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Agrobiodiversity maintenance through everyday practices: A gender-analysis of women’s role in native potato conservation

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Abstract

Agrobiodiversity systems are mainly maintained by family farmers, who hold vast knowledge around the cultivation and use of diverse crops. Agrobiodiversity maintenance is a complex process, which involves environmental, cultural, and economic factors, social relations, institutions, and knowledge systems.

The knowledge and practices of women in particular, play a key role in family agriculture and in agrobiodiversity maintenance.

This qualitative study investigates the role of women in the maintenance of agrobiodiversity through the observation of everyday life. We focus on potato diversity, native to the Peruvian Andes, which is conserved *in situ* by family farmers. By applying ethnographic field methods, including semi structured interviews and film-based interactions, we analyse the different dimensions of agrobiodiversity maintenance, identify women’s vulnerabilities and their daily life strategies of persistence. We look at women’s specific knowledge and everyday practices that are essential for sustaining socio-ecological relationships, from a gender sensitive, intersectional, and power critical perspective.

Our results show how the farm and care work of women, and in particular their everyday food provisioning practices, contribute to agrobiodiversity maintenance. Women’s knowledge on seed selection, agroecological cultivation, environmental care, marketing, and their awareness about family nutrition combined, are sustaining force for agrobiodiversity. Based on our results, we argue that women’s everyday practices contribute to food sovereignty and can be understood as strategies of persistence in a context of global socio-ecological transformations. We emphasise the need to acknowledge the value of traditional knowledge systems and especially the role of women farmers in keeping these knowledge forms alive. Thus, we encourage the application of a gender focus in the formulation of development interventions related to agrobiodiversity maintenance.

Keywords: Agricultural biodiversity, agroecology, everyday life