increasing “role of private sector in seed production” and thereby increasing the scope of export/import of seeds and planting materials.**

We the members of South Against Genetic Engineering, a network of farmers, farmer's organisations, scientists, NGOs and researchers fundamentally reject the very premise of such a legislation which is paving the way for an organised shift of control into the hands of private sector seed companies, essentially promoting unethical and high risk technologies like genetic modification. The proposed Seed Bill allows for certification of imported seeds based on trials done outside the country. It also brings in a system of Seed Inspectors with the explicit function of policing farming communities rendering the farming system to further externalised checks and balances. While accepting Genetic Modification in agriculture the proposed Seed Bill also allows for royalties for use of GM seeds, most of which are controlled by few large corporations based in the USA.

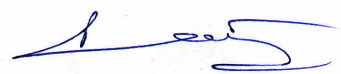
SAGE believes that the proposed Seed Bill is an extremely retrograde step that undermines India's agricultural systems and farmer's knowledge which have within them solutions to fight the food, farming and climate change crises in the country. With farmers loosing control over seeds, the Seed Bill only bring in a death knell to the farmers who are yet to deal with the continual impacts of the green revolution, which Government of India seeks to take forward.

Despite its far reaching consequences on the food and farming systems of the country, the Government of India (in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture) continues to go through the finalisation of the Seed Bill in the most exclusionary and opaque manner, completely disregarding the root causes of the farming crisis in India. The only version of the Bill available to the public is its 2004 version which is more than 6 years old.

We at SAGE believe that any Bill addressing the concerns of seeds needs to build within it a solution which is based autonomous farmer controlled, farmer led seed systems which translate into seed sovereignty. In other words ecological biodiverse farming and seed systems which make farmers seed sovereign need to be in the centre of any legislation which seeks to govern and regulate seed systems of a country.

**We have reason to believe that most of the suggestions made by farmer's groups and civil society groups have not been included in the finalised draft to be placed in the coming session of the Parliament. Such a blatant disregard is renders little faith in a government which seeks itself to be positioned towards inclusive growth. No inclusive agenda can be furthered with exclusive privileges to the private sector and that to at the cost of small and marginal farmers.**

**We therefore reject the very premise of the proposed Seed Bill as finalised by the Ministry of Agriculture and demand full, prior informed debate to be able to shape any legal change which seeks to transform India's farming heritage.**



(p v satheesh]  
National Convenor  
South Against Genetic Engineering