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Distribution of New Enset Landraces (*Ensete ventricosum*) in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*), a Musaceae, is cultivated in southern and southwestern Ethiopia for its starch containing leaf sheaths and corm. It shows a broad diversity in landraces. Farmer claim the need to grow a number of landraces due to their manifold properties for human consumption, animal feed, agriculture, household, construction and traditional medicinal treatments. Usually enset is propagated vegetatively to preserve the characteristics of the landraces. Farmer try to improve their enset plantation by introducing new landraces.

Farmer in ten enset cultivation regions were visited in 1994 and 1998–1999. They were interviewed about the landraces they grow and the plants' uses. Possible ways to obtain new landraces, selection criteria to introduce new landraces, and regional differences were studied and compared with literature on the same localities. Distribution of landraces from their original growing areas to other regions became important after the drought in 1984/85 when plantations were almost exhausted, and farmer had to buy plants from distant regions. New landraces are supplied either by trade, by exchange with neighbours or distant relatives, by collecting uncultivated species, or by spontaneous mutation or seedlings. Selection criteria are adaptation to climate and palatability. Regional differences are evident regarding exchange of enset and use of seedlings and mutants.

Comparison with older studies at the same localities often showed partly different names for landraces. Investigations in 1994 and 1998–1999 showed different frequencies of certain landraces. Changes are due to preferences of the farmer and improved infrastructure, but possibly also due to climatic changes. This might explain the introduction of highly frost susceptible but favoured landraces to high altitudes, while bitter tasting landraces with a high tolerance to frost diminish. Classification of genotypes is an option to identify landraces, their migration and genetically determined site requirements and properties, and offers the chance to optimize enset cultivation at any particular site.

Keywords: Distribution of landraces, *Ensete ventricosum*, exchange of plant material, seedlings, vegetative propagation, Ethiopia