



Outstanding Practice in
AGROECOLOGY 2019



FACTSHEET

Africa – Regeneration Through Connecting Seeds With Culture And Nature In Africa (2007)

IN BRIEF

The African Biodiversity Network (ABN) works with 11 African countries to revive traditional/indigenous agroecological farming systems, which are threatened by industrial agricultural practices. Seed diversity and sovereignty is the key focus of ABN's Climate Seeds and Knowledge (CSK) programme. To achieve this, the practice is fully inclusive, driven by communities and involves activities such as seed banks and household seed storage systems; community ecological governance; seed festivals, ceremonies and practice of rituals; community research groups; seed maps and seasonal calendars; exchange visits; community dialogues; seed exchanges and sharing; intercropping; use of natural fertilizers and composting; integrated pest management, seed selection, saving and multiplication. CSK currently has 4,640 farmers working on reviving seeds and has revived 470 varieties.

ABOUT THE PRACTICE AT A GLANCE

Organisation: African Biodiversity Network (ABN) working with partners across Africa (Network of NGOs)

Implemented in: 11 African countries: Ethiopia (Telecho, Sheka, Tigray and Bale), Uganda (Buganda and Bunyoro), Tanzania (Moshi and Kilimanjaro), Rwanda (Mugahanga District), Benin (Avrankou), Togo (Lome), Ghana (Tamale, Waa), Burkina Faso (Wagadugu), South Africa (Kwa Zulu Natal, Stellenbosch, Mpumalanga), Zimbabwe (Bikita) and Botswana (Gaborone)

Year: 2007

Beneficiaries: 4,230 households of smallholder farmers (in communities working with ABN's partners)

Topic(s): Africa, production, agrobiodiversity

PROBLEMS TARGETED / CONTEXT

The practice grew out of the need to empower smallholder farmers to regenerate diversity of seeds to regain their control of the food production system. Initiating from the idea that being able to save one's own seed each year puts the farmer in a position of strength and resilience. In many communities where they work alongside with their partners, the diversity of seed has been lost due to years of colonialism and subsequent policies that have not protected such diversity. The loss of seed diversity makes smallholder farmers vulnerable to climate shocks. It leads to a loss of control by smallholder farmers, putting them in the hands of companies that sell seed to them each year, preventing them from saving and exchanging their own seed. The role of women as knowledge holders on seeds has been diminished, as they have been marginalised and excluded from these processes. Industrial agriculture and the now-dominant seed forces have also ignored the value and contribution of women in the production of indigenous seed. Initiatives such as International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) or Plant Breeders' Rights and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are creating a dramatic erosion of diversity worldwide. The practice offered by ABN counteracts this by empowering smallholder farmers through reviving community seed diversity.

To develop the practice, ABN has worked with partners and communities in 12 countries across Africa for the last 15 years. Through visits to other countries, partner meetings and exchanges programmes, they initially worked with less of a focus on seed, but then realised its importance and started piloting ways in which seed could again become central in community processes. Hence ABN started the Climate Seed & Knowledge programme. Some of their key partners, for instance RAINS (Ghana), ICE (Kenya), EarthLore (South Africa), ISD and Melca (Ethiopia) piloted the process of working with communities through community dialogues, seed maps, eco-calendars and training on agroecology (including composting, land preparation, seed banks, storage systems, and promoting an understanding of the relationship between farming systems and the environment, etc). The central role of women and their knowledge emerged through this process and they started mobilising women. After the piloting of these methodologies, other partners started to join and to spread the work.

KEY FEATURES OF THE SOLUTION

The main goal of the practice is to promote seed and food sovereignty in Africa and regenerative livelihoods, to increase seed diversity and protect wild relatives and thus biodiversity in general, and to build resilience of communities and ecosystems in the face of climate change. Its objectives are to revive seed biodiversity through reviving knowledge by means of community dialogue, memory using eco-calendars, complimentary roles and responsibility and building confidence through knowledge exchange.

The practice focuses on the social and ecological regeneration of seeds. It involves recuperation of lost seeds and related knowledge and practices, seed banks and household seed storage systems, community ecological governance, seed festivals, ceremonies and practice of rituals, community research groups, seed maps and seasonal calendars, exchange visits, community dialogues, seed exchanges and sharing, intercropping, use of natural fertilizers and composting, integrated pest management, seed selection, saving

and multiplication, women's knowledge and establishment of communities of practice on seeds.

The practice is implemented throughout Africa by ABN and the Gaia Foundation in collaboration with local partners (e.g. Regional Advisory Information and Network Systems (RAINS) in Ghana, Institute for Culture and Ecology (ICE) in Kenya and National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) in Uganda). Partners and communities are advocating actively to policymakers to promote understanding of community seeds and knowledge systems e.g. ICE (Kenya) with Greenpeace Africa lobbying for agro-ecology support; ISD (Ethiopia) campaigns continually and annually organises Green Action Week to raise awareness of ecological principles; and RAINS (Ghana) lobbied against passage of Plant Breeders Bill (2015) and established a good relationship with Department of Agriculture and Nutrition.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

- Addressing not only ecological but also social regeneration of seeds
- Fostering farmers' reconnection with nature for a holistic approach in all farming practises
- Is fully inclusive, building on local knowledge and resources, enriched with modern science, and being driven by communities themselves.

