OUTCOMES of GMO Multi-stakeholder Meeting

Hanoi, Vietnam, May 21 to 22, 2018

Drastic GM Corn expansion in Vietnam brings adverse health and environmental impact to farmers

In 2006, Vietnams Prime Minister issued Decision no. 11/2006/QD-TTg on the adoption of genetically modified crops (GMOs) as part of the "program on development and application of biotechnology in agriculture and rural development" aiming at having 30-50% farmland under GMO cultivation by 2020.

In 2010, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) started experiments of 7 corn varieties from the giant agrochemical and seed companies Sygenta, Pioneer Hibred Vietnam and Dekalb Vietnam (a subsidiary of Monsanto). Commercialization of genetically modified crops in Vietnam started in 2015 within pilot areas in An Giang, Dong Thap, Dong Nai, Phu Tho, Son La, Thanh Hoa, Thai Nguyen, Hoa Binh and Tuan Quang provinces. The expansion of GM corn production is in line with the proposal of the government to boost corn exports in the region.

The expansion of Bt corn has not just increased conversion of forest areas for monoculture plantations. Valuable insects, birds, medicinal plants are also lost along the way while paving for the erosion of traditional seeds. It has also increased the use of toxic herbicides and pesticides which contaminated land and water in the uplands. In 2017 and 2018, a series of media investigation within these GMO BT corn areas shows evidence of growing farmers' woes, ill health and toxic environmental pollution. These include increasing cases of respiratory ailments, miscarriages and skin diseases. The poisoning of 78 farmers this May 2018 in Son La province is among the most recent of these evens documented so far.

Glyphosate, the genetically modified Bt Corn's evil twin, poisons 78 farmers in Vietnam uplands

The poisoning and suffering of 78 farmers in Son La province has raised public alarm on the worsening environmental pollution and health hazard brought by massive un-regulated use of the toxic herbicide Glyphosate, along with drastic expansion of monoculture GMO Corn plantations in Vietnam. News reports show that Son La province is now using about 300,000 litres of herbicide annually leading to toxic contamination of their water supply and environment. The rise of Glyphosate is most pronounced within leading pilot areas for genetically modified BT Corn, such as in Son La.

Glyphosate, the world's most widely used toxic herbicide, was declared carcinogenic in 2015 by the World Health Organization and is now banned in most European Countries for its pernicious ecological and polluting effects. Unfortunately, despite statements of its negative health impacts coming from WHO, glyphosate is not among the 1,024 types of chemical pesticides and herbicides the Minister of Agriculture and Development (MARD) have announced as banned.

GM Corn and Glyphosate are both manufactured by multinational corporations like Monsanto, which holds a monopoly position in the global commercial seed trade, GMO development, and the promotion of chemical pesticides and herbicides. Monsanto amassed huge profits from the manufacture of biochemical poisons during the war era and has been the culprit in several horrific ecological catastrophes of "eco-cide" in the last century, as documented in the Monsanto Tribunal in 2017. Amidst this, Monsanto's monopoly and influence in the trajectory of agricultural policies in Vietnam and South East Asia continues to grow with the commercialization of GMOs.

GMO Multi-stakeholders meeting in Hanoi tackles issues and concerns threatening farmers' and consumers' welfare in Vietnam and South East Asia.

These pressing public issues prompted various farmers, indigenous peoples, and policy makers to conduct a multi-stakeholders in-depth discussion on the implications of vast GM corn expansion. More than 40 participants from different provinces, parliament members, and government officials gathered to discuss, analyze and address the impacts of GMO commercialization in Vietnam over the last 3 years.

Farmers from different identities and localities at the GMO dialogue on 21 - 22 May 2018

Farmer Vang Sin Min from H'mong ethnic minority group of Simacai district, northern Lao Cai province.

People in Simacai district have witnessed and engaged in anti-GMOs activities. Hybrid corn variety is also a type of GMO, which had been used by the villagers between 1999 and 2000 to overcome hunger. This variety is very productive, bringing about fruitful harvests, which makes our villagers very happy. In the previous years, the corn seeds had been distributed free to the farmers by the district agriculture office. However, in the recent years, only the poor households are entitled to receive free hybrid corn seeds, while other households have to pay VND 150,000 a pack. We have seen how this corn variety affects human health, causing critical health problems such as cancer, at alarming level. Many people had died because of cancer, especially liver cancer. In my village, for example, there are two people suffering from blood cancer. Additionally, miscarriage and malformation cases have threatened women. GM corn or hybrid corn with associated pesticides and herbicides cause death to cattle. In the past, farmers raised many horses. The beautiful images of men riding the horses and women walking beside their husbands have once made the inherently beautiful mountainous landscape become even more beautiful and romantic have just been kept in memory. As horses are gone, the villagers ride motorbikes instead.

