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"Solidarity in a competing world — fair use of resources"

Conservation of Genetic Resources through Multi-Level Initiatives in Eastern Ethiopia

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Abstract

Agro-biodiversity - the genetic diversity of cultivated crops and crop varieties - is widely understood as an essential resource of small farmers to manage production risk and as a key factor for robust cropping systems. Genetic resources, however, can only be used effectively when they are accessible to small farmers. Consequently, there is a growing interest to improve access and conserve diversity *in situ* or on-farm.

The highlands of Central Ethiopia as one of the world's eight centres of genetic diversity (for barley and durum wheat) have been subject to green revolution agricultural policies for the past decades. Genetic diversity has severely eroded through the introduction of high-input agriculture, including improved wheat varieties. Since the mid-1990s, remarkable efforts have been made in a multi-stakeholder initiative to re-introduce landrace wheat and barley varieties and conserve them in local gene banks. In this study we identify factors of success for two community gene banks located in East Shewa, eastern Ethiopia, which were initially funded through the Global Environmental Facility and established in 1996. 20 years later, the membership of the gene banks is steadily growing and they have achieved financial independence as well as a robust institutional set-up. Ethiopian non-governmental actors, governmental agencies like the Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute and Bioversity International as international actor continue to support local actors.

The case study is based on in-depth interviews with chairmen and committee members of the two gene banks as well as with representatives of all national and international stakeholders. The qualitative analysis is complemented by a comprehensive survey of 430 households allowing a comparison of the crop and varietal portfolio as well as characteristics of members and non-members of the community gene banks.

Keywords: Agro-biodiversity, Ethiopia, *in-situ*

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