



Southern China International MUN

United Nations Development Programme: On measures to combat corporate monopolies in agricultural food production and trade

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1. Description of the Issue.

1.1 History of the Issue

For a long period historically, mankind's ways of practicing agriculture were characterized by diverse, community-based food production. Small farmers, cooperatives, and local markets formed the backbone of food supply at first on a very local scale, then gradually expanded globally. However, over the past century, the world's food and agriculture sector has undergone a dramatic process of consolidation. Today, the global food system represents one of the most brutal manifestations of oligopolistic capitalism, with a handful of transnational corporations controlling every link of the agricultural supply chain. The range goes from seeds and pesticides, to commodity trading and retail¹. This process is also known as agricultural consolidation.

Agricultural consolidation can be first traced to the Green Revolution (1960s-1970s), where advancements in chemical engineering and engineered seeds produced by large corporations increased yields while also creating a lasting dependency. The 1995 creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and subsequent trade liberalization agreements accelerated corporate consolidation within the agricultural sector, pressuring developing nations supported by the agricultural sector to gradually abandon traditional systems and open markets to multinational corporations².

A pivotal moment occurred in the 2010s with megamergers in agrichemical and seed sectors. In 2016, Bayer acquired Monsanto for \$63 billion. The merging of the two agricultural megacorps became one of the most debatable corporate acquisition in history³. In 2017, the company Corteva formed through the merger of Dow and DuPont's agricultural divisions. These consolidations, combined with existing leaders such as Syngenta and BASF, created unprecedented concentration in the global agricultural supply chain¹.

Today, huge agricultural corporations, represented by Bayer, Corteva, Syngenta, and BASF, collectively control 56% of the global seed market and 61% of the global pesticides market¹. Even more so, in the United States, these four firms control 95% of corn seed patents, 84% of soybean IP, and 93% of canola IP⁴. On the other end of this, agricultural commodity trading is also dominated by five companies only (Cargill, ADM, Bunge, COFCO, and Louis Dreyfus Company), who add up to controlling about 70-90% of the global grain trade⁵. This list goes on; four beef packers control 85% of the U.S. beef market, and four grocery retailers control over 65% of the U.S. grocery market⁶.

The consequences are staggering, concerning over unfair condition to farmers and global food security. These aspects are illustrated in the following examples. Between 1990 and 2013, genetically engineered seed prices was 700% higher, while other field crop prices increased by only 218%⁴. Since the introduction of GMO crops in the early 1990s, 200 independent seed companies have disappeared⁷. 75% of the world's crop varieties disappeared between 1900 and 2000, largely due to promotion of identical seeds produced by the companies as mentioned above⁸.

1.2 Recent Developments

In 2025, Bayer further announced the consolidation of ten regional seed brands under its Channel line, eliminating century-old family companies such as Jung Seed Genetics and Kruger Seeds⁹. This represents the largest seed brand integration since 2018⁷.

In December 2025, the Trump Administration issued an Executive Order demanding federal inquiry into alleged price-fixing and anticompetitive behavior in agricultural sectors—including meat processing, seeds, and fertilizer¹⁰. The DOJ and FTC established joint task forces to investigate monopolistic practices threatening food prices and supply stability. This represents the most aggressive antitrust scrutiny of the agricultural sector in recent history¹⁰.

Resistance to corporate domination has intensified globally. Kenyan smallholders filed constitutional challenges to seed laws, while farmers in Honduras, Argentina, and Colombia successfully reversed "Monsanto laws" through legal action, which primarily achieved the goal protecting farmers' rights to save and exchange seeds¹¹. Indonesia's Constitutional Court had also ruled that seeds are a public resource, making privatization of them unconstitutional¹¹.

The geopolitical dimension has also intensified. China's state investment in Syngenta represents an example state-backed monopoly capitalism in agriculture, while Western corporations continue dominating seed and pesticide markets¹. The United Arab Emirates has recently become an aggressive promoter of intellectual property clauses in free trade agreements with Asian and African nations¹².

Key Terms

Agribusiness – Large-scale, industrialized agriculture controlled by transnational corporations

Crop Biodiversity – The variety of plant species and genetic variants in agricultural systems; they are essential for food security and ecosystem resilience.

Foodecurity – The state in which all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.

Food Sovereignty – The right of peoples and their states to define their own agricultural, labor, and food policies.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) – Organisms whose genetic material has been engineered using b introduce traits not found in nature, for example, herbicide tolerance.

Intellectual Property (IP) – Legal rights granted to creators and inventors of innovations, including patents on seeds and agricultural technologies.

Monopoly – Market condition in which one company or a small group of companies controls the production and distribution of a good or service, limiting competition and enabling price manipulation.

