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“Resilience of agricultural systems against crises”

## Banking on Variety – Systems Diversity in Small Scale Farming Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa

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### Abstract

Small scale farming systems in sub-Saharan Africa are not only production systems of agricultural products. They are primarily livelihood systems within a living community, reflecting the social and natural environments as well as the thoughts and ideas of their individuals. Those livelihood systems, the farm households, are cultural, environmental and economic systems at the same time. That still counts for the majority of the population in sub-Saharan Africa, living in rural and sub-urban areas.

Livelihood systems develop and adjust themselves to their environments for centuries. While some technological changes are absorbed easily, others could be observed being neglected or were just taken over for a short period of time. Looking at the system's properties, it can be observed that those options with a significant positive or no effect on the diversity of the system are those being accepted easily. The diversity of the system must be the primary measure, in order to maintain the capacity for resilience against potential crises.

This study is based on 100 randomly selected rural households in Northern Malawi. Data analysis demonstrates that the diversity in activities of the farming household is continually maintained in order to tackle risky and uncertain situations, while maintaining the livelihood for their household members. The presented study postulates that farm households achieve an optimum diversity in order to address the needs of subsistence, income and security, depending on the specific environments. I argue that “banking on variety” is just that strategy for small scale farming systems in sub-Saharan Africa to maintain the resilience against potential crises.

**Keywords:** Diversity, household, livelihood system, Malawi, smallholder farming system