Initially, the hybrid corn had very high productivity, and could be sold at the higher price. However, the more it is planted, the more chemical and herbicide are applied, making the soil less fertile and corn less productive. As a result, farmers decided to shift to planting GM corn. In the first year, farmers were supported in price and chemical fertilizer by the Government. In the following year, the farmers had to pay for seeds, fertilizer and pesticide at dozens time higher. The corn productivity reduced remarkably, while it was sold at much lower price. To

continue the GM corn production, the farmers went to the bank for loans. But because they never paid the debt on time, they had to extend the debt at the interest rate of 3 times higher. But even that couldn't help them pay the debt because of the production loss. Finally, they were forced to get into a private "hot loan" with the interest rate as much as VND 60,000 per every million dong of loan per month. Having failed to pay debt, the farmers were forced to sell their land to the loan owners. Finally, they left their home village to go to China for selling labor. Theft, drug addiction and women trafficking happened in the community. If in the past, the farmers were poor but in peace, they now are poor and in fear, and don't know where to go.

In one word, there is clear evidence that GM corn planting has caused a series of problems to Simacai: overuse of chemicals polluting soil, water and environment, serious debt, labor selling and social evils, eroding life of the local people spiritually and materially, making life politically unstable.

If the local government officials at all levels and professionals were ethical and knowledgeable, the companies and corporations wouldn't have monopolized as they are doing now in our villages. We strongly recommend the local government at all levels get involved to help the villagers overcome the currently difficult situation caused by such corporations like MONSANTO, who are destroying the community values and local diverse seed system in the mountainous areas.

Farmer Leng Van Suong from Nung ethnic group of Lao Cai province

While GMOs have been restricted in some SEA countries, the use of GMOs and chemical fertilizers has still been promoted in Vietnam, accounting for 90%. We understand that GMOs contribute to hunger elimination. However, in the current context, GMO cultivation makes loss due to the high input cost such as seeds, fertilizer, herbicide and pesticide. The more we invest, the more we lose. In addition, the farmer's knowledge of herbicide use is very limited. Although they feell dizzy and itchy when spaying, they keep spraying chemicals. To the question why the farmers keep using the harmful herbicide, they say that because everybody in the country uses it, and it is sold at the market, and not prohibited by the government,

It is vital that in addition to the consideration of profitability and quality of GM seeds, health factors should be taken into account.

Mr. Nguyen Quang Huy, representative of Cao Quang commune Fatherland Front, Central Quang Binh province.

Vietnamese Communist Party and State encourage farmers to use GMO seeds. The localities that reject GMOs will be criticized. In every report of the local authority to the higher levels, it is always mentioned about the rate of new seed variety application in the production.

As the State subsidizes farmers in hybrid and GMO seed prices, we don't know what to do. Everyone prefers using GM seeds because of its higher productivity and supporting policy of

the State. Our question is whether the companies standing behind the State have lobbied the State to do so? Because I just simply think that the State should support price for those farmers who continue to plant, save and transfer local seeds, traditional cultivation best practices and indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Am I correct?

Why did the Cao Quang farmers boycott some hybrid varieties advertised by the companies? Because after two years of use, they saw them not as good as advertised. Now the farmers raise the campaign to return to local varieties, such as peanut which has productivity as high as the hybrid peanut. In addition, green bean, red bean, black bean and sesame varieties have also been saved and cultivated.

The local varieties are at the lower risk of pests, therefore their quality is much higher. Although Cao Quang is isolated from outside, their local products get a very good sale to the outsiders at site.

In my opinion, people, functional agencies and policy makers should hand in hand to promote local varieties and restrict GMOs.

Farmer A Chat from H're ethnic group of Dak Nen commune, Kon Tum district, Kong Plong province of the Central Highlands

2 to 3 years ago, our H're villagers started to use hybrid corn as encouraged by the district agro-forestry extensionists. They talked about the advantages of the hybrid corn such as it was bigger in shape and more productive compared to the local corn seed. Even though we knew the local corn seed was much better, we have no way but followed the request of the agro-forestry extension sector to implement the policy on hunger elimination and poverty reduction of the Government.

At first, the hybrid seeds were provided free to plant on the fertile soil. No need to apply fertilizer, and the harvest was very productive with the corn length of 30m and big grains. The farmers felt so happy and started to cut down the forest trees to cultivate hybrid corn. However, in the 4^{th} year, the productivity sharply reduced. Farmers didn't know why. For those, who didn't listen to the extentionists and kept planting local corn variety, the productivity remained the same after 4 to 5 years without using fertilizer. First, the price for hybrid corn was 6,000 VND per kilo, and then it reduced to 2,000 VND per kilo. That is why the farmers voluntarily gave up planting hybrid corn.