Patent – Exclusive legal right granted to an inventor or corporation for a specified period, similar to IP.

Seed Saving – A traditional agricultural practice in which farmers save seeds from harvested crops for replanting in subsequent seasons to eliminate the need to buy seeds next year.

Structural Adjustment Programs – Conditions imposed by international financial institutions on developing nations to privatize, deregulate, or liberalize trade in certain sectors or markets.

Trade Liberalization – Removal of trade barriers such as tariffs and quotas between countries, often imposed on developing nations through trade agreements and international institutions.

UPOV (International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants) – International

legal framework that grants corporations exclusive rights to new plant varieties. They restrict farmers' seed-saving practices.

Transnational Corporations (TNCs) – Large companies operating in multiple countries, typically headquartered in developed nations, controlling global supply chains and markets.

2. Emphasis of the Discourse

2.1 Conservative Approach

Conservative policymakers would approach on areas such as market efficiency, intellectual property (IP) protection, and private enterprise. Their main point is that patent protection can incentivize innovation. Another point that they hold is that through consolidation, corporations can create economies of scale that lower costs and increase productivity. More specifically, conservative-leaning MEDCs that emphasize that strong intellectual property frameworks, such as UPOV, could protect corporate investment and promote research and development⁸. In turn, well-backed corporate research would be able to produce better seed variants that would benefit global food security. However, patent enforcement as such can exclude small farmers from seed-saving practices, cost force dependency on corporations, and neglect the needs required by developing regions or sustainable practices.

2.2 Progressive Approach

Progressive policymakers would generally focus over areas such as food sovereignty, farmer rights, and environmental sustainability. They argue that the monopolistic concentration of corporations would allow them to exploit farmers and consumers while prioritizing profits over food security. Progressive approaches proposes policies such as farmer agency, agroecological practices, and public agricultural research as alternatives to corporate-controlled systems². The incentives in doing so are protecting agricultural biodiversity through seed saving rights, as well as supporting small-scale farming that would strengthen rural economies and food security. On the other hand, policies such as reducing patent protection may discourage private agricultural innovation.

2.3 Stance of Intranational Organizations

The FAO recognizes consolidation as a key threat to food security and farmer livelihoods, especially in developing nations. They also emphasize on the importance of crop diversity and farmer seed-saving rights⁸. The WTO has been critiqued for facilitating trade liberalization that enabled agricultural consolidation, though some WTO bodies recognize need for balance between intellectual property protection and developing nation interests. The UN Human Rights Council has issued statements warning that monopoly control over seeds threatens the human right to food¹.

2.4 Stance of Developed Countries

Developed nations present divided positions. The United States and Canada strongly support intellectual property frameworks protecting corporate patents on seeds. These countries benefit from major agribusiness corporations headquartered within their borders and have prioritized trade agreements imposing intellectual property protections globally⁴.

However, some developed nations, particularly within the European Union, have expressed concern about agricultural consolidation. The European Commission has launched investigations into market concentration, with some EU member states advocating for antitrust action against dominant firms¹³. The EU engages in debates over patent protection for new genetically modified organisms, with civil society warning that deregulation combined with patent enforcement would entrench corporate monopolies¹⁴.

The December 2025 U.S. Executive Order signals potential policy shifts, with both Democratic

and Republican interest in antitrust enforcement addressing elevated food prices and rural economic collapse¹⁵. Consumer movements in Western Europe pressure governments to address monopoly control, citing pesticide safety and environmental concerns¹⁵.

2.5 Stance of Developing Countries

Developing countries are the most prone community to consequences caused by agricultural monopolies, yet they possess limited capacity to challenge that. Small-scale farmers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America still depend on affordable, accessible seeds for their farms. However, monopoly corporations charge premium prices for patented seeds, forcing small farmers into debt⁸. Approximately 70% of food consumed in developing countries is produced by small-scale farmers, yet they face criminalization under UPOV-compliant seed laws prohibiting seed-saving—their traditional practice¹¹.

Many developing nations were pressured through trade agreements and World Bank conditionality to liberalize agricultural sectors and adopt intellectual property frameworks benefiting corporations². Over 90 countries have now adopted UPOV-compliant laws, often through pressure from developed nations and new players like the UAE¹².

However, India, Brazil, and African nations increasingly call for regulation of agricultural monopolies at multilateral forums, arguing that corporate control threatens food sovereignty⁸.

3. Possible Solutions

3.1 In Favor of Developed Countries

Developed nations with established institutions can regulate agricultural monopolies without compromising corporate interests. Solutions supporting MDCs generally rely on market-driven strategies and improved regulation.

