

**MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY
OF PRACTICE
FOR FARMER-MANAGED SEED
SYSTEMS**

14th - 15th September 2025

Manila, the Philippines



OXFAM
Novib

This document reports on the first Meeting of the International Community of Practice for Farmer-Managed Seed Systems, organised by Oxfam Novib, with the support of the FAO Treaty Secretariat and the European Union.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are pleased to announce the publication of this report following the first official meeting of the Community of Practice (CoP) for Farmer-Managed Seed Systems (FMSS) on the 14th and 15th of September 2025, in Manila, the Philippines, preceding the Second Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights (16th – 19th September). Over the two days, sixty participants from more than twenty countries came together to share knowledge, exchange experiences, and form connections with the overarching aim of strengthening and promoting FMSS. The meeting Coordinated by Oxfam Novib and supported by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the European Union (EU), the two-day meeting provided the opportunity to engage in rich discussions on seed policy and practice, including plant variety protection, establishing a registration system for farmer varieties (ITPGRFA), and exploring different national policy mechanisms to promote FMSS. Community Seed Banks (CSB) were explored in depth, with participants presenting on topics such as CSB best practices derived from a meta-analysis conducted in India, alternative forms of CSB governance and institutional interlinkages, and models of sustainability. One of the days was dedicated to the newly formed CoP for FMSS, established in Harare in November 2024, during which thirty members of the CoP collaboratively defined the CoP's common vision, goals, and responsibilities, as well as forming coherent policy recommendations ahead of the Eleventh Session of the Treaty Governing Body (GB11) in Lima, Peru (24th – 29th November, 2025).

The report provides a comprehensive overview of the content discussed under each theme, structured into four main corresponding sections, respectively: (1) Seed Policy and Practice, (2) Community Seed Banks, (3) The CoP for FMSS, and (4) Findings and Recommendations. Our intention is for this document to provide practitioners, policymakers, researchers, institutions, and any relevant actors working on seed-related initiatives with diverse cases of best practices, as well as how to promote and strengthen an enabling policy environment for FMSS.

ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CoP	Community of Practice
CSB	Community Seed Bank
DUS	Distinct, Uniform, and Stable
EAPVP	The East Asia Plant Variety Protection Forum
EU	European Union
FMSS	Farmer-Managed Seed Systems
FR	Farmers' Rights
FVR	Farmer Variety Registration
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
LDC	Least Developed Countries
OHM	Organic Heterogeneous Material
PBR	Plant Breeders' Rights
PGRFA	Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
PPB	Participatory Plant Breeding
PVE	Participatory Variety Enhancement
PVP	Plant Variety Protection
PVS	Participatory Variety Selection
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants
UPOV91	International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, 1991 Act

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has witnessed a growing recognition of the critical role that farmer-managed seed systems play in providing food security, nutritional variety, and as a source of agrobiodiversity. Beyond this, farmer-managed seed systems retain at their core the notion of sovereignty for the farmer and their community to choose what is sewn, cultivated, and preserved for future generations. Efforts to promote and strengthen farmer-managed seed systems have been significant, spanning across continents and originating from a rich variety of actors, yet have been largely fragmented. In recent years, however, this has begun to change as these movements have begun to converge and align.

In the 10th Session of the Governing Body (2023), contracting parties and stakeholders were requested to organize regional workshops to raise awareness on the implementation of Article 5 & 6, and 9 of the Treaty. Furthermore, a shift in legislation governing seed systems through Resolutions (Res. 06/2023) and (Res. 07/2023) was encouraged. In response to this call to action 70 actors including policy makers, gene banks, non-governmental organizations, projects, and donors supporting farmers' seed systems in various African countries and in Europe convened in Harare, Zimbabwe, for an international workshop. Together these actors reviewed key regulatory bottlenecks in relation to breeding for diversity and farmers' seed systems and explored how an enabling environment for FMSS would look like. Ultimately, the meeting produced a Regional Position Paper (Report) on national implementation of Articles 5, 6 and 9 of the Treaty, an Information Document for the next session of Governing Body of the Treaty (GB11), inputs provided to the African Union (AU) policy process on FMSS and the launch of the CoP to, among other things, explore best practices towards the development of an enabling policy framework for farmer-managed seed systems.

Consequently, the origins of the CoP and its meeting in Manila lies in the momentum gathered following this meeting, where the need emerged to strengthen ties between actors working on FMSS on an international scale. Under a partnership agreement between the FAO Treaty and Oxfam Novib, the initiative was formally launched to build this movement; to convene members of the CoP in-person to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and learnings, synthesise learnings and cases of best practices, and to consolidate efforts.

These two days consisted of sharing knowledge by way of presentations, workshops and World Café sessions on various aspects of seed policy and practice, models of community seed bank governance, and examples of best practices.

The purpose of the meetings between the Communities of Practice (CoP) members and SEARICE was to facilitate collaboration between the African and Asian CoP groups. The primary objectives included sharing information across regions, establishing networks and alliances, engaging in discussions to align on broad policy goals, identifying gaps in knowledge, and working collaboratively to bridge these gaps. The meetings aimed to foster mutual understanding, promote regional cooperation, and develop strategies for advancing shared interests. By connecting diverse communities, the initiative sought to enhance knowledge exchange, strengthen regional partnerships, and support the development of effective policies that address regional challenges. Overall, the focus was on building a cohesive platform for continuous learning, collaboration, and policy advocacy to achieve sustainable development goals across both regions.

OBJECTIVES



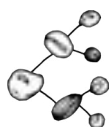
KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Share policy and practical experiences on FMSS, including farmer variety registration, quality assurance, and community seed banks.



POLICY ALIGNMENT

Identify technical and financial needs to integrate community seed banks into national and regional policies. Prepare coordinated inputs for GB 11 and other international fora to strengthen farmers' rights and ensure fair benefit-sharing.



NETWORK BUILDING

Define the FMSS CoP's vision, governance, and strategy for ongoing collaboration and advocacy.

