



Strengthening the informal seed system through community seedbanks

For more information about the 'Seeds for Needs' initiative, see:

- Factsheet 1
A participatory approach for landrace evaluation
- Factsheet 2
The crowdsourcing approach
- Factsheet 4
Diversity in durum wheat landraces to tackle drought
- Factsheet 5
Molecular techniques to map farmer and breeder preferences – an innovative approach towards participatory plant breeding
- Factsheet 6
Improving Ethiopian durum wheat landraces through breeding

The initiative shows that re-introducing selected varieties conserved in the national genebank to farming communities, can provide concrete options for climate change adaptation, increase productivity and satisfy multiple farmers' needs. However, traditional varieties usually work well in specific local conditions, whereas formal seed systems are interested in finding one variety that can perform uniformly under different conditions. Our approach relies on using a set of diverse varieties to manage risks related to unpredictable weather. This would be even more complicated for the formal sector, since that would mean providing seeds of many different varieties.

In Ethiopia, the farmers we work with rely predominantly on rainfall to grow wheat. This makes them more vulnerable to unusual weather patterns. It is therefore essential that they have access to seeds that are adapted to local conditions, and respond to changing needs.



Farmers were happy with the traditional varieties selected in the project and requested that the seeds be made available to local communities. As in other project activities, scientists and farmers worked together and came up with a shared solution: a community seedbank.

Our progress

- A community seed bank was established in Meket Woreda and opened in 2014
- The Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute, which works to conserve agricultural biodiversity in the country, is ensuring that the community seedbank managers are properly trained and that the seedbank becomes a reliable source of good-quality seeds for farmers in the area
- The community seedbank empowers farmers to use, exchange and conserve local and improved crop varieties for food security and improved livelihoods.

Looking ahead

The community seedbank is well integrated with other initiatives in the country: the Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute manages 12 community seedbanks across Ethiopia as part of a programme for on-farm conservation. Even though traditionally, community seedbanks are intended to conserve existing landraces, in our case the goal was mainly to use it as a reliable source of seeds. Despite this slight difference, we decided to put the seedbank under the national system to guarantee its sustainability.

Training and capacity building of local farmers on seed multiplication and seed management will make the community seedbank an even more reliable source of good-quality seeds.



Cover Photo: Opening of the Meket Woreda community seedbank
Credit: Bioversity International/
C. Fadda

