



biowatch

SOUTH AFRICA

biodiversity | food sovereignty | agroecology | social justice

bulletin

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Monsanto accused of crimes against humanity and the planet

The International Monsanto Tribunal held in The Hague from 14-16 October accused Monsanto of crimes against humanity and against the planet. While the Tribunal has no formal legal standing, the verdict of the jurists will be widely publicised, airing the truth about Monsanto.

Two events were held: the hearings, which took place before a team of jurors; and the People's Assembly. At the hearings different people from affected communities around the world gave evidence about the behaviour of Monsanto in their area. The combined testimony told a story of poisoning, intimidation, debt, chemical contamination of land, monopolisation of control over seed, harassment of farmers onto whose land Monsanto seeds had been blown, repeated around the world.

The People's Assembly was an opportunity for activists fighting Monsanto and GMOs to share experiences and strategies. Key new information shared was the result of studies of glyphosate (Monsanto's Round Up herbicide) which connected its use since 1997 to epidemics of diabetes, certain cancers and other health problems.

Another issue which the movement against Monsanto has to take on board is the new generation of GMOs (called "hidden" GMOs by French campaigners) which are laboratory manipulations producing new foodstuffs and cosmetics, but which avoid falling under the technical definition of a GMO. The ETC Group, based in Canada, was most knowledgeable about this new phenomenon which needs careful monitoring.



There is increasing evidence that GMOs create serious environmental and health risks and have dubious economic advantages (see Fact Sheet: GMOs in South Africa available on our website: www.biowatch.org.za).

David Fig, Biowatch Chairperson, represented the organisation at the Tribunal and gave a presentation to the People's Assembly on the Biowatch case against Monsanto which was heard in the South African Constitutional Court.

"Monsanto is in talks that may mean it merges with Bayer, a German chemical and seed corporation, making it even larger and more powerful. We need to be watchful and ready to continue to oppose this company's criminal behaviour," said Fig. You can see the Monsanto Tribunal in action at www.monsanto-tribunal.org.

Biowatch's National Seed Event brought farmers, seed custodians and other experts together to



learn, organise and celebrate local seed, food and knowledge.

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Agroecology certificates of achievement were awarded to Biowatch-supported farmers during



World Food Day celebrations in Ingwavuma, northern KZN.

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Biowatch and SKI hosted a series of events to explore approaches to support small-holder farmers in the



region towards more diverse and resilient seed systems.

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From the director

Much of our work these past six months has been on deepening our agroecology practice, exploring diverse and resilient farmer-led seed systems, and writing up our work on agroecology and household seedbanks.

We were also part of the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) 2016 seminar *"How Do We Maintain, Restore and Strengthen Resilient and Diverse Seed and Knowledge Systems in Southern Africa?"* which was hosted by University of Cape Town. UCT, Biowatch and the EarthLore Foundation are pioneering partners of SKI, now a regional Initiative. There was an excellent group of people participating at the seminar who grappled with the many issues around this complex topic, one that is of critical importance to food security and, more importantly, to food sovereignty.

We have found great synergy in our work with other civil society partners – from a local level, such as a recent civil society meeting hosted by Biowatch in KwaZulu-Natal, to the international level where Biowatch participated at the CSM (Civil Society Mechanism) to the World Committee on Food Security (CFS) in Rome. There seems to be an unprecedented groundswell towards agroecology for climate resilience and food sovereignty. There is also an increasing emphasis on the importance of agricultural diversity. We were glad to participate in a workshop *"National Strategic Action Plan for the conservation and sustainable use of crop wild relatives in South Africa"* hosted by the national Department of Agriculture. Although we were not able to participate in the UN Convention of Biological Diversity meeting in Mexico in December, it has been great to see the focus on agricultural biodiversity.

It was important for us to send a submission to the Monsanto Tribunal, which took place in The Hague (see page 1), as we continue to work to dispel the myths around genetic engineering and other industrial agriculture "silver bullets" and how they undermine resilience – whether it be farmer, ecological or climate. Equally it is important for us to disseminate more widely information about agroecology and farmer-led seed systems – a focus for 2017.

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GM updates

■ Moratorium on gene drives is called for

Biowatch demands a moratorium on gene drives!

Gene drives – an extreme form of genetic engineering, also sometimes known as "hidden" GMOs (see page 1) are risky business. Biowatch has signed onto a petition to demand a moratorium on "gene drives". This call was initiated by groups including Friends of the Earth, ETC Group, Third World Network, Genewatch UK, Heinrich Boell Foundation, Hawaii Seed, Econexus and the New Zealand Sustainability Council.

Jim Thomas of ETC writes: "These applications, created using CRISPR-cas9 gene-editing are designed to force a particular genetically engineered trait through an entire wild population – potentially changing entire species or even causing deliberate extinctions." Applications range from releasing gene drives into weed species to make them susceptible to pesticides, to attempts to eradicate invasive species or disease vectors. For more on gene drives see: www.synbiowatch.org/gene-drives/.

