

Terminator technologies

Workshop at the Planet Diversity, May 2008, Bonn (Germany)

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The workshop on Terminator technologies (under CBD called GURTs = genetic use restriction technologies) brought together some 20 people from at least 4 continents (Asia, North and South America, and Europe). Some had been involved in the debates and campaigns since quite a long time, others joined them only recently.

Veronica Villa (ETC group) gave an overview about the "history" and the background of the Terminator Technology and the different campaigns on it.

1.4 billion people depend on saving seeds from their harvests as main source of seeds for the following season.

Three quarters of the world's farmers save their seeds and exchange it with their neighbours. This way to act is the basis of the local food security.

The CBD has a moratorium on Terminator technologies in place since 2000 (COP 5). It had been reaffirmed in 2006 (COP 8).

Veronica found three changes in the debate since the reaffirmation of the CBD moratorium:

- the Transcontainer project, funded mainly by the European Union
- the enormous push for the agrofuels especially in the global south
- Monsanto acquired Delta and Pine Land, the holder of the „original" Terminator patents

Andreas Bauer (Munich environmental institute) presented the European Transcontainer project. At the moment developments and tests only take place in greenhouses and laboratories.

The Transcontainer project is a program where Terminator crops are developed and endorsed. The project is perfectly in line with the corporate agenda.

There are nine public research institutions from eight European countries, one governmental agency from Germany, and three companies from the private sector involved.

In contrast to the „traditional" Terminator technology, the new approach has turned the mechanism the other way round. Now the seeds must be woken up from death through the addition of certain chemicals (e.g. antibiotics, alcohol ...). The pollen of this „Zombie Seed" is fertile so outcrossing of transgenic DNA is still possible. The so-called RBF (recoverable block of function) mechanism is a special v-GURT, that's the most common Terminator technology.

Ruth Tippe (No patents on life!, Kein Patent auf Leben!, Germany) showed a list of patents and

involved companies and universities.

She rose the question about the reason of developing Terminator plants if there are legal approaches of monopolising the intellectual property with patents: The patent cannot be enforced in any place, esp. not in developing countries, so the companies need the biological seed control.

Normita Ignacio (CBDC forum, searice) presented a film with farmers perspectives that will be on the web soon.

Maria Jose Guazelli (Centro Ecologico, Brasil; Latin American Ban Terminator Campaign) presented experiences from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Uruguay.

With respect to the expected social impact of the Terminator technologies the campaign in South America is working with a broad definition of Terminator. They do not use the specialised CBD definition that mainly focus on the so called v-GURTs.

During the following discussion the workshop members concluded with six main demands

- the CBD moratorium is not enough - BAN terminator!
- GM trees, agrofuels, and pharmaceutical crops must not legitimate GURTs
- GURTs cannot be seen as a safe measure of containment of transgenic DNA
- no public money for the development of Terminator technologies / GURTs
- better use the broad definition of Terminator technology and look for social impacts
- campaigns should be done for producers, consumers, policy makers, and media