FACTS & FIGURES

- 470 varieties of seeds revived, such as different kinds of millet (finger and bulrush), sorghum (white and red), green grams, pigeon peas, cowpeas and pumpkin
- 4,640 farmers working on seed revival. 6 communities, each partner works with more than one community
- 6 toolkits created: community dialogues, eco-cultural maps, eco-cultural seasonal calendars, Earth Jurisprudence, experiential exchanges, legal education workshops.
- Work of partners in 5 countries is helping to integrate 'Youth, Culture and Biodiversity' principles into schools e.g. RAINS (Ghana) integrating hundreds of children in schools in biodiversity platforms.
- 8 partners have supported communities in gaining legal recognition of laws and practices of ecological systems e.g. MELCA (Ethiopia).

OUTCOME, IMPACT & EFFECTIVENESS

- Re-establishing seed sovereignty by making communities themselves custodians of seeds.
- Ensuring food security throughout the year by educating farmers about the counter-intuitive mechanism of growing for two seasons (although yields may be less productive in the first season, they are much better in the second season).
- Poverty level has gone down to 75%. Farmers are less reliant on external inputs, have more food now than before, have improved their health, and are more able to send their children to school.

- Empowering women by promoting them in leadership roles due to their deep knowledge to revive indigenous seeds.

OUTLOOK, TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY & COST-EFFICIENCY

Due to its implementation in several countries throughout Africa the practice has proven to be scalable and transferable. In addition to its collaboration with local partners, the ABN is working on decentralizing through setting up country and sub-regional nodes to help expand the practice further over the next few years.

The practice is very cost-effective, because it focuses on home-grown rather than exotic seeds. The practice is embedded in the community's own structures of governance and so it has fewer costs and is more sustainable. In 2016, the practice received Kshs 59,747,400.10 (€ 512.064) external funding from Bread for the World (9%), NORAD (52%), SwedBio (30%), partner contributions (8%) and The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) (1%). In 2018, the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) was awarded a 2018 Lush Spring Prize Influence Award, which includes £25,000 in funding.

In order to further scale up, there is the need for capacity building, to identify the right communities and to set up community research groups. In terms of technology, GPS tools for seed mapping and tracking seed belts could help to recuperate the lost seeds and to increase regeneration of seed diversity; simple video camcorders would be useful in capturing the practical aspects; and live videos would be useful in training.

INTERVIEWEE FEEDBACK

Number of points: 22,5 out of 23

Summary: The practice scored excellently across all future justice principles, receiving full marks, only losing 0.5 points for its current (but shifting) reliance on external funding.

1 (Sustainable use of resources) – 5.5/6 – Focuses on processes of healing the soil, natural composting (recycling), connecting seeds with culture, increasing biodiversity. Chemical fertilisers are banned. Through diversity, pests are kept minimal. 0.5 awarded for question on economic sustainability because it strives for self-maintenance, but still relies on foreign funding.

2 (Equity and eradication of poverty) - 4/4 – Small-scale producers and indigenous knowledge championed and empowered. Improves equity especially for women as it boosts the valuation of their knowledge. Youth also find a lot of space to grow, market and learn about seeds. Local solutions and traditional practices at the forefront. No reliance on external inputs.

3 (Precautionary approach to human health, natural resources and ecosystems) - 2 / 2 – Revival of crops prevents diseases and provides for better health in general. It seeks to copy nature and so no harm.

4 (Public participation and access to information) - 3/3 – Information sharing and indigenous knowledge is at the centre of all activities. Members of the communities become custodians of knowledge. Documents and reports are also produced and shared with everyone. Community discussion groups run to revive the cycle of seeds, encouraging co-creation of knowledge.

5 (Governance and human security) 3/3 – Encourages transparency because everything is communitarian and everyone is accountable. Encourages communal ownership and promotes farmers as “custodians of seeds”.

6 (Integration, interrelationship- human rights, social, economic and environmental objectives) - 3/3 – Practice is holistic in its approach. Believes in social justice and communal ownership of seeds so that everyone can have access. Promotes healthy and varied diets.

7 (Common but differentiated obligations) - 2/2 – No burden placed on vulnerable groups. Promotes local economy and uses communal technologies.

CONTACT

Mr. Simon Mitambo, Regional Program Coordinator, African Biodiversity Network (ABN), Section 9, Mortgage House N0. 60, off OAU Rd, Thika, Kenya

Email: smitambo@yahoo.com / abnsecretariat@africanbiodiversity.org

Phone: +254 72 135 488

Website: <https://africanbiodiversity.org/community-seeds-and-knowledge-csk/> & <http://www.seedsoffreedom.info/our-projects/climate-seed-knowledge/>

LINKS AND FURTHER READING

African Biodiversity Network (2016), Annual Highlights & Audited Financial Statements

African Biodiversity Network (2017): Final Draft Evaluation Report

African Biodiversity Network (2013), Seeds for Life Report: <https://africanbiodiversity.org/seeds-for-life-scaling-up-agrobiodiversity/>

African Biodiversity Network, Report: Celebrating African Rural Women: Custodians of Seed, Food and Traditional Knowledge for Climate Change Resilience: <https://www.gaiafoundation.org/post-library/celebrating-african-rural-women/>

Naturinda. Women Vital for Food Security in NAPE.or.ug: <http://www.nape.or.ug/project-news/pnews/153-women-vital-for-food-security>

Ngotho (2015), Tharaka women strive to bring back indigenous seeds in The Star.co.ke: https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2015/09/01/tharaka-women-strive-to-bring-back-indigenous-seeds_c1194189

Lush Award (2018), Lush Spring Prize 2018 Influence Award Winner: African Biodiversity Network: <https://uk.lush.com/article/lush-spring-prize-2018-influence-award-winner-african-biodiversity-network> and Video: <https://vimeo.com/269225541>

African Biodiversity Network, films - Kamburu film: <https://vimeo.com/7096771>; Seeds of Freedom film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-bK8X2s1kI>; and Seeds of Sovereignty film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GLYIw_QdjQ