



111 Bedford Avenue,
Bloomsbury,
London
WC1B 3DP

Written Input to the Working Group on Peasants on the Right to Seeds

Community-Based Submission Informed by the Global Human Rights Centre - Chisoméjé Rural Women Rising Project (CRWRP)

This submission reflects the lived experience of over 3,000 rural women engaged through the Chisoméjé Rural Women Rising Project across more than 300 climate-vulnerable communities. It centres women's voices, practices and leadership in relation to the right to seeds as recognised in Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) (UN General Assembly, 2018).

Seeds as Life, Identity and Survival

Women participating in Chisoméjé consistently describe seeds as life itself. Seeds determine what families eat, what income is earned, and whether communities can withstand drought, flooding or erratic rainfall. For many women, saving seeds is a form of resistance against dependency. One participant explained that when she can save seeds from her own harvest, she is not forced to borrow money to purchase commercial varieties. Seed autonomy reduces debt and strengthens dignity.

Seeds are not only economic assets. They embody knowledge passed from mothers to daughters regarding planting cycles, storage techniques and varietal resilience. Women preserve specific crop varieties based on taste, nutrition and performance under local climatic conditions. These practices contribute directly to biodiversity conservation and food sovereignty, aligning with Articles 15, 19 and 20 of UNDROP (UN General Assembly, 2018).

Scientific evidence confirms that diversified, locally adapted cropping systems enhance resilience to climate variability (IPCC, 2022). Women's seed stewardship is therefore both a cultural practice and a climate adaptation strategy.

Gendered Roles and Responsibilities

In the communities engaged, women are primary custodians of seed selection, preservation and exchange. They store seeds from previous harvests, exchange varieties through kinship and cooperative networks, and collectively evaluate yield performance. Youth participation occurs through intergenerational learning, though economic migration threatens continuity.

Despite their central role, women often lack secure land tenure. Without recognised land rights, their authority over seeds remains fragile. Article 17 of UNDROP affirms the right to land, yet implementation gaps undermine women's ability to exercise Article 19 rights fully.

Legal and Structural Barriers

Women report that national seed regulations and certification requirements are difficult to navigate. While quality standards are important, frameworks often privilege commercial seed systems. Informal exchange of farm-saved seeds may exist in a grey legal space. Intellectual property regimes and plant variety protections further complicate seed saving, especially when hybrid seeds dominate local markets.

Corporate concentration in the seed sector has reduced diversity and increased dependency (UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 2009). Women describe feeling pressured to purchase uniform commercial seeds that require chemical inputs and cannot be saved. Climate shocks exacerbate this dependency when traditional varieties fail under extreme conditions.

International frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, 1992) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (FAO, 2001) recognise traditional knowledge and Farmers' Rights. However, women in rural communities rarely see these commitments translated into accessible legal protections.

Community-Led Responses and Women's Leadership

The Chisoméjé Rural Women Rising Project places women at the centre of seed governance. Participatory gendered climate vulnerability assessments document locally adapted seed varieties and identify risks posed by climate change and market pressures. Women co-design solutions rather than receiving externally imposed interventions.

Women-led cooperatives facilitate collective seed saving and exchange networks. These networks strengthen solidarity and biodiversity conservation. Agroecological practices such as composting, crop diversification and soil regeneration support the viability of traditional varieties without reliance on synthetic inputs.

Renewable energy-supported processing, including solar drying technologies, increases the economic value of crops grown from traditional seeds. By strengthening income stability, women gain stronger incentives to maintain diversified seed systems.

Legal literacy training integrated within the project enhances awareness of rights under national law and international frameworks. Women report increased confidence in engaging with local authorities regarding land use and cooperative governance. Monitoring systems track crop diversity, yield stability and income outcomes. Preliminary findings indicate that women maintaining diversified seed portfolios demonstrate greater resilience to climate variability and reduced input costs.

Remaining Gaps and Recommendations

Despite these community-led successes, structural gaps remain. States should explicitly incorporate protections for farm-saved seed exchange into national seed legislation consistent with Article 19 UNDRIP. Gender-responsive land tenure reform is essential to ensure that women's seed rights are secure.

Public investment in community seed banks managed by women's cooperatives can support conservation and equitable benefit-sharing consistent with the CBD and ITPGRFA. Human rights impact assessments should be conducted before adopting seed intellectual property regimes that may restrict farmers' rights.

International cooperation should prioritise agroecological research that values women's knowledge systems and ensures meaningful participation under Article 10 UNDRIP.

The experience of the Chisoméjé Rural Women Rising Project demonstrates that the right to seeds is inseparable from women's leadership, climate resilience and food sovereignty. Seeds are not merely genetic resources. For rural women, they are instruments of autonomy, cultural continuity and collective dignity. Ensuring that governance frameworks align with human rights standards requires recognising women not as beneficiaries but as leaders and custodians of biodiversity.

References

CBD (1992) Convention on Biological Diversity. United Nations.

FAO (2001) International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Rome: FAO.

IPCC (2022) Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Geneva: IPCC.

UN General Assembly (2018) United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. A/RES/73/165.

UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (2009) Seed policies and the right to food. A/64/170.

Email: craig@globalhumanrightscentre.org

Website: www.globalhumanrightscentre.org



info@globalhumanrightscentre.org



+44 20 8200 0187 / +44 7424 931375



www.globalhumanrightscentre.org

