

**Mooney, P.R.: The Law of the Seed. Another Development and Plant Genetic Resources. Development Dialogue 1983: 1-2.** Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation 1983. 172 pp., 6 maps, 43 tabs, 3 documents.

Mooney fervently advocates that we conserve the genetic resources in another manner and set-up than we have done so far. He wants a system in which the responsibility lies directly and entirely with FAO and which restricts the influence of the 'North' for the benefit of the 'South'. The germ plasm collections should be preserved and developed in the centres of diversity, with the farmers/curators playing an important role. The breeding work based on this genetic variability is to be done by government institutions as the best means of maintaining control of the food system.

Many will not be able to support each of his conclusions and recommendations, but a dialogue of standing should be possible. It is regrettable, however, that, with every means, he depicts the 'North' as a profiteer of the 'South'; that he does not illustrate the role of commerce (also in seed and plant material) in a balanced way; that he looks at the breeding activities of private enterprise with suspicion, even to the point of mere mistrust where a breeding firm belongs to a transnational group. Also, Plant Breeders Rights are treated in a biased and negative way. They are shown in the blackest of colours. The author of the book is enticed into stating that *rigor mortis* has actually settled over plant breeding. And

this notwithstanding the fact that everyone can see that after World War II plant breeding has made great progress and has contributed substantially to the world food supply.

The amount of worldwide sources of information the author can draw upon is rather remarkable. However, this information is inaccurate and, in some points, even wrong. He states that British Petroleum owns two vegetable seed producing companies in the Netherlands. As a matter of fact B. P. is a minor shareholder in just one company. Cebeco-Handelsraad would own 7 seed-firms. This should be: 2 seed-firms and is shareholder of two other ones.

The most striking example is: 'Adolf Hitler almost single-handedly established Plant Breeders Rights . . . in the Netherlands in 1941' (page 138). This is a downright untruth. PBR was being discussed in the Netherlands long before World War II and even before the Germans occupied the country the Dutch Government had appointed an advisory committee for Breeders Rights. This entirely Dutch committee conducted its work with great energy. Its activities resulted in the Plant Breeders' Decree of 1941.

This type of allegation is suggestive and will provoke aversion with the uninformed masses, but it also reduces the quality of a dialogue to the doubtful level of a one-sided non-scientific monologue.

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