METHODOLOGY



INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS & THEMATIC GROUPS

Addressed Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), agroecology and agrobiodiversity policy, farmer variety registration, and FMSS policy options.



CASE STUDY PRESENTATIONS

Sharing experiences and examples of best practice from Africa, Asia, and Europe on community seed bank management and sustainability.



WORLD CAFÉ

Facilitated multi-stakeholder exchange on the topic of Community Seed Banks, such as governance and bridging on-farm conservation with ex-situ gene bank initiatives.



STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSIONS

Defined CoP vision, roles, and responsibilities; used the Harare Info Document as a reference for policy recommendations.

The links to all presentations can be found in the appendix, as well as links to the folders with photos taken during the sessions.

I. SEED POLICY & PRACTICE

Legal frameworks that are exclusive or restrictive often hinder farmers' access to diverse seed systems, limiting their ability to select seeds that meet their specific needs. Farmers evaluate various seed qualities and standards based on factors such as adaptability, yield potential, disease resistance, and local suitability. To empower farmers, it is essential to invest in capacity-building initiatives that enable them to produce and breed their own seeds, fostering self-sufficiency and resilience. Additionally, involving farmers directly in national breeding programs can enhance their understanding of seed characteristics and traits that are most beneficial to their farming practices. Such participatory approaches ensure that breeding efforts are aligned with farmers' preferences, leading to the development of improved seed varieties that support sustainable agriculture and food security.

The workshop began with a focus on seed laws in policy and practice. The ways in which seed laws can either hinder or promote FMSS was explored with presentations from the Philippines, Kenya, as well as the broader IPR landscape on Plant Variety Protection in Asia, followed by four workshop sessions on IPR, agrobiodiversity in policy, farmer variety registration, and policy for FMSS.

Two questions were posed to participants at the beginning of the session. The answers can be found at the end of the chapter.

- Q How do we achieve a sui generis system that recognizes PBR and FMSS?
- Q How to empower farmers to gain control over local seed value chains?

NATIONAL SEED LAWS & THEIR EFFECT ON FARMER-MANAGED SEED SYSTEMS (NORMITA IGNACIO, SEARICE)

The Asian Community of Practice comprises 24 CSOs and farmer organizations spanning 12 countries across Southeast Asia. Its primary goal is to promote the comprehensive implementation of agroecology, land rights, farmers' rights, and peasants' rights at the national level. This is achieved through the domestication of key international frameworks, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the ITPGRFA. The CoP aims to foster policy reforms, strengthen community resilience, and ensure sustainable agricultural practices by aligning national policies with these international agreements. Through coordinated efforts, the CoP seeks to empower local communities, advocate for equitable land access, and promote sustainable farming practices that respect biodiversity and indigenous knowledge. The initiative underlines the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and policy advocacy to realize these objectives effectively across this region.

In Asia, two primary seed systems prevail: the formal seed system and the informal or farmer-managed seed system. The formal system includes public, private, and mixed-sector actors and is characterized by structured breeding, certification, and commercialization processes. In contrast, the informal system, which supplies approximately 80–90% of the seed demand in many countries, is rooted in farmers' own production, social networks, and local markets.

The formal seed system is based on the development of new varieties through professional plant breeding. These varieties undergo a process of testing, release, multiplication, and marketing. The value chain includes plant breeding, variety testing and release, early generation seed multiplication, certified seed production with quality control, storage and conditioning, and commercialization.

Farmers access seeds through their own production, exchanges within social networks, and purchases from local markets. This system is flexible and relies on local landraces and locally improved varieties that are not certified. Seeds are generally inexpensive and readily available, although their quality can vary and often depends on trust in the seed seller. Farmers also engage in their own breeding and seed selection, contributing to the diffusion and maintenance of genetic diversity.

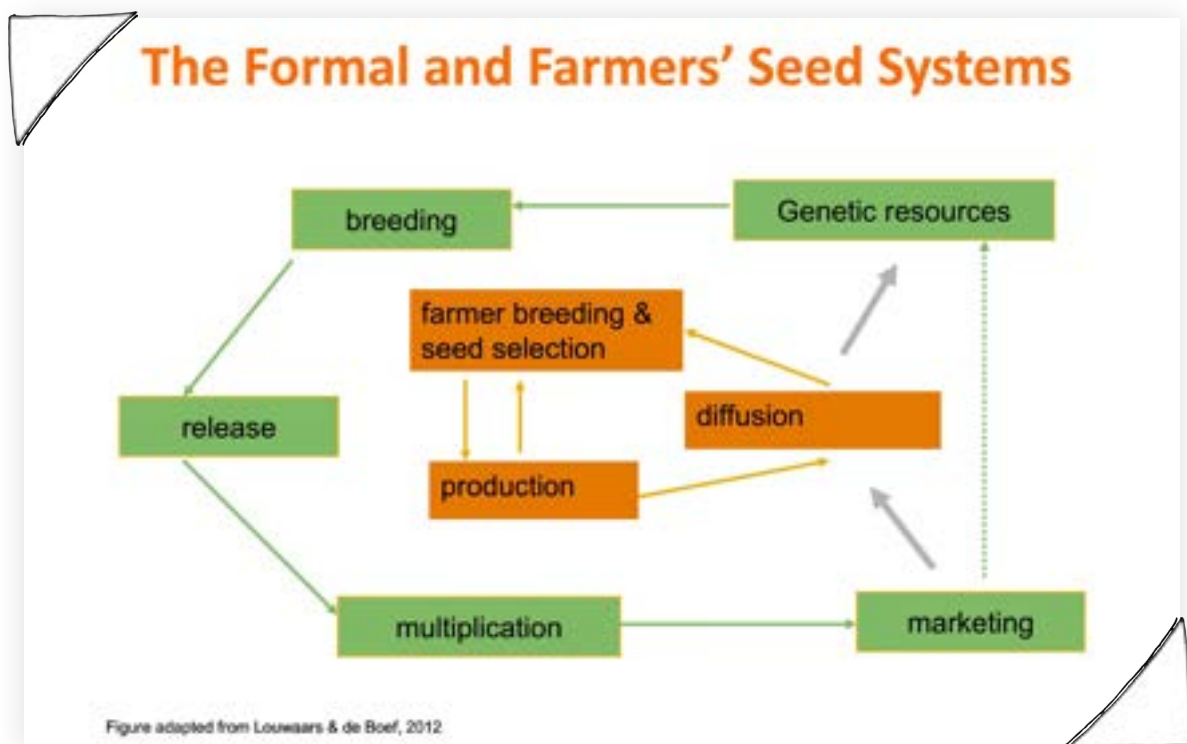


Figure 1: Schema of the formal and farmers' seed systems.