Antitrust Enforcement: To improve antitrust enforcement, developed countries must prevent monopolistic mergers and acquisition activities in agriculture. The order by the U.S. Executive to its DOJ and FTC task force to probe agricultural monopolies is a move in this direction¹⁰. Antitrust enforcement also entails the dissolution of conglomerates and the shedding of their subsidiaries⁴.

Transparency and Data Access: Developed nations can mandate enhanced transparency requirements for major agribusiness corporations, requiring disclosure of market shares and pricing practices. Public release of agreements can help policymakers to assess impacts of monopolistic practices⁵.

Support for Independent Seed Companies: Developed nations can provide financial support and legal assistance for independent seed companies and public research institutions, which would foster a more competitive market.

Shift Agricultural Subsidies: Developed nations can provide subsidies to sustainable, diversified farming systems instead of industrial monoculture. Public investment to agroecological research can help build resilience in the food system of a country¹.

3.2 In Favor of Developing Countries

Developing countries require more transformative approaches to challenge agricultural monopolies, prioritizing food sovereignty and rural livelihoods.

Farmer-Controlled Seed Systems: Developing countries can ensure, through the law, the right of farmers to save, share, and re-plant seeds without interference from corporate entities. The law can shield seeds saved by farmers from being covered by patent protection, as stated by the Constitutional Court of Indonesia. This opposes the patent monopolies held by corporate entities.

Public Agricultural Research and Development: Developing countries can establish public institutions to conduct agricultural research and develop crops that are tolerant to the local pests and can grow well in the countries' climates. Developing countries can benefit from South-South collaboration to share knowledge with countries with similar climates and conditions.

Regional Agricultural Cooperation: Developing countries could form regional agricultural unions/commodity agreement arrangements to enhance their bargaining position against the multinational trading corporations. Joint agricultural input purchases could reduce the monopoly position. Regional seed certification could offer an alternative to corporate-controlled seed distribution channels.

Withdrawal from Corporate-Favorable Trade Agreements: Developing countries can renegotiate or withdraw from trade agreements that include the protection of intellectual properties in agricultural sectors. This will give developing countries the flexibility to protect seed systems and the acquisition of farmland by corporations. Developing countries can form alliances based on successful trade resistance campaigns.

Regulation of Foreign Land Acquisition: Countries which are developing may also adopt strong regulations or bans against foreign corporations in order to secure their food security as well as prevent fertile land from turning into lucrative commodities.

4. Keep in Mind the Following:

When researching your country's stance on agricultural monopolies, investigate your nation's interests and historical positions carefully. Consider these guiding questions:

1. Is your country a significant agricultural producer or primarily an agricultural importer? How does this position shape your interest in monopoly regulation?
2. What role have corporations from your country played in global agricultural consolidation? Which side of the monopoly debate would benefit your nation's corporations?
3. Does your country host major agribusiness headquarters or a significant smallholder farming population? Where do your nation's economic interests lie?
4. What trade agreements has your country signed relating to intellectual property, agricultural subsidies, or market access? How would addressing monopolies require renegotiating these agreements?
5. What is your country's food security situation? Is your nation self-sufficient in food production or dependent on imports from monopoly-controlled traders?
6. Does your country have a history of supporting farmers' seed saving rights or intellectual property protection for corporations? What are the domestic political constituencies supporting each position?

5. Evaluation

The concentration of power in the agricultural sector at the global level is an important challenge for humanity in the 21st century. A few multinational corporations control the seed, agrochemical, and trade chains that are responsible for what gets produced, how it gets produced, and for whom the food gets produced. This concentration of power has contributed to the increased costs of food, the instability of rural livelihoods, the displacement of small farmers, and the establishment of dependency relationships that undermine the sovereignty of national food systems ^{1 5}.

Monopolies within the agricultural sector can thus be considered a manifestation of neo-colonism,

as they affect the production, resource flow, as well as the wealth distribution within the developing world. However, the changing trends within the antitrust regulation within the developed world, as well as the grassroots movements within the South, indicate a possible shift within the agricultural monopoly politics^{10 11}.

It is necessary for dealing with agricultural monopolies that there be international cooperation and a willingness to put food sovereignty and development ahead of profit. It is necessary for representatives to evaluate their national interests while recognizing that a true food security and development agenda cannot be based on monopoly and profit.

This topic demands flexibility in thinking, creative diplomacy, and strong political commitment to challenge corporations. The stakes to this issues are high in the UNDP context: food security, rural livelihoods, environmental sustainability, and the fundamental right to food all hang in the balance. Proceed thoughtfully, and good luck.

6. Bibliography

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