In 2015, an outside company illegally came to introduce cassava to our farmers. They provided seeds, fertilizer and herbicide free of charge. They also sent their person to instruct the farmers how to use herbicide. They said to the H're villagers that herbicide were not toxic. The farmers believed them and abused herbicide for cultivation. It was even getting worse when the villagers destroyed the natural forest to plant cassava for 4 to 5 years. If in the past it required almost one-month's labor exchange to spray herbicide on 1 ha area, now only one person can complete. Recently, there is a new product combining fertilizer and herbicide in one, which costs 22,000 VND per sack. Every day, big trucks come in to sell it to the villagers. As the villagers believed in the company advertisement, they bought it without any awareness

of how the affects would be. The company also advertised that farmers should plant hybrid corn to feed goats for milk. Traditionally, people in my village love forest very much. They worship the forest; ask the forest for permission to plant local rice and corn varieties without using fertilizer or herbicide. The villagers hold the rituals to worship forest and field before sowing, and to pray for good weather. They take care of the plants with all their hearts and beliefs. Over the past years, the villagers trusted to buy their seeds, chemical fertilizer and herbicide from the company that pushed them deeply into debt, causing a big concern and headache. Old forests are narrowed, therefore the Nature Spirits rituals have less held. Young people prefer travelling outside their village.

Mr. Le Hong Giang from LISO member

Who is responsible for the preservation and breeding of local seed varieties agro-ecologically?

Is it right when farmers sustain and preserve local seeds, while the State, especially agro-forestry extension agencies, force the farmers to cultivate hybrid and GM seeds?

As a civil society organization, CENDI has communicated and shared with the farmers on how it is vital to sustain and develop local varieties that imply spiritual, cultural and social values, bio-diversity capital and indigenous wisdom. Therefore, the indigenous ethnic groups would like to preserve them via rituals and ceremonies, and cultural norms that have been passed on inter-generationally for hundreds year.

However, practically, both CENDI and farmers have faced some constrains and difficulties when promoting a propaganda of preservation of local varieties by traditional farming. Firstly, the local authorities misunderstood CENDI while thinking that CENDI's philosophy and methodology on preservation of local seeds system are contrary to the government policy on development of industrial agriculture. Secondly, farmers, who plant local varieties, have constantly confronted lower productivity and pests. Thirdly, as the local varieties don't use herbicide and pesticide, pests from other places come to attack the local variety farm. Fourthly, local varieties cannot be planted on the large consolidated farmland which is only suitable for monoculture, chemicals and machines use. But they can only develop independently, self-sustainably in accordance with specific ecosystem. The land consolidation policy to gain large fields for monoculture of GMOs have made lives of 16 million ethnic people throughout Vietnam extremely difficult spiritually and materially, while they by themselves, could create their own local technology appropriate for each field area, each type of seeds based on the typical terrain and natural features of the location, especially on their traditional ecology-reliant farming, which becomes their beliefs and wisdom. These changes are not only difficult for the local varieties themselves, but also eliminate the farmers' rights to a healthy life in the living space of seeds and their socio-cultural and ecological values.

Therefore, for the livelihood development in the mountainous areas, the State should support small-scale households and consider the following:

1. Have a policy to support and encourage the use of local knowledge and appropriate technology depending on the specific context of each locality. (For instance, it is impossible to implement agricultural mechanization and land consolidation in the mountainous areas like in the lowland areas).

2. Create all favorable conditions for farmers to exchange, share and establish associations or alliances among upland farmers to nurse and enrich local seed system in the nature-reliant and interactive eco-farming.

3. Support upland farmers to develop niche markets for the local eco-products in the rural areas to be sold to the civil servants, workers, hospitals, schools.

4. Support preferential credit specifically to preserve and develop local varieties in eco-farming in the entire upland area, where the ecosystem is vulnerable and easily to be eroded year by year.

5. Prohibit the use of GM seeds and herbicide in the mountainous areas which are diverse in eco-biology, local wisdom and indigenous technology for agricultural production,

Mr. Lo Van Sinh of Thai ethnic group from northern Son La province

Local seeds have never been lost, but just reduced gradually by the attack of the new varieties introduced and advertised by seed, fertilizer and herbicide corporations and companies, which are uncontrollable. Especially, agricultural seeds and herbicides are sold everywhere in the mountainous areas under the support of the State. The market mechanism has built a money-driven life style. However, not everybody likes money, or is controlled by money. Beliefs and cultural norms of the ethnic people are never lost, but their resources are quite limited. Therefore, we really need the support and encouragement from the State in saving local varieties, as they are our soul culturally, spiritually and physically. The independence in seeds and traditional technology of the ethnic minorities should be protected.