National seed laws define the framework and principles governing seed production and marketing. In many Asian countries, these laws aim to develop a commercial seed industry and ensure that farmers have access to high-quality seeds of superior crop varieties. However, the implementation of these laws often favors the formal system and can marginalize farmer-managed systems.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT & IMPLICATIONS FOR FARMERS

The concept of seed certification originated in North America. The International Crop Improvement Association was formed as a coalition of organizations involved in crop improvement. Its goal was to make large-scale seed handling and distribution acceptable to the seed trade. Between 1969 and 1970, the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies was established to review and approve genetic purity standards. The period from 1900 to 1970 was crucial in defining certification principles, perfecting standards, and developing operational procedures.

Seed certification is a quality control system managed by government-designated agencies. It involves setting standards for variety identity and purity, genetic purity, physical and mechanical purity, physiological status (including viability, germination, vigor, and storability), and phytosanitary status (seed health). While these standards aim to ensure seed quality, they also serve as the basis for proprietary ownership, which can exclude farmer seeds from formal recognition.

There are several assumptions underlying current seed laws and policies. One is that only certified seeds are of good quality. Another is that farmers are best served by receiving varieties developed by professional breeders, treating them as passive end-users of innovation. Additionally, farmers are often

viewed as a homogenous group driven solely by economic motives. These assumptions have led to poor adoption rates of formally released varieties. For example, a study in the Philippines found that out of 74 rice varieties released between 1991 and 2004, only 34 were grown by farmers, and just 10 were commonly used.

The misalignment between formal breeding programs and farmers' needs has resulted in differential effects across farming populations, limited impact over time and space, and questionable cost-effectiveness. These dynamics have paved the way for corporate concentration in the seed sector, leading to higher seed costs and reduced accessibility for smallholder farmers.

Seed development, production, exchange, and sale are integral parts of dynamic farmer-managed seed systems. These systems are vital for maintaining seed diversity and ensuring food sovereignty. Current seed policies, often modeled after those in developed countries, do not align with the realities of these dynamic systems. Effective policymaking must be grounded in an understanding of both formal and informal seed systems. Farmers have the potential not only to secure their local seed systems but also to support communities facing greater challenges. Seed legislation should reflect the needs of smallholder farmers and provide incentives for breeders, including farmer breeders, without restricting access to seeds.



Image 1: Normita Ignacio presenting on national seed laws in the Philippines.



The more a seed system recognizes and supports farmers as stewards of a seed system for all of humankind, the more this system fulfils people's human rights.

- Michael Fakhri, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

DEVELOPMENTS IN PLANT VARIETY PROTECTION: THE ASIAN CONTEXT (KARINA YONG, THIRD WORLD NETWORK)

The World Trade Organization's TRIPS Agreement, specifically Article 27.3(b), mandates that member countries provide protection for plant varieties. However, it allows flexibility in how this is achieved—through patents, a sui generis system, or a combination of both. Importantly, the agreement does not require countries to join the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV). This gives governments the freedom to design plant variety protection (PVP) systems tailored to their unique agricultural needs and priorities.

UPOV91 is more comprehensive than UPOV78 and offers broader protection, covering all genetic resources, products, and semi-products, and is designed to be less restrictive for farmers. However, membership in UPOV91 varies globally. For instance, in Asia, only Singapore and a few other countries are members, while Argentina, Brazil, and China have not adopted UPOV91. Countries like Honduras and Colombia have declared their Plant Breeder's Rights (PBR) laws unenforceable, indicating challenges in implementing international standards. Conversely, the Netherlands and Japan are among the most active members of UPOV91, actively promoting and enforcing its provisions.

CONCERNS SURROUNDING UPOV

Despite this flexibility, the UPOV 1991 Convention has become a focal point of controversy. Its rigid, one-size-fits-all legal framework restricts countries from adapting the system to reflect local interests or align with other international treaties. The convention grants extensive monopoly rights to breeders for 20 to 25 years, with very limited exceptions. Farmers' rights are particularly constrained—especially their ability to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seeds. These activities, vital to smallholder farmers, are often prohibited or subject to royalty payments. Furthermore, the convention lacks mechanisms to prevent biopiracy or to support laws that protect indigenous genetic resources.

The uniformity requirement under UPOV is also problematic. It incentivizes the narrowing of agricultural genetic diversity, which undermines sustainability and resilience—especially critical in the face of climate change. The rules around Essential Derived Varieties (EDVs) create a double standard that allows commercial breeders to exploit local varieties while limiting farmers' ability to breed using traditional selection techniques.

There is growing concern over misleading narratives used to promote UPOV. Claims that joining UPOV leads to better seed quality, increased yields, or improved market access are often unfounded. For example, Vietnam's rice yield improvements occurred long before it joined UPOV, and there are no PVP applications for sweet potatoes in the country. Additionally, assertions that smallholder farmers will not face legal consequences under UPOV are contradicted by documented cases of harassment and prosecution.

Many experts argue that developing countries should avoid joining UPOV 1991 and instead develop their own sui generis PVP systems. These alternatives can better support local agriculture, protect farmers' rights, and promote biodiversity. Countries like India, Malaysia, and Thailand have successfully implemented such systems, allowing broader exceptions for farmers and enabling local breeders to seek protection abroad.

