

Georgia / Georgien

Who is saving the diversity of cultivated plants and/or fighting for peasant rights of saving seeds in your country? Who is involved in GMO-free seed production? Are there new groups or networks that are setting up?

Seed conservation is in the responsibility of governmental agencies, Ministry of agriculture and Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, but due to the absence of financial resources, this process is stopped and that's why peasants obtain and multiply seeds of cultivated crops in their own forces. Besides this, Elkana multiplies seeds of several local varieties, like grains, legumes, technical crop, fruit trees and vine, on seed multiplication plot. Elkana also tries to protect peasants' rights for conservation of local varieties. For this purpose Elkana arranges different events, training courses, thematic workshops, promotes conservation of local varieties through information distribution. Elkana conducts food testing events of dishes made from local varieties, where invites wide spectrum of society. Peasants produce or purchase imported seed material; it is difficult to recognize which of the imported seed is GMO free or not, as there is no legislation in the country that controls or regulates traffic of GMO seed. Only now the work is carried out for joining to Kartahena Protocol.

Please give some examples for using cultivated biodiversity. How do you see the importance of peasant, local or traditional varieties for agriculture and vegetable gardening?

Vine varieties are the most diverse in the country. Vine included over 500 varieties in the past. Now only over 50 varieties are spread in the country. Also can be mentioned fruit cultures. As to annual crops, local diversity is very low. From grain crops maize and partially wheat is cultivated. These are imported varieties. From legumes kidney-bean has wide diversity. Other legumes, like Faba bean and Vigna is sowed in very low amounts; Lentil, Chick-pea, Chickling vetch is not spread in Georgia.

Which are the main (legal) obstacles that constrain you? How can you avoid them?

Peasants should have opportunity to obtain place on the market in case of cultivation of local varieties. Also, local biodiversity is characterized with the highest quality and it should have higher prices. In this case, the peasants will be more interested in cultivation of local varieties. Also the peasants also should have access on long-term credits.

Elkana provides reintroduction of local varieties in peasant farms. These are the threatened varieties – Millet, Italian millet, Lentil, Chickling vetch, Flax, etc. Seed material in small amounts is delivered to peasants and trainings are conducted for them in the field of agro-techniques. The main constrain in recovery of local biodiversity is farmers' mentality and shortage of technical means. Besides this, the farmers have small size plots, which are already covered with other crops. The farmers are not sure that they will gain more income in case of planting of local threatened varieties.

Which are the public gene banks in your country? What is the cooperation with them like? Do the gene banks have public access? How do they assure GMO-free quality?

Small gene bank is functioning in Georgia, which is established for two years with support of the international organization ICARDA. Here is collected germplasm from different scientific-research institutions. As these institutions were not funded, part of germplasm has been lost. This gene bank is not financed by government. That's why it is in critical situation. Germplasm of about 300 samples are stored in the seed depository of Elkana. Gene bank does not have enough finances to increase germplasm amount to provide service for farmers and other population.

What are the perspectives of public gene banks for the future in your country?

Gene bank will have the future in case, if the government or other part of the society provides financial support. In other case gene bank will not be able to continue functioning. Financial sources are not visible yet and are not expected for nearest future. Support of international organizations is the only hope.

During the past years several projects are implemented by Elkana. Now two projects are being implemented for recovery and sustainable use of Georgia's agrobiodiversity. About 160 farmers from three regions of Georgia are involved in the project. They produce products from local threatened varieties that are already placed on local market. It is intended to increase the diversity of these products. These projects are funded by EED (German Protestant Churches Development Service), Misereor, UNDP-GEF.