Another important value related to the local seeds that is never lost is the seasonal and annual rituals, ceremonies and offerings. Therefore, saving local seeds also means to operate a social governance independently, voluntarily and confidently by the ethnic communities living in the vulnerable ecology system of the high and sloping mountainous areas.

Farmer Mai Phuc Han from Kinh majority of Cao Quang commune, Tuyen Hoa district, Quang Binh province

1. How to introduce good local products to the market?
2. How the quality of local products can be tested?
3. What to do in order to help the currently independent, self-determining and confident communities continue preserving and sustaining their traditional farming using local seeds that have been existing for hundreds of years?

The answers to these questions will form the solutions to protest against GMOs and those powerful forces standing behind the GMOs – the corporations. .

These questions should be discussed at the higher level of the policy-makers given that the Government is not fully aware of GMOs and their effects while it continues chasing after quantity for exports, and the Government is unable to control the widespread use of GMOs and low-quality chemicals, and that farmers have no chance to know and understand how to use GMOs and their associated chemicals.

Mr. Nguyen Van Tien, high-ranking official of the National Assembly's Ethnic Minority Council

- The nature of GMOs is monoculture and intensive farming, requiring a huge land area, a synchronized cultivation system using industrial technology and a market chain for commercial production. Therefore, GMOs must come along with a series of additional requirements and investment, such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides that are not appropriate for application in the mountainous areas.
- As farmers are not able to create GMOs by their local knowledge and technology formed through their own wisdom and creativeness, they have to be fully dependent on the company's seeds, technique, fertilizers,…especially their own products. GMOs cannot replace rice and daily food of the farmers living in the mountainous areas.
- The issue is that the farmers haven't fully been aware of the potential risks caused by the use of chemical fertilizers and herbicide for planting GMOs.
- GMOs are responsible for the environmental pollution and contamination of the local varieties, and especially violations of patenting law of the multi-national corporations such as MONSANTO. Farmers from ethnic minorities not only lose their local seeds and chances to practice their traditional cultural values, beliefs and community relations, but also are accused of being guilty by the invisible hands of the multi-national corporations.
- Traditional local varieties of the ethnic minorities have actively been saved and transferred in accordance with the cultural style and community voluntary values, which are formed through the local technology and indigenous wisdom that do not require high investment, intensive farming and land accumulation, and are appropriate for the long-lasting and inter-generational cultivation.
- Therefore, the State should adopt appropriate policies to protect the local seeds production and transparently govern the effects of GMOs and associated chemicals, especially in the mountainous areas that are very diverse in varieties and national culture.
- The upcoming Law on Cultivation and Law on Animal Husbandry should pay special attention to the mountainous ecology, where indigenous wisdom and national ecological diversity have been saved. These laws should have their specific agricultural mechanism appropriate to the upland ecology.
- However, prior to the enactment of these laws, *it is urgent to arrange a workshop between intelligent and knowledgeable village elders and passionate agro-ecological key farmers representing for 16 million of ethnic minority people living nation-wide for learning, sharing and communicating about the differences between local varieties and GMOs,* the unpredictable consequences caused by replacing local seeds by GM seeds, analyzing the two different values system and two logics of development.
- There should be *a strategy to save, transfer and breed local varieties to form platforms, practical education curriculums on agro-ecology via local varieties available in the upland*

ecology, and the wisdom and norms of the indigenous ethnic minority in the countries of Laos Thailand and Vietnam. Each country should have one community to serve as a model for learning and sharing about the traditional seed saving from different countries, for comparing between traditional and GMO varieties, so that people can understand and value what they have, and reject the propaganda of the companies.

International Participants

GMOs are not an isolated issue for Vietnam. Participants from other South East Asian countries, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Laos who were present at the meeting also shared their country's experiences and actions to confront the harmful impacts of GM crops that have sustained the corporate takeover of agriculture in the last two decades.

To counter the detrimental impacts of the Green Revolution's hybrid rice and conventional chemical agriculture, which eroded local genetic resources over the past four decades, MASIPAG, a farmer-led national network promoting farmers' rights in the Philippines, develops and promotes local rice varieties and organic, diversified and sustainable farming systems. Now, more than 600 traditional varieties, 1,200 MASIPAG bred-lines and 500 farmer-bred locally-adapted varieties are kept alive by hundreds of farmer organizations across the archipelago. MASIPAG emphasized that diversity and rights to seed is the heart of farmers' freedom and power against corporate control.

