

Food Security and Sustainability

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The patenting of life, limiting liberty and the corporate pursuit of seeds

Throughout world history, what human beings ate was determined by what local producers cultivated and what they planted was determined by seasonal cycles. Some seeds that could withstand harsh weather were planted in the fall while most seeds were planted in the spring. After the harvest, farmers reclaimed the seeds so that they could replant them the following season. Today, however, these age-old practices that guided countless generations are becoming extinct. What we eat, the quality of our food and even the tastes that we develop are dictated by powerful corporations who are driven by the profit motive. My book entitled “The Patenting of Life, Limiting Liberty and the Corporate Pursuit of Seeds” investigates the corporate dominance of the world’s seed supply. The seed is nature’s gift and the first link in the food chain. This life form is becoming the exclusive intellectual property of the corporation. The advent of genetically modified seeds and strict patent protection accorded to them enable companies to own the seed even after the farmer has bought, planted and harvested the seed. Multinational corporations have a monopoly control over seeds and the accompanying pesticides which is leading to monocultures in the food system and the disappearance of traditional methods of farming. Local producers are forced to buy seeds each year, thereby fostering a feudalistic relationship of perpetual dependence. An imbalance of power has emerged and farmers are transformed from producers to consumers by these new arrangements. The leap to embrace biotechnology and genetically modified foods has been quite swift and conducted without the public’s knowledge. The food that our stomachs ingest may be increasingly bad for us. Case studies from four developing countries are presented for consideration.

Biography

Ali M Nizamuddin is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois Springfield. He has received his PhD from Columbia University in International Relations. His dissertation examined the impact of market risks on investment patterns and the bargaining interaction between multinational corporations and host governments over the life cycle of an investment project. His research has been published in numerous academic journals including the Journal of Pacific Affairs, Asian Journal of Social Science, the International Social Science Review and the Encyclopedia of International Political Economy.

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