THE KENYAN CONTEXT: CULTIVATING THE REALIZATION OF FARMERS' RIGHTS (DANIEL WANJAMA, SEED SAVERS NETWORK KENYA)

The realization of farmers' rights is a critical issue both globally and locally, with direct implications for food security, biodiversity, and community resilience. In Kenya, smallholder farmers are central to agricultural production, making the protection of their rights essential for sustaining livelihoods and promoting agrobiodiversity. The Seed Savers Network, founded by Daniel Wanjama, has played a pivotal role in advancing this cause by conserving farmer-saved seeds, advocating for supportive policies, and building the capacity of farming communities.

Agriculture is the foundation of rural life in Kenya, where over 70 percent of the population resides in rural areas, and more than 85 percent depend on farming for their livelihood. Despite cultivating small plots of land, these farmers produce approximately 75 percent of the country's food. Notably, more than 80 percent of the seeds used in Kenya come from farmer-managed systems rather than commercial seed companies. These systems are vital for preserving genetic diversity, ensuring crop adaptability, and maintaining traditional knowledge.

A defining feature of Kenya's agriculture is that over 80 percent of the seeds used are sourced from farmer-managed systems rather than commercial seed companies. These farmer-managed seed systems are critical for preserving genetic diversity, ensuring crop adaptability, and sustaining traditional knowledge systems. Kenya is a signatory to international frameworks that shape seed policy and farmers' rights. Kenya adopted UPOV91 and enact seed laws through the Plant Breeders Rights and Seed and Plant Varieties Act, while the country has also ratified the ITPGRFA and Article 11(3b) of the Constitution clearly recognizes Article 9 of the ITPGRFA in the Bill of Rights.

CONCERNS SURROUNDING UPOV

There is a clash between the recognition of Farmers' Rights and the implementation of the current Seed Act. The Seed Act prohibits sale and exchange of farm-saved seeds. There are issues surrounding the promotion of biopiracy with no apparent recognition of seed origin. With 70 percent of commercial seeds and 85 percent of vegetable seeds being imported, it does not seem the adoption of UPOV91 is working, whose intention is supposedly to increase local seed sector development and enhanced production.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Seed Savers Network has achieved significant milestones in addressing these challenges. It has established 121 community seedbanks across Kenya, which serve as living repositories of traditional crop varieties. Over 1,000 crop accessions have been documented and preserved in seed and gene banks, ensuring their availability for future generations. Farmers actively participate in these conservation efforts, contributing their knowledge and engaging in research.

Capacity building is another cornerstone of the Seed Savers Network's work. Through farmer-to-farmer trainings and quarterly Seed Schools, farmers gain technical skills in seed saving, selection, and conservation. These initiatives empower farmers to manage their own seed systems with confidence and independence. In terms of policy and advocacy, the Network has supported legal actions defending farmers' rights, contributed to the review of the Seed and Plant Varieties Act, and engaged in the

development of access and benefit-sharing regulations. It has also facilitated the delivery of over 1,000 crop accessions to the National Genebank, linking community conservation with national efforts. At the grassroots level, Mashinani Seed Fairs held in 115 locations have reached over 5,000 people, providing platforms for farmers to exchange and celebrate indigenous seeds. Additionally, more than 2,000 households in arid and semi-arid regions have received locally adapted seeds, enhancing their resilience to climate change.

Several lessons have emerged from this journey. Farmer-led advocacy is essential for visibility and influence in policymaking. Collaboration with government, civil society, and international partners strengthens impact and drives systemic change. Moreover, aligning global policies with local realities ensures that international treaties like ITPGRFA deliver tangible benefits to communities.

SEED POLICY & PRACTICE WORKSHOPS

Four workshop sessions were held on topics related to seed policy and practice, with an expert facilitator leading the discussion. The workshop sessions were intended for participants to share their own country contexts and experiences, and to answer a pre-defined set of questions.



GROUP 1

Intellectual Property Rights



GROUP 3

Farmer Variety Registration



GROUP 2

Agrobiodiversity in Policy



GROUP 4

Policy for FMSS



Image 2: Workshop in session.



INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

COUNTRY CONTEXTS:

ZIMBABWE: Seed laws revision, legal framework on farmer varieties registration with multi stakeholder consultative processes and plant breeders' rights revision.

THAILAND: reviewing the seed policies with provisions made on conservation and sustainable use in the context of the Plant Treaty (participatory breeding), farmers rights and having access and benefit sharing mechanisms.

MALAYSIA: has a write up on how to establish farmers rights and ABS in considerations and inclusion of farmers in the formulation.

INDONESIA: criminalization of farmers based on laws restricting the reuse of seed.

VIETNAM: is a member of UPOV91 but has not been able to implement these guidelines. Over 300 seed clubs had been supplying seed countrywide with the government depending on these for the supply of seed.

Countries with interests in adopting UPOV91 need to harmonize national laws for suitability, especially in contexts where Free Trade Agreements are concerned.

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the Asia Pacific are exempted until 2034 – and could therefore use this opportunity to develop supportive/farmer-centric PVP laws.

LESSONS

- ▶ Making allies with and participating in consultative processes.
- ▶ Inclusion of farmers in the policy formulation processes/ dialogues Inclusion of private sector in the conversation discourse- for awareness and buy in.
- ▶ Formulating technical working groups to engage on dialogues to have a broader consultative group.
- ▶ Starting with the development of a seed policy, which can be developed into a seed law.
- ▶ Negotiated text during seed law formulation processes to include conservation and sustainable use in the context of the Plant Treaty (participatory breeding), farmers rights and having access and benefit sharing mechanisms.

CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

- DSI is unregulated, not tracked and its implications on farmers rights and access and benefit sharing mechanisms.
- Cases where farmers are criminalized on reports of reuse of seeds which they may be unaware of through national laws.
- The continued need for patenting of materials damaging public research for public good.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ Take a hard stance - no patenting of life forms.
- ◆ For countries developing Plant Variety Protection Laws, APBREBES has developed guidelines to coming up with a model sui generis law, and the FAO has developed voluntary guidelines for the formulation of seed laws. Model law to include FRs.
- ◆ Working on linkages between countries and learning from each other and having a regional platform to pull resources, share knowledge and lessons learned.
- ◆ UPOV91 cannot be a blanket solution – it is not suitable for many contexts, and it is highly inefficient when adopted in the Global South. The production systems and culture are inherently different from countries in the Global North. Seed is identified as our cultural identity and its diversity is key for resilient community systems.
- ◆ Exploring further regulations for access for open-source seeds.



