



NATIONAL CROP DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

DIVERSIFOOD analysed five different national crop diversity management systems, to identify the types of actors involved and assess the links between formal and informal seed sectors. The objective was to identify how the actor constellations, the interaction between and among actors and the legal environment affect the prospects for maintaining the diversity of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) at the national level. The analyses of the five national crop diversity management systems were conducted from the point of view of the relevant national DIVERSIFOOD partners: Rete Semi Rurali (Italy), Arche Noah (Austria), Red Andaluza de Semillas (Spain), ProSpecieRara (Switzerland) and Réseau Semences Paysannes (France).

AT FIRST GLANCE

Civil society organizations engaged in seed and propagating material contribute to the sustainable use of crop genetic diversity. However, they normally operate in the informal sector with many challenges and little interaction with formal seed and food system.

Embedding crop diversity and networking for local high quality food systems

Comparing the five organisations

Although the five organizations share a similar vision of a dynamic seed system and have similar core activities revolving around the community-based conservation and management of crop genetic diversity, they differ quite consistently in governance, financing and membership structures. Whereas some depend up to 99% on public funds (national or European) others are publicly financed only up to 6%. The latter are mostly supported by private membership fees or donations, and sponsors, contributing to up to 70% of their overall annual income, and sometimes more. In terms of membership, some organizations have collective members (associations and organisations) while others have individual members. The organizations' size also varies greatly, with smaller ones totalling around 50 members (usually collective) and a small staff (average 6 people) and larger ones having more than 10'000 members and up to 39 employees. A geographical pattern can also be described, by which member-supported seed saver-organizations are dominant in Northern Europe (mostly composed of amateur gardeners and citizen seed savers), while networks of collective farmers' organizations (with a small proportion of amateurs or hobby gardeners) supported by public funds are prevalent in the South.

Understanding the legal environment

Most organizations contribute to national and international political and legal debates, to influence the development of the legal framework in a more conducive direction for the management of PGRFA in their countries. DIVERSIFOOD is studying the impact of legislation on seed system diversity. The EU-**directives on conservation varieties** are a very relevant legal framework in this context. The directives are implemented differently in each country; in Italy, the registration of conservation varieties requires defining a region of origin, which is not always so clear-cut; in Germany, France and Switzerland



many conservation varieties are registered declaring a nation-wide region of origin. In Italy and Spain, registration is free of charge, while in more northern countries a one-time or annual fee is due. Another policy issue regards the possibility of non-commercial **seed exchange** of non-protected varieties between gardeners and farmers; this possibility is also interpreted differently in the member states, with some allowing it, and others restricting it but often not too clearly. Restrictive **national phytosanitary laws**, tailored around the needs of the formal, large scale seed sector, can represent another obstacle to local circulation and sustainable use of PGRFA in diverse seed and food systems. Complex administrative procedures for **access to PGRFA** can also have a negative effect on the availability of these resources for the farming and breeding sectors. Last but not least, stricter **rules on intellectual property rights** (both the plant variety protection and the patent systems) may impede circulation of diversity and local PGRFA-based innovation, negatively affecting seed system diversity and its sustainability.

Stakeholder interaction - towards platforms for PGRFA management

All organizations stressed that national seed systems should take into greater account the role of social actors involved in conserving, maintaining and renewing agricultural diversity. Even if all EU Member states have signed the International Treaty on PGRFA (hence committing to realise Farmers' Rights related to PGRFA – Art. 9) and have implemented the directives such as those on conservation varieties, there is no formal space or platform in any country in which all stakeholders, formal and informal, institutional or civil society-based, can discuss and negotiate PGRFA issues. Where there are communication platforms on PGRFA-issues, large-scale seed or food actors often prevail and the views of civil society organizations are not taken into great consideration.

Ways forward

Through surveys, workshops and research activities, DIVERSIFOOD is drawing a clearer picture of national PGRFA systems, their needs, the impact of the legal environment on their development and the critical aspects to be improved in order to enhance their contribution to sustainable use of PGRFA. In 2018, DIVERSIFOOD will discuss policy recommendations produced within the project and with external stakeholders through European and national workshops and in the final congress in Rennes (France) in December 2018.

Suggested readings

European Commission (EC): *Preparatory action on EU plant and animal genetic resources. Final Report.* European Union 2016. ISBN: 978-92-79-54841-3.

TRANSformative Social Innovation Theory (TRANSIT) 2014-2017. Balázs, B., Aistara, G. et al (2015). Report: *Transnational Seed Exchange Networks.*

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