Recent publications

All Biowatch publications are available on our website: www.biowatch.org.za. If you would like to be notified when we launch new publications, sign up to our mailing list – you can use the link on our home page or send an e-mail to allison@biowatch.org.za.

■ Research Paper: Agroecology – Environmental, social and economic justice

Examining what agroecology is and why it's needed for a sustainable food system (32 pages).

■ Fact Sheet: Household seed banks

The facts about why it's important for farmers to save seed and build community seed networks (4 pages).

■ Fact Sheet: GMOs in South Africa

Updated facts about GMOs and GM crops in South Africa, and why it's important to avoid and speak out against GMOs (4 pages).





Our 2016 National Seed Event brought together farmers, seed custodians, civil society organisations and other experts from South Africa and Swaziland. Farmers participated in a seed exhibit, shared learnings and visited local agroecology food gardens.

Celebrating local seed, food and knowledge

Biowatch's 5-day National Seed Event, an annual celebration of local seed, food and knowledge, this year gathered farmers, seed custodians, civil society organisations and other experts in Pongola, northern KwaZulu-Natal to learn, organise and celebrate together.

Learn: The event was a space to deliberate what is happening in South Africa around seed; threats such as GMOs; why seeds need to be protected; and why knowledge on seeds needs to be preserved.

Organise: Farmers and partner organisations shared learnings and methods for organising around seeds and agricultural activities.

Celebrate: Farmers exhibited their seed varieties, and local farmers shared traditional foods for everyone to taste.

Annual farmer gathering

Thirty Biowatch-supported farmers from Tshaneni, Pongola, Mtubatuba, Ingwavuma and KwaNgwanase attended the 2016 annual farmer gathering. Held in Pongola in November, the 3-day event was an opportunity for farmers and Biowatch to reflect on the year's activities and learnings, and to plan together for 2017.

The increasing participation of these agroecology farmers in the learning and development of other farmers is a theme that is emerging, and the 2017 event and learning calendar is quickly filling.

(Right) Farmers who attended the 2016 annual farmer gathering left the event inspired and energised, ready to fly the agroecology flag high in 2017.

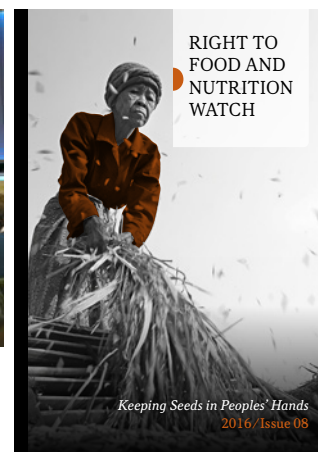


The Mandulo Project in Ingwavuma, northern KwaZulu-Natal, hosted a Biowatch World Food Day celebration in October. Farmers and communities from Tshaneni, Pongola, Mtubatuba, Ingwavuma and KwaNgwanase attended the festivities and shared a "real good food" lunch prepared from locally grown produce. (Below) The celebrations included the awarding of agroecology certificates of achievement to 28 farmers.





Rose Williams, Biowatch Director (seated far right), was one of the panellists at the October international launch of the 2016 issue of Right to Food and Nutrition Watch at the FAO headquarters in Rome.



Valuing women and the seed they keep – this is the key to food sovereignty in Africa

What is the key to African food sovereignty? Valuing women and the seed they keep. The link between women and seed is ancient, writes Biowatch's Elfrieda Pschorn-Strauss, co-ordinator of the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI), in *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2016*.

The publication, which was launched in October at the FAO Headquarters in Rome, sheds light on the existing threats to peasant seed systems and the accelerated destruction of biodiversity.

"Women's link to seed is through food, health, culture, ecology, spirituality and social relationships. In their roles as seed custodians, plant breeders, farmers, herbalists and mothers, African women's daily work involves an intimate involvement and knowledge of plants," writes Pschorn-Strauss. "Women are the unacknowledged and unseen experts on seed and on both domesticated and wild biodiversity."

If you haven't already, you can download a copy of *Watch 2016: Keeping Seeds in People's Hands* from the Right to Food and Nutrition Watch website: www.rtfn-watch.org



African experts on genetic conservation, farmers, UKZN students, Biowatch and SKI staff engage, explore and learn together about diverse and resilient seed systems.

Approaches to resilient farmer-led seed systems

In August, Biowatch and the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) hosted a series of events to explore approaches to support small-holder farmers in northern KwaZulu-Natal and in the region towards more diverse and resilient seed systems.

African experts on genetic conservation were invited to engage with SKI and Biowatch staff, farmers, and staff and students from the School of Agricultural, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), both in the field and at a seminar at the University. The purpose of the engagements was to learn, to share experiences and knowledge, and by engaging with the context in a very practical way, to develop ideas and possibilities for future engagement between scientists, farmers and NGOs.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- People's Assembly to coincide with Bayer AGM (Dusseldorf) – April 2017
- March Against Monsanto (international) – 25 May 2017
- Seed ritual (KwaNgwanase) – 22 June 2017
- Seed ritual (KwaNgwanase) – 25 July 2017

Biowatch Bulletin will keep you updated.

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