AGROBIODIVERSITY IN POLICY

Agrobiodiversity is crucial in improving food and nutrition security, climate resilience, and rural livelihoods. Integrating agrobiodiversity goals into national and international policy frameworks offers a strategic pathway to empower farmers, protect indigenous knowledge, and promote agroecological transformation. This thematic discussion outlines key areas where policy can support and strengthen farmer-led seed initiatives.

MANAGING AGROBIODIVERSITY: A FARMER-CENTRIC IMPERATIVE

To effectively manage agrobiodiversity, policies must prioritize farmer participation and leadership. Investing in participatory breeding programs enables farmers to develop climate-resilient varieties tailored to local conditions. This approach not only enhances genetic diversity but also builds farmers' capacity to innovate and adapt.

Support from duty bearers—governments, institutions, and international bodies—is essential. They must establish mechanisms that facilitate the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity, ensuring that policies reflect a farmer-centric ethos rather than industrial bias.

ADDRESSING IN-SITU CONSTRAINTS AND POLICY GAPS

CONFLICTING LAWS often undermine farmer-led initiatives, creating legal ambiguity around seed saving and exchange.

LACK OF DEDICATED AGROBIODIVERSITY POLICIES, with a prevailing bias toward industrial agriculture, marginalizes traditional practices.

GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS can further complicate access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing arrangements.

These challenges necessitate a rethinking of legal and institutional frameworks to align with the realities of farmer-managed systems.

ENGAGEMENT FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Strengthening farmer-managed seed systems requires multi-stakeholder collaboration. CSOs and farmers must work together to build movements that advocate for agrobiodiversity and seed sovereignty. CSBs should be recognized and supported as custodians of local genetic resources.

A multi-sectoral approach—engaging agriculture, environment, education, and trade sectors—can amplify impact. Farmer Field Schools (FFS) offer a powerful platform for experimentation, knowledge exchange, and empowerment, enabling farmers to find local solutions to global challenges.

A transformative shift in agricultural policy and practice is needed—one that centers agroecology and agrobiodiversity. This shift requires:

- ▷ **POLITICAL WILL** to reorient policies toward ecological and farmer-led approaches.
- ▷ **SOCIO-CULTURAL RECOGNITION** of indigenous knowledge and practices as vital to biodiversity conservation.
- ▷ **ECONOMIC STRATEGIES** that develop inclusive value chains and reward biodiversity stewardship.
- ▷ **POSITION AGROECOLOGY AS A CORE PATHWAY**, not a marginal alternative.
- ▷ **DEVELOP A NATIONAL AGROECOLOGY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN** that integrates agrobiodiversity and farmer-managed seed systems.
- ▷ **STRENGTHEN DATA COLLECTION** to build evidence for policy advocacy and influence.
- ▷ **ESTABLISH BENEFIT-SHARING MECHANISMS** that protect farmers' rights, especially in the face of emerging threats like Digital Sequencing Information (DSI), which risks undermining traditional custodianship. This issue must be addressed by the Conference of the Parties (CoP) and other global governance bodies.



Image 3: Workshop group discussing farmer variety registration.



FARMER VARIETY REGISTRATION

1. What are possible alternatives to the requirements of Distinct, Uniform, and Stable (DUS)? How to register diversity and not uniformity?
 - ◆ Local Farmer Variety Registration (FVR) which allows for registration upon recognition of a distinct trait (such as employed in Nepal)
 - ◆ Development of a system to register heterogeneous varieties, such as in the EU with the development of the Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on Organic Heterogeneous Material (OHM)
 - ◆ Drafting a policy for traditional variety registration at the national level; integrating farmer and traditional varieties into National Seed Policy.
 - ◆ Notification system of diversified/not uniform varieties.
2. Benefits and drawbacks of different models
 - ◆ Quality Declared Seed (QDS) is only for registered varieties.
 - ◆ Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is good for organic varieties.
3. How can the capacity of communities be developed?
 - ◆ Through Farmer Field Schools (FFS) which provide training and availability of land to engage in participatory plant breeding
 - ◆ The management of local varieties can be conducted at sites such as CSBs, whereby community members can keep inventory, classify/characterise, and undertake evaluation of seed varieties.
4. Incentive mechanisms for farmers?
 - ◆ Farmer/community recognition for the variety developed.
 - ◆ Royalties can be paid towards the community that developed and registered the variety.



POLICY FOR FMSS

Globally, there is growing recognition that policies must formally acknowledge and support FMSS as complementary to formal seed systems.

To strengthen FMSS, policy frameworks should institutionalize recognition of these systems at both national and local levels. Governments need to integrate FMSS into procurement policies and ensure that farmers' rights are upheld. Specific measures include:

- Developing guidelines for quality assurance and certification tailored to FMSS.
- Creating enabling environments through supportive legislation and financial incentives.
- Promoting FMSS through awareness campaigns and capacity-building programs.
- Linking FMSS with public distribution systems to enhance food security.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- ▶ Co-design of seed & agroecology policies to directly involve farmer groups and CSOs to ensure that FMSS language and priorities are integrated into national frameworks.
- ▶ Evidence generation: national data on FMSS contributions to seed supply, climate resilience, and livelihoods should be compiled and disseminated through policy briefs, dialogues, and workshops.
- ▶ Engagement with parliamentary committees on Agriculture, Environment, and Budget should be strategic—organizing field visits for Members of Parliament to witness FMSS initiatives firsthand helps translate advocacy into political commitment. On the regional front, cross-border platforms and Communities of Practice offer opportunities for knowledge exchange and harmonization of supportive regulatory frameworks. At the local level, piloting district-based initiatives demonstrates practical results that can later be scaled nationally.

COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

- ▶ Policy transformation thrives on visibility and public understanding. Coordinated communication strategies can help FMSS gain the recognition it deserves. Policy briefs and fact sheets tailored for policymakers and parliamentary committees can simplify technical information into actionable insights
- ▶ Seed fairs and exhibitions provide practical platforms to showcase farmer innovations while engaging decision-makers directly. Editorials and opinion pieces timed with key agricultural events or parliamentary sessions can further influence public debate. Social media campaigns carrying messages such as “Seed is Life” and “Protect, Conserve, and Share” create momentum and citizen engagement. In addition, engaging influential champions both political and cultural can amplify FMSS voices in policy spaces, while supporting journalists with evidence packs ensures accurate and positive coverage in the media.

POLICY–PRACTICE LINKAGES

- ▶ Public/institutional funds should be allowed towards the establishment and running of community seed banks, farmer field schools, and participatory plant breeding programmes.
- ▶ Supporting on-farm quality assurance and community-based certification systems enhances trust and marketability of farmer seeds (such as Quality Declared Seed or by Participatory Guarantee Systems).



REVISITING THE OPENING QUESTIONS



Q HOW DO WE ACHIEVE A *SUI GENERIS* SYSTEM THAT RECOGNIZES PBR AND FMSS?

Countries should establish flexible legal mechanisms that explicitly recognize farmers' rights to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seeds, as enshrined in **Article 9 of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)**. A *sui generis* approach would therefore include:

LEGAL RECOGNITION OF FARMER VARIETIES through simplified registration systems that allow local and heterogeneous varieties to be officially acknowledged without burdensome certification procedures.

DUAL-TRACK PROTECTION FRAMEWORKS where PBR laws coexist with community rights laws, ensuring that local varieties remain in the public domain and free from restrictive patents.

PARTICIPATORY POLICY FORMULATION involving farmers, CSOs, researchers, and seed authorities to co-develop regulations that reflect the realities of smallholder production.

INTEGRATION WITH NATIONAL SEED POLICIES AND AGROECOLOGY STRATEGIES, such as Tanzania's National Ecological Organic Agriculture Strategy (NEOAS), which already emphasizes sustainable input systems including farmer-managed seeds.

REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND LEARNING through the African Union and regional blocs (e.g., SADC, EAC, COMESA) to harmonize standards while respecting national sovereignty and community seed practices.

In essence, a *sui generis* system must be context-specific, ensuring the coexistence of innovation protection and community rights, while promoting access, equity, and biodiversity conservation.



Image 4: Discussion following the presentation on national seed laws and policy in the Philippines.

RETURNING TO THE OPENING QUESTIONS



Q HOW TO EMPOWER FARMERS TO GAIN CONTROL OVER LOCAL SEED VALUE CHAINS?

Empowering farmers to take control of local seed value chains requires interventions that address both structural and capacity-related gaps.

- ▶ Policy recognition: FMSS to be integrated into national agricultural policy with legal provisions that guarantee farmers' rights to produce, exchange, and market their own seed.
- ▶ Investment in capacity building to enhance farmers' technical skills by funding Farmer Field Schools, community seed banks, and community-based seed cooperatives.
- ▶ Strengthening infrastructure and market linkages ensures that farmer-produced seeds can reach both local and regional markets, resulting in the development of local value chains.
- ▶ Enhancing farmers' participation in research and innovation for instance through participatory plant breeding and variety trials bridges the gap between scientific research and local realities. When farmers are co-innovators, they gain leverage and knowledge to negotiate better within the value chain.
- ▶ Advocacy and coalition building remain central. Engaging parliamentary committees, ministries of agriculture, and local government authorities helps to institutionalize FMSS in policy.



Image 5: Community Seed Bank World Café session.

II. COMMUNITY SEED BANKS

Community-level seed saving initiatives have been around for several decades. In recent years, attention is increasingly being turned to the multiple functions and roles that CSBs can play in conserving agrobiodiversity, in bridging the gap between the researcher and the farmer, and in promoting community cohesion, to name a few. This second chapter provides details of the four presentations given on different aspects of CSBs, and a summary of the points discussed during the World Café session.

COMMUNITY SEED BANKS: CASES OF BEST PRACTICE & INDIA META-ANALYSIS (REGINE ANDERSEN, FNI)

The DIVERSIFARM-India project (2024 – 2026), “Unfolding the Potentials of Community Seed Banks for Food and Nutrition Security among Smallholder Farmers in India through the Realization of Farmers’ Rights”, aims to strengthen the contributions of community seed banks to seed-, food- and nutrition security and improved livelihoods among small-scale farmers and contribute to scaling up best practices – with focus on one pilot state, Odisha. The project partners are the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation and the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI). The Indian National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources is waiting for official clearance to join the project as a partner.

DIVERSIFARM-India was developed following the conclusion of research project DIVERSIFARM, which investigated the contribution of community seed banks (CSBs) to improved seed and food security and livelihoods in Malawi, Ethiopia, and Nepal. Conducted between 2020 and 2024, the project “Pathways to food security, poverty alleviation and livelihoods through the implementation of farmers’ rights to crop genetic diversity” sought to identify success factors and systematic barriers in CSB operations and explore how best practices could be scaled out. The project involved in-depth case studies of 17 representative CSBs and interviews with 550 informants. The partners consisted of the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (project leader) University of Cape Town, Mekelle University, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (Nepal), German Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Norwegian University of Life Sciences. Results from DIVERSIFARM were presented at a side-event at the Ninth Session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in New Delhi in 2022. Representatives from the Indian Government were present and asked why such a project was not executed in India. Also, the Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi was present and invited the FNI to discuss a possibility to develop a similar project in India. This is how DIVERSIFARM-India emerged. The project proposal was developed by the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI) in collaboration with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research – National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (ICAR-NBPGR) and the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF). As ICAR-NBPGR is still awaiting clearance to join the project as a partner, the project is currently carried out by the FNI and MSSRF.

The key activities of the project are the following:

- Mapping and survey of CSBs in India
- Developing a CSB typology for India
- Carrying out case studies of successful CSBs of major types with identification of success factors and challenges
- Carrying out capacity building measures based on the findings
- Shaping enabling environments in terms of legislation, policies and institutional network

At the outset, the project involved a literature and document review to establish the current state of knowledge on CSBs in India. This was followed by a nationwide mapping exercise to identify existing CSBs across India and a survey to explore their features, in order to understand their distribution,

characteristics, and potential for strengthening seed security. The data collected was also used to develop a typology of CSBs, enabling targeted interventions and support strategies. A key output of this effort is an [interactive GIS-based Atlas of Community Seed Banks](#) in India that visually represents the distribution and attributes of CSBs across the country.

As for the analysis, a total of 900 CSBs had been identified by August 2025, of which 605 have been mapped so far, with 295 remaining. Of these, around 400 have been surveyed, and the survey continues until the end of 2026. As a focus has been on Odisha as a case state, this is where the highest number of active CSBs has been found so far (459), followed by Assam (50), Telangana (47), and Madhya Pradesh (42). However, as the survey goes on, more states will be covered and to a greater extent. The majority of the CSBs (66%) were founded after 2020, reflecting a recent surge in interest and support. Another 32% were established between 2011 and 2020, while only 2% were set up between 2000 and 2010. A negligible number (0.3%) existed before 2000, with the oldest known CSB dating back to 1997. In terms of crop focus, rice was the most prioritized crop among CSBs, accounting for 30% of the total. Millet followed closely at 29%, with vegetables at 24% and legumes at 18%. This crop selection reflects both dietary staples and climate-resilient varieties important for smallholder farmers.

In developing a typology of CSBs in India nine metrics were considered: activities, promoting organization, governance/management, seed distribution, priority crop, gender distribution among members, objectives, size, and operational structure. Governance /management was selected as the key parameter for the typology. On this background 7 types were identified, i.e. governance/management based on member organizations, self-help groups, individuals, registered organizations, farmer producer organisations, traditional village councils and external cooperatives. This framework allows for nuanced understanding and categorization of CSBs, facilitating tailored support and policy development. So far in the survey, the most common model (41%) involved CSBs managed directly by their members. Self-help groups (SHGs) accounted for 40%, while individual farmers managed 9% of CSBs. Registered organizations and farmer producer organizations (FPOs) managed 6% and 2% respectively. A small number were overseen by traditional village councils or external cooperatives.

To support knowledge sharing and policy advocacy, the project launched a national platform at www.communityseedbanks.in. This website serves as a hub for CSBs and their supporting organizations, offering resources, success stories, and connectivity. It includes the interactive atlas, state-wise CSB data, and guidance for scaling successful models. The case studies on success factors have been carried out, and the data are currently being processed and analysed. The results will be posted at the CSB platform in 2026 – along with all the other results from DIVERSIFARM-India.



Image 6: Santosh Shrestha presenting on the role of CSBs in Nepal.

BRIDGING ON-FARM, EX-SITU & IN-SITU CONSERVATION AND UTILIZATION IN NEPAL (BAL KRISHNA JOSHI, NEPAL GENE BANK, NARC & SANTOSH SHRESTHA, OXFAM NOVIB)

Agrobiodiversity in Nepal encompasses six components—crops, livestock, forages, agro-insects, agro-microbes, and aquatic species—with four subcomponents: domesticated, semi-domesticated, wild relatives, and wild edibles, all integrated with traditional knowledge and environmental factors. However, the expansion of private companies and CGIAR-bred exotic varieties has rapidly displaced native landraces, leading to a severe erosion of Nepal's genetic diversity—estimated at 40–100% loss depending on species and site. Native genotypes remain poorly utilized, as 85% of them are neglected or underutilized species (NUS) not included in formal seed systems. Farmers' varieties are excluded from registration and markets, while incentives and services favor released and registered (R&R) exotic varieties. With 95% of germplasm used in research and development originating from outside the country, Nepal's agriculture has become heavily dependent on external technologies and seeds, resulting in a shift from genetically diverse, community-managed systems to uniform, monogenotype-based farming. The prevailing focus on orthodox seeds has further marginalized other vital components of agrobiodiversity.

To reverse this trend, the concept of Community Gene/Seed Banks (CGB/CSB) aims to bridge on-farm, ex-situ, and in-situ conservation and utilization by integrating all six agrobiodiversity components. Community seed banks generally conserve orthodox seeds, while community gene banks encompass broader genetic resources. Three operational models are envisioned: (A) village-level community gene/seed bank (each household in a village conserve different landraces i.e. consisting of many household genebanks), (B) centralized community gene/seed bank (conservation collectively in a single building or central site), and (C) hybrid or mixed model community gene/seed bank (combining above both

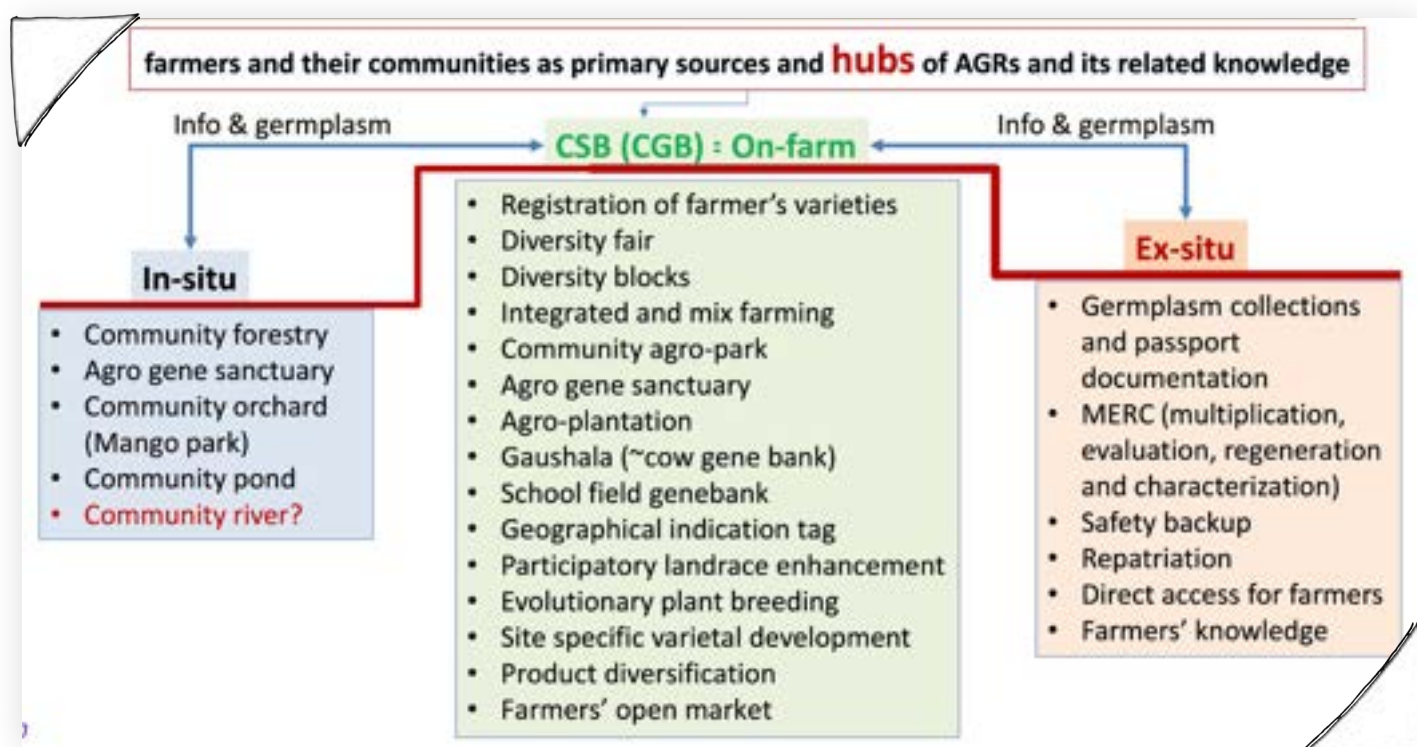


Figure 2: Schema of CSB's role in bridging ex-situ and in-situ conservation.

approaches). Bridging mechanisms include participatory landrace enhancement and conservation, registration and repatriation of native varieties, establishment of agro-gene sanctuaries, banana trail and field genebanks, red zoning and listing, community orchards, diversity field schools, school field genebank, agro insect field genebank, geographical indication tagging, safety backups, and open farmers' markets, multiplication, evaluation, regeneration and characterization of genebank accessions.

The overarching principle is that genetic diversity is directly proportional to agricultural resilience, enhancing climate adaptation and sustainability. Farmers, who have maintained genetic identity of landraces across generations, should be empowered through legal registration of native landraces in formal systems as a conservation strategy and to assert their farmers' rights. Moving toward localized seed systems and globalized product systems, Nepal must establish mechanisms that allow marketing of native and local technologies and products without undue taxation or legal barriers, while ensuring incentives and benefit-sharing for custodial farmers. Conservation incentives, valuation of native genotypes based on ecological yield, and the use of nature-positive storage materials (such as bamboo, clay, fiber, and wood) can further strengthen this integrated approach toward resilient, farmer-owned, and biodiversity-rich agricultural systems. Farmers' rights should encompass the entire spectrum of agrobiodiversity, with the seed cycle fully owned and managed by farmers themselves.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO PLANT BREEDING & CSBS IN ZAMBIA (EARTHLORE & CTDT ZAMBIA)

EMPOWERING FARMERS THROUGH PARTICIPATORY BREEDING AND SEED SYSTEMS: ZAMBIA'S EXPERIENCE IN REALIZING FARMERS' RIGHTS.

Across Zambia, smallholder farmers play a vital role in conserving and developing crop diversity that sustains both local communities and national food systems. Yet, their contributions often remain invisible in formal agricultural frameworks. While Zambia is party to the Treaty, which guarantees Farmers' Rights to save, use, exchange, and sell seed, the country's seed laws still favour formal commercial systems.

Under the existing law, only seed from officially registered varieties can be sold or distributed. Seed of farmer varieties is treated as grain, leaving millions of smallholder farmers outside the formal market. This imbalance threatens not only farmers' livelihoods but also the diversity and resilience of local crops that underpin Zambia's food security.

The Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT) in Zambia has been working to bridge this gap by strengthening FMSS. Through participatory plant breeding, seed multiplication, and community seed banks, CTDT is helping farmers reclaim their role as breeders, custodians, and distributors of diverse local varieties.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES: GIVING FARMERS BACK THEIR POWER



Image 7: EarthLore and CTDZ Zambia (SKI).

At the heart of CTDZ's work lies a participatory process where farmers identify, improve, and develop the varieties that matter most to them. Guided by Farmer Field Schools (FFS), the process begins with farmers defining their breeding objectives, traits such as early maturity, drought tolerance, high oil content, or resistance to local pests and diseases. Depending on the presence or absence of these traits in available crops, farmers then decide which participatory breeding method to use.

1. PARTICIPATORY VARIETY ENHANCEMENT (PVE)

PVE is used when the desired traits already exist in local crops but are not well expressed. Farmers enhance these varieties by selecting the best-performing plants that show the preferred characteristics. This process helps "clean" and improve varieties that may have deteriorated over time.

In Zambia, CTDZ has supported the enhancement of four maize varieties through PVE, with 263 farmers involved. The work has revitalized local maize types to meet farmers' production needs while maintaining their adaptability to local conditions. As one farmer noted, "We are improving what already belongs to us."

2. PARTICIPATORY VARIETY SELECTION (PVS)

Where the desired traits exist in varieties from nearby communities or research institutions, farmers use PVS. Here, they test and compare varieties to identify those that perform best under their conditions.

Through this approach, more than 1,300 farmers across Rufunsa, Shibuyunji, Chikankata, and Chirundu have evaