Managing conservation and use of agricultural biodiversity

Let the locals lead: Empowering the poor to manage agricultural biodiversity and adversity

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On-farm conservation efforts are not sustainable without local efforts and there are considerable gaps globally in how to consolidate local efforts on the ground. Roles of farmers as users, conservers, innovators and promoters are considered important for supporting evolutionary breeding and on-farm management of local crop diversity. We tried to 1) assess whether empowering community and local institutions helps realize the dual goals of on-farm conservation and improved farmer livelihoods; 2) discuss key principles and practices that empower community and local institutions and 3) identify key indicators of empowered community and local institutions.

We analysed experiences of two long term on-farm projects: ‘Strengthening the scientific basis of in situ conservation of agricultural biodiversity on farm in Nepal’, and ‘Conservation and sustainable use of wild and tropical fruit tree diversity in India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand’. We found that community empowerment is the key driver to achieving the dual goals of conservation and development. This can be achieved through the community-based biodiversity management (CBM) approach - a set of principles and practices by which communities enhance knowledge of local intraspecific diversity and improve traditional practices through continuous engagement in platforms of social learning that are led by community organizations. These platforms could benefit from a set of good practices, tools and methods that engage both men and women, poor and rich in collective planning and learning processes. This presentation illustrates some of the good practices from the CBM approach that are essential for empowering communities, promoting in situ-ex situ linkages, and managing adversity by mobilizing available genetic resources and participatory crop improvement. The paper puts forward CBM as a key strategy to promote community resilience and contribute to the conservation of plant genetic resources.

Key words: agricultural biodiversity, community biodiversity management, participatory methods, empowerment, on-farm conservation

Rete Semi Rurali: Collective action for sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity in farming systems

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Rete Semi Rural (RSR), the Italian Farmers’ Seed Network, was established in 2007 and now in 2015 consists of 34 associations. The commitment of RSR consists of supporting farmers politically and scientifically in the creation and dissemination of self- and truly sustainable organic farming systems. Until now seed policies and programmes have been inconsistent with practice and have not taken into consideration the variations that exist in European agriculture. The principles of an integrated seed system are full integration and recognition of formal and informal systems, as well as seed sector development approached in a pluralistic manner. RSR works towards innovative farming systems based on agricultural biodiversity, where decentralized and