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Civil Society Denounces World Bank's Scheme to Hijack Farmers' Rights to Seeds

Oakland, CA – Ahead of World Bank's release of the 2017 "[Enabling the Business of Agriculture](#)" (EBA) report this month, 157 organizations and academics from around the world denounce the Bank's scheme to hijack farmers' right to seeds, attack on food sovereignty and the environment.

In a [letter to the World Bank President](#) Jim Yong Kim and [EBA's five Western donors](#), the group demands the immediate end of the project, originally [requested by the G8](#) to support its [industry-co-opted](#) New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition.

"The EBA dictates so-called 'good practices' to regulate agriculture and scores countries on how well they implement its prescriptions," said Frederic Mousseau, Policy Director at the Oakland Institute. "But the EBA has become the latest tool, to push pro-corporate agricultural policies, notably in the seed sector – where it promotes industrial seeds, that benefit a handful of agrochemical companies," he continued.

Only six multinationals currently control [over two-thirds](#) of the industrial seed sales, and pending agro-industry mergers stand to [further consolidate this oligopoly](#). Further market expansion for these corporations depends on the shrinking of farmer-managed seed systems, which currently provide [80 to 90 percent](#) of the seed supply in developing countries through on-farm seed saving and farmer-to-farmer seed exchange.

A new report, [Down On the Seed, the World Bank Enables Corporate Takeover of Seeds](#), exposes that while the World Bank claims to promote "smart and balanced policies," its EBA index blatantly ignores farmer-managed seed systems. Instead, it reinforces the stranglehold of agrochemical companies and Western nations by pushing for intellectual property rights in agriculture, so that private breeders profiteer from the use of their seeds by farmers.

The EBA also [awards the best scores](#) to countries that ease private companies –not the farmers – access to public gene banks. In addition, the Bank recommends that governments reduce the time and cost necessary to register industrial seeds, with the private sector as the predominant force on the national committees that oversee the introduction of new varieties.

"The EBA reforms aim to foster the privatization of seed systems, regardless of the consequences for farmers and the planet," said Alice Martin-Prevel, author of the report, *Down on the Seed*. "The reduction of farmers as passive consumers of industrial seeds undermines their contribution to agrobiodiversity, which is crucial to mitigate pests, disease, and the effects of climate change. It also disempowers farmers, while failing to protect them in increasingly concentrated markets."

In its 2016 EBA report, the World Bank upheld Tanzania as a model country for enacting intellectual property laws in agriculture, and becoming the first least-developed nation bound by the 1991 UPOV

Convention. UPOV is a pro-industry treaty that dramatically [restricts](#) farmers' rights to save, exchange, and sell seeds. Under Tanzania's seed laws, farmers now risk [fines and imprisonment](#) for practicing ancestral seed saving and trading, and are being forced to rely on industrial varieties.

"The Bank, behind closed doors, convinces governments to implement reforms based on the EBA scores, thereby bypassing farmers and citizens' engagement," said Mousseau. "The signatories to the petition are demanding an end of the EBA as a step to enable the full participation of farmers and rural communities in agricultural policymaking. This participation is essential for development to be inclusive and to tackle the challenge of food insecurity and rural poverty around the world."

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