**Promotion of traditional crops for household food security and conservation of agricultural biodiversity in Nepal Himalayas**

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**Abstract**

Traditional crops in the Himalayas of Nepal play important role in household food security and livelihood needs of marginalized communities, while at the same time safeguarding local crop biodiversity for future generations. These crops are presently undervalued both nationally and globally, and hence neglected by current research and development policies. Baseline surveys and field trials were undertaken in 2014-2015 in the mountain agroecosystems of Jumla, Humla, Dolakha and Lamjung in Nepal, to provide information on (1) the present status and constraints in maintaining crop diversity and (2) the role that these traditional crops and their local seed system play in meeting local food and seed needs for smallholder mountain farmers in Nepal. A rich species and intra-specific diversity of traditional crops was found to be maintained at all project sites. About a dozen number of finger millet, bean and a good number of foxtail millet and cold tolerant rice varieties were maintained by farmers at the community level. In all sites local farmers seed system meet the majority of all the seed needs of the farm households. Current production and productivity of the traditional crops are low, and the capacity of these crops to meet increasing food and livelihood needs of small farmers is declining. Major constraints are the limited access to quality diverse traditional and improved seeds, improved processing technologies for diverse fields, and inadequate support of information and knowledge on the productive and nutritional value of these mountain crops, coupled with a lack of policy support from formal sector agencies. In order to address these constraints, and improve the productivity of traditional mountain crops, the project piloted practices, approaches and tools for enhancing access to diverse seeds and diversity rich management solutions that promoting benefits sharing to farming communities. These include deploying and promoting use of broad range of quality clean and diverse traditional planting materials for the target crops through diversity field schools, diversity fairs, community seed banks and participatory plant breeding linking with formal sector R &D agencies.The impact of these practices on improving farmers’ livelihood in the mountains of Nepal is discussed.

*Key words*: Traditional crops, biodiversity conservation, local seed system, mainstreaming, mountain agroecosystem