

Activists plan to call Vandana Shiva as ‘expert’ witness in Ghana GMO court case

Groups fighting Ghana’s efforts to commercialize genetically modified organisms (GMOs) will call Indian activist Vandana Shiva as an “expert witness” — a move mocked by defendants in the case. “If you claim that introducing GMOs amounts to bringing in multinationals to take over seed systems, and you are bringing in foreigners to defend your case... what is the point?” defendant John Awuku Dziwornu of the Ghana National Farmers and Fishermen Association (GNAFF) told the Alliance for Science in an interview. “It’s funny.”

Still, the High Court hearing the case adjourned the case for the next three months after plaintiffs’ attorney George Tetteh Wayoe said they needed more time to secure the testimony of three foreign witnesses, including Shiva.

“We pleaded with the court that the scientists and experts who will testify on our behalf are not in the jurisdiction and we will need some time to secure them,” Wayoe told the Alliance for Science in an interview. “Certainly, we will have Vandana Shiva from India and then possibly one or two experts from the US. Because the US is the hub of genetic engineering. That is where the debate is happening vigorously.”

Dziwornu, a maize, rice and livestock farmer, said the move to bring in foreign witnesses defeats the plaintiffs’ claims that they are fighting against GMOs to protect Ghana’s national interest.

“We will be calling in local scientists from [Ghana’s] Council for Scientific and Industrial Research to testify for us that GMOs are good and there is nothing illegal happening here,” Dziwornu added.

A [report released last February](#) indicated that Ghana’s farmers are impressed by the performance of GM crops that the country’s scientists are developing, and are eager to grow them.

But Food Sovereignty Ghana and three other groups are trying to prevent that from happening. They are seeking, among other relief, a court declaration that activities now being pursued by various government agencies to commercialize GMOs are illegal. They claim that the requirements in the National Biosafety Act 2011 have been breached because a committee approved the processes instead of the National Biosafety Authority, as mandated by law. Four government institutions and Dziwornu’s farmers’ association (GNAFF) are defendants in the case.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’ innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

[SIGN UP](#)

The proceedings had resumed following a recent [Supreme Court ruling](#) that the High Court had jurisdiction to hear the case. The High Court then ordered the parties to file written witness statements within three weeks, but lawyers for the plaintiffs pleaded for more time because some of those who will testify are outside the country. The judge agreed and gave the parties eight weeks to file their written witness statements.

The court will reconvene on Oct. 15 to review the witness statements and set out modalities for the trial. At this stage, evidence can be challenged and witnesses who have filed written addresses can testify before the court and be cross-examined.

Asked when Shiva and the other witnesses will be in town to join the case, Wayoe explained that their physical presence in the country will not be necessary because they can testify through the power of technology. "Right now the court system allows for people to testify before the court electronically. So Vandana Shiva, if she decides to testify, she can be where ever she is, and when the day comes, she can be picked up via Skype," he explained. "What they need is to get their documents filed here in Ghana. Any cross examination will be done via Skype and it will be part of the court records. So, we are on course. The case has to be dealt with so Ghana can be clear in our minds on the way forward for GMOs."

But Dziwornu of GNAFF is not convinced the involvement of foreign "experts" will make any difference in the case. "For me, she is not a scientist. She is not an expert when it comes to GMOs. She has no background in science. All she says is based on spiritual stuff," Dziwornu claimed. "And if she will be testifying in the case through electronic technology, why can't that same [advanced] technology be applied to other aspects of life like agriculture?"

Shiva, who supports "traditional" agriculture, has recently gone on record [denouncing frustrated farmers](#) in her own country who are demanding access to improved seeds. As part of a widespread "satyagraha" civil disobedience movement, Indian farmers have begun planting GM cotton and brinjal (eggplant) seeds not yet approved by the government, prompting Shiva to characterize them as "criminals."

Shiva has been involved in Ghana's anti-GMO campaign for some time now. She came to the country in June 2014 to address a public fora on GMOs, urging Ghanaians to reject the technology.

When the Supreme Court ruled against the Ghana National Farmers and Fishermen Association, which sought to challenge the jurisdiction of the High Court in the GMO case, Shiva posted Tweets congratulating the anti-GMO groups on their victory. "Congratulations @FoodSovereignGH. I remember my trip to Ghana and stand in solidarity with you and all people's movements across the world defending their seed sovereignty and food sovereignty from the assaults of the poison cartel who are trying to control our seeds and food," she Tweeted.

But Dziwornu said that ongoing plans to introduce GMOs in Ghana will actually reduce the use of agricultural poisons and do not in any way threaten the nation's food sovereignty.

"It's about reducing pesticide applications by farmers," the farmer said. "It's about introducing more technology in our agriculture as the rest of the world is doing. Our farmers will still control their seeds, but

we cannot continue to do agriculture the way it's always been done. As farmers, we are happy we will soon have the opportunity to grow GMOs to make us have a better agriculture.”

Joseph Opoku Gakpo is a broadcast and online journalist with the Multimedia Group Limited in Ghana. Follow him on Twitter [@josephopoku1990](https://twitter.com/josephopoku1990). Follow the Alliance for Science [@ScienceAlly](https://twitter.com/ScienceAlly).

This article originally ran at the [Cornell Alliance for Science](https://cornellallianceforscience.org/) and has been republished here with permission.