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“Exploring opportunities ...
for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Assessing the impact of farmers’ indigenous seeds and seed conservation practices in Nakuru county Kenya

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Abstract

Farm-saved seed is existential for agriculture and nutrition in Kenya. For many crops families rely almost entirely on their own seed conservation for cultivation needs. Genetically, local cultivars are the result of generations of farmers’ expert knowledge in plant selection. Seed supply and agrobiodiversity loss is a major threat for Kenya. To fight this problem, Seed Savers Network Kenya together with AGRECOL introduced a commons-based process of describing and documenting local varieties (open-source seeds) that is intended to help farmers seed supply and provide adequate protection against bio-piracy. Over a period of two years, farmers recorded their progress towards better seed security using a participatory impact monitoring tool (PIM). 200 Farmers in 13 villages were trained and a total of 132 farmers participated in PIM. To enhance income diversification and promoting biodiversity, 76 % of farmers increased the number of crops on their farm, 19 % thereof to more than 21 crops per household. Furthermore, 30 % of farmers began with the cultivation of drought tolerant crops. Fruit tree cultivation was taken up by 44 % of farmers. Seed production and working together in seed banks resulted in the fact that 75 % stated a significantly revived culture of seed sharing. The availability of seed could be improved for various local populations of beans, potato, black nightshade, and garden peas. The effects were marked strong for those farmers with lowest seed supply grade of less than one quarter of sowing needs. The number of farmers in this poorest category dropped from 55 % to 27 % while farmers with excellent seed supply rose from 3 % to 17 %. Progress could also be achieved on better seed storage and here the percentage of farmers in the poorest grade fell from 55 % to 14 %.

These various changes combined with new agroecological practices and water saving technologies practices let to the fact that 91 % of farmers reached better food security. Describing their local varieties 10 farmer groups managed to characterise and distinguish a total of 69 different varieties from 8 species. Being able to distinguish local varieties according to scientific procedures filled farmers with pride and enthusiasm.

Keywords: Agrobiodiversity, farmers’ varieties, indigenous seed