Despite strong opposition, the first GM Corn commercialization in Asia was in the Philippines. Cumulatively, more than 600,000 hectares or almost a fourth of the country's corn area are now planted with GM Corn. MASIPAG launched a national socio-economic impact study in 2012-2013 revealing that GMO farmers experienced negative net income due to tightening seed monopoly, rising cost of seed and chemical inputs, usurious rates of traders' interest which led to debt chains, bankruptcy and weakening of land rights.

Monoculture plantations of GM corn have also led to dwindling biodiversity, erosion and contamination of traditional corn varieties and massive land use conversion of upland forest for agricultural expansion. During the height of herbicide-resistant and Round-up Ready GM corn adoption, Glyphosate peaked at from 5.7 to 6 Million liters annual used in 2011. Meanwhile, estimates of corporate seed profit from GM corn in the Philippines ballooned to more than 115 million US dollars in 2014. An ongoing health investigation also revealed rising cases of cancer, and glyphosate contamination of land and water in upland areas where GM corn plantations are concentrated. Learning from Negative experiences with GM corn, Philippines civil society have linked with various sectors and organizations in Asia to opposed GM Golden Rice, a genetically engineered rice with the capability to produce beta-carotene, the precursor of Vitamin A, which is intended to be released in Philippines, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

BioThai, a network in Thailand shared that the GMO debate started as early as 1999 when Monsanto planned to release BT Cotton in the country. Strong civil society campaigns led to the decision to ban all GMO field trials in 2001 and to the drafting of safeguards and regulation under Biosafety Bill in 2002, despite Monsanto's strong influence in government

during that time. Thailand is now facing a grave problem of GM contamination in papaya which has caused economic loss and export rejections in 2012 and 2013. Rising GMO contamination and leakage has also been detected in several agronomic crops, including cotton, corn, soybean, papaya and chili from 2007 to 2013, affecting Thailand agricultural exports negatively. From 2014 to 2015 Monsanto, through Charoen Pokhpand (CP) Company, lobbied anew to push for GMO planting in Thailand, but a strong and united public demonstration halted this plan. Currently, numerous organizations in Thailand are pushing for the promotion and support of sustainable, organic and indigenous agricultural systems, while protecting and promoting traditional local seed varieties and community values.

GRAIN, an international organization working to advancing community controlled and biodiversity-based agriculture, emphasized that there is a need for the public, including policy makers, to be more discerning and critical of the two decades of deception and false promises coming from GMO promoters, that GMOs will help feed countries like Vietnam with its increasing population; that it is more productive, helps eliminate the use of agrochemicals and thus contribute to farmers' economic improvement, and that it's perfectly safe for humans and the environment.

Experience from neighboring countries, as well as from other part of the world, has provided us with vast evidence that GMO is only working to increase corporations control over seeds and to put farmers in further economic dependence and indebtedness. Lesson learned from disastrous Bt cotton in India shows how growing Bt cotton has created massive indebtedness in farming communities due to high input cost and this has led to huge numbers of farmer suicides. The failure of Bt cotton promises also experienced by more than 4000 farmers in Sulawesi, Indonesia in 2001 lead to that country still not allowing the commercial planting of GM crops until now. In Latin America where GM soybean is planted on a large scale, the glyphosate use has rocketed to over 550 million litres per year, with terrible consequences for the health of its inhabitants. It also causes soil depletion and thus forces farmers to use more and more fertilizer if they want to have sufficient yields.

Moving forward: protect traditional seed diversity, environmental health and farmers' rights against GMOs

The rich and diverse discussions in the workshop provided an important and much needed venue for the stakeholders to gather information, discuss perspectives, analysis and propose solutions to address issues surrounding GMO commercialization in Vietnam.

While corporations profit, farming communities are suffering from declining health, growing debts, loss of cultural agricultural knowledge, and increasing social vulnerability and undeniable ecological degradation. The introduction of herbicide-resistance GMOs is evidently responsible for the increase use of glyphosate in the farm. GM seeds helps multinationals seed companies like Monsanto, Syngenta, CP Thailand to control seeds and prohibited farmers from developing farmers own seed system and erode local agriculture biodiversity. Vietnam has experience big shifts in agricultural production from self-sufficient to market oriented and this

can bring grave consequences for Vietnamese farmers and environment if it continues to grow this way.

Two days of collective discussions and debates brought forth important recommendations. The workshop concluded that nationally in Vietnam there is a need to:

(1) Having broader public participation on the policies concerning GMOs in the country,

(2) Cooperative action among different sectors in Vietnam to push for more responsive government action to investigate, regulate and address multi-faceted issues experienced from three years of GMO commercialization in the country,

(3) Learn from and work with other countries in facing GMO threats, and in defending local and diverse seed varieties, farmers rights, consumers health, traditional indigenous culture and environment,

(4) Push for a more responsive Biosafety policy to ensure regulation, safeguards, accountability, social-environmental protection and the primacy of peoples' rights against corporate takeover of agriculture and GMO commercialization,

(5) Foster stronger solidarity and unity to strengthen network collaboration across South East Asia, particularly between Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Philippines and Indonesia to challenge GMOs; protect and promote traditional local seed varieties; enhance learning exchanges and collaboration to build capacities in the development of diversified and sustainable agricultural systems in the region.

In unity, participants also echoed that sustainable agricultural development can only be realized when the environment is protected, culture is respected, and farmers rights to seeds and land is upheld against corporate greed.

TheLEADER MAGAZINE 21/5/2018 Said

GMOs FALSE PROMISES CHEATING THE WHOLE WORLD?

By An Chi - 14:40, 21/05/2018

TheLEADER. According to Ms. Kartini Samon from GRAIN (Indonesia), GM crops will not end the world hunger, will not eliminate agrochemicals and are not more productive.

Genetic modification is the world's scientific achievement since the early 1980, a technology aiming at creating a desired crop with less time and higher accuracy by directly adding or reducing genes of the crop.

Until now, many countries in the world have been applying the genetic technology, especially the United State of America, China and India. More and more GM food are available on the market. However, not many people really understand what GM food is and how it affect human health, environment and ecology.

Sharing at the "GMO Multi-stakeholder Meeting" held by the Community Entrepreneur Development Institute (CENDI), Ms. Kartini Samon from GRAIN (Indonesia) has shown the adverse impacts of the GM crops, and explained why we needed farmers own the seed system and not GMOs

Ms. Kartini Samon

According to her, the 3 following false promises are mostly advertised by GMO corporations.

"The world needs GMO to end hunger and fix malnutrition"

That is not true. The fact shows that only 26 countries in the world allow commercial planting of GM crops and mostly for industry needs, and none developed to tackle malnutrition is available for public. Moreover, 75% of the world food is produced on only 25% of land area. Therefore, it is clear that without GM crops the countries could well sustain their food security.

In Africa where people from many countries suffer from hunger, only three countries allow GMOs, while the other apply alternative solutions to reduce hunger. So it is proved the world community is still very concerned about the GM food – Ms. Kartini shared.

"GM crops will eliminate agrochemicals"

Practically, only some GM crops are resistant to pesticide, while the introduction of GM crops has increased the resistance to herbicide, causing the increase in use of glyphosate in the farm – She continued.

In Latin-America where GM soybean is planted in the large scale has rocketed the glyphosate use to over 500 million liters per year with dramatic consequences for the health of its habitants. More dangerously, it causes soil depletion, thus need for more fertilizers.

Talking about whether "***GM crops are more productive"*** as promised, Ms. Kartini shared lessons learnt from the disastrous Bt cotton in India, Burkina Faso and Indonesia. Accordingly, in India Bt cotton is responsible for increasing suicide due to debt because of lower production and high input cost.

Since 2001 Indonesia has banned Bt cotton planting and hasn't allowed commercial planting of other GM crops.

Farmers become indebted and dependent to GMO corporations.

At the meeting, Ms. Kartini also indicated a number of challenges to farmers' own seeds system. Accordingly, through seed laws and trade agreements, the corporations like Monsanto, Syngenta,

Bayer, Dow, DuPont, BASF (top 6 accounting for 2/3 of the market) want to make it illegal for farmers to save seeds so that they are obliged to buy them every year by privatizing seeds through "intellectual property" laws, like patenting and plant breeder's rights. By that way, the farmers cannot save seeds from harvest of protected varieties unless the government make a special rule to allow this. Even where allowed, they have to pay to reuse the seed.

In developing countries, it very much favors big trans-national seed corporations. For instance, in Argentina Monsanto has waged a 15 year- long lobby campaign for amendments to allow it to collect royalties from every grower who saves seed for replanting. It means that seeds and livestock become more expensive and it takes way farmer's right to freely reproduce them, reduce life and culture to a commodity that corporations can own and control, opening up to seed biotechnology – She emphasized.

GMO Multi-stakeholders organized by CENDI

To minimize GMOs' impacts, it is necessary to build movements in different countries to strengthen and impose food sovereignty systems and freedom for farmers to grow, save and exchange their own seeds – she recommended. In addition, it should promote a transformative process towards a diverse agriculture such as agro-ecology including acknowledgement of farmers and indigenous community access and rights over farmland.

In April this year EU approved a resolution on organic production, in which it is explicitly stated that the use of animal cloning and artificially induced polyploid animals, as well as products produced from or by GMOs are incompatible with the concept of organic production and consumer's perception of organic products. Such use should, therefore, be prohibited in organic production – she concluded.

TheLEADER MAGAZINE SAID

GM CROPS AND DRAMATIC CONCEQUENCIES

By Thu Phuong - 10:55, 22/05/2018

TheLEADER: The concerns about whether GM food is safe for human health are still controversial. However, their dramatic consequences to the environment are visible.

Visible consequences

GMOs (Genetically modified Organism) in general and GM crops in particular have been globally researched, produced and traded mainly because of their economic benefits. There is, however, much doubt about the potential risks caused by the GM crops to human health and biodiversity.

The concerns about whether GM food is safe for human health are still controversial among researchers and in public. However, their dramatic consequences to the ecology, environment and farmers are alarming in many countries.

People might remember the breaking news released few years ago by the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRG) that "every 30 minutes, there is one Indian farmer committing suicide due to the GM crops".

According to this organization, over the past two decades, about 300,000 farmers in India have committed suicide due to their depression caused by the crop failure. Nevertheless, this figure has not included the number of the suicides committed by their relatives as the long-lasting consequences of the tragedy.

According to the India's agriculture experts, the crop failure is attributed to the GM crops, especially Bt cotton, that haven't been as effective as promised. The more farmers plant GM crops, the more they are dependent on seeds and fertilizers provide by the corporations at very expensive price, pushing them into indebtedness.

The story of the Indian farmers are quite similar to the story of the “Golden Rice” in the Philippines or the story of the sufferings of the farmers planting GM corn in Son La province, Vietnam.

The Son La farmers have now been paying for what they had planted between 2012 – 2013 when they strongly believed that their lives would be changed with GM corn. Because at that moment the GM corn price had reached up to 65,000VND per kilo, and its productivity had remarkably increased. Things, however, have changed since then – Mr. Lo Van Sinh from Thai ethnic group in Yen Chau district, Son La province sadly said.

Also according to Mr. Sinh, there is a truth that the farmers have never ever known that GM corn’s productivity was only high for the first two years. In the 3rd and 4th year, the productivity dropped by 20% and 50% respectively, and continued to drop sharply in the following years.

"More surprisingly, after growing the GM corn variety, the soil got dryer to death in the 3rd year, pushing the farmers to spend a lot of money for fertilizer. The more they bought, the more expensive the fertilizer was, making the farmers become dependent on the company’s seeds and fertilizer. Finally, high input cost and production reduction pushed them into big economic losses.

More dangerously, most of the land used for GM corn planting in Son La were hilly. Planting GM corn had made the soil depleted and hardly be restored to the original status. Although the farmers had tried to apply organic fertilizer or mud layer, it didn’t work. In the area that used to plant corn now could hardly plan any variety even corn – Mr. Sinh nervously shared.

Addressing the impacts of GM crops to the environment and ecology at the GMO Multi-stakeholders Meeting, which was held by the Community Entrepreneur Development Institute (CENDI), Dr. Phan Dinh Nha, Director of Consultant and Development Institute said GMO was created by human by directly modifying genes to transmit genes from one organism to another organism for additionally new biological traits in the transmitted organism.

By this intervention, human expects to increase productivity, reduce the use of herbicide and plant protection products, improve the product quality and eliminate toxics.

However, according to Mr. Nha, this genetic engineering has potential risks since it is the unsafe technology which eliminates the natural reproductive process, causing high level of mutation, and frequently goes beyond the genetic limit.

The expert also said that although the evidences of the risks of GM products to human health had not been officially available for public, their unforeseen consequences to the natural environment and biodiversity were dangerous and alarming.

The planting of GM crops would increase the risks of the GMOs’ contamination to the environment through invasion or uncontrolled competition, and the risks of unintentionally converting recombinant genetic materials and related traits into other organisms through cross pollination and elimination of useful micro-organism.

More seriously, GM crops cause soil depletion, water contamination, and diseases to cattle, livestock and environment.

Also according to Mr. Nha, strikes against GMO take place in many countries, especially in EU. There are information available to prove the ineffectiveness and insafety of GMO, that there is no remarkable difference between GM crops and non-GM crops in terms of productivity; GM crops don’t

save cost; GM crops don't reduce poverty but vice versa; GM crops make pests resistant to pesticide; GM crops may negatively affect the environment, human and animal health.

Sharing about GMO's impacts to farmers at the meeting, Ms. Kartini Samon from GRAIN (Indonesia) said In Latin-America where GM soybean had been planted on the large scale had rocked the glyphosate use to over 550 million liters per year, with dramatic consequences for the health of its habitants.

The GM crops cause soil depletion, thus need more fertilizers. Therefore, farmers are more dependent on fertilizer and seeds from GMO companies, and pushed into debt. The GM crops harm ecological environment, soil, water and biodiversity – She continued.

If GM crops are chosen, the trade-off for the ecological environment would be big. Therefore, the GM crops should not be applied until the assessment of their risks, especially to the ecological environment, are clearly identified, and they should be only planted in the areas where the biological safety are fully controllable. – Mr. Nha recommended.

GMO MULTISTAKEHOLDER MEETING's media

Global chanel television of Vietnam https://vtc.gov.vn/chitiet/30745-viet-nam-goc-nhin-cua-ban-25-05-2018.html

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OCTOPUS - GMO - Listen to the Indigenous Farmers Voice in Southeast Asia

Today, throughout the whole of Vietnam, the livelihoods and ways of life of farmers are under threat. Listen to the farmers' voice who suffer … but do not know why.

1) In the highland and midland areas of Vietnam where Viet and ethnic minority farmers once lived peacefully with the rice fields and with their forests, growing their one varieties of rice and celebrating with their own ritual and ceremonies the annual harvest of their own produce, the landscape has changed. Forests and rice field have been lost and replaced by fields of GM corn. Now the life of Vietnamese farmers is one of dependence upon foreign agrochemical companies. They are losing their independence, their rituality, their wellbeing, their healthy livelihood, their self-determination, losing the solidarity of their kinship system, and their local wisdom, customs, and knowledge. All these things are becoming displaced by growing of GM seeds and their accompanying chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

What is being left behind for future generations is dying soils, no birds in the sky, no fish in the rivers, no insects or snakes, no snail in the rice fields. All that is being left is enslavement to money, selling everything for money. This is the life of the farmer in the vulnerable ecosystems of the highland and midlands. Their forest home is now gone.

2) In the delta regions of the Red and Mekong rivers, over last decade, high-yield breeds of rice have made Vietnam No.1 in the world for rice exports, the pride of the nation, but now, left behind is a dying Mekong Delta, dying from salinization and degradation. There is no longer happiness in the area, no more wellbeing, no more healthy living. The farmer in the area are confronted with debt, loss of land, and slavery. Slaves to chemical fertilizer and herbicide. Slaves to polluted living conditions, and slave to a life where living is worse than death. Already too much suffering a life without spirit, being dead but not buried.

Now there is a policy for open up Vietnam to Monsanto and CP Thailand to bring their GM seeds to impose another layer of poisoning and suffering into the Mekong Delta area under the scientific term of Biotechnology Innovation, but actually very inhumane and guilty

Why is this so dangerous? Because more biotechnology mean more and stronger chemical fertilizers, and more and more dangerous herbicides and pesticides, because Monsanto in competing with nature, want to control and rule over the nature. In doing so, Monsanto and Bayer are killing the inter-being of the universe. Together, for our own protection, we need to reject this assault on nature. We need to take care of nature as nature, live in grace with nature, by worshiping and nurturing nature in small return for the gift that nature gives to all of us.

3) Everything in the Highland, the Midlands and Delta regions is today confronted with the danger GMO, but so too are our water systems, from the smallest mountain stream to the rivers flowing to the sea, everything is polluted by chemical herbicides and pesticides. Addicted to money profit Monsanto wants to compete with nature law, with the universe, and so are killing themselves.

Now, Vietnam wants to become the biggest exporter of GM corn in the world, and wants to open up land all over Vietnam for experimentation with 20 new GM seed varieties. With the support of legal decrees, they want to open up 37-50% of the agricultural rice land of about 60 million Vietnamese farmers, who up to now have served the nation faithfully, to become slave to foreign biotechnology companies - Monsanto and its partners hiding under their different names. It means the cancelling of the whole nation's treasure of local seeds, of local diversity, of local knowledge, of local culture and identity that has made Vietnam famous in the world – but no longer. It is all to be given over to Monsanto, free. No longer will Vietnam be self-determining. No longer the unique beauty of the Vietnam landscape. Everywhere will be biotechnological industrial agricultural wasteland.

To hasten this devastation, professionals and scientists are *promoting seed laws designed to 'imprison' local seed varieties worldwide in order to give GM seeds the freedom to travel wherever they want. This is a dirty law, under whose regime local seed varieties will no longer have the freedom to live among indigenous societies*. Under the seed law, a multinational alliance of Monsanto, the International Rice Institute, and the Bill Gates Foundation will be able to criminalize indigenous farmers for nurturing the local seed varieties that are essential to their material and spiritual existence and innermost wellbeing. (Tran thi Lanh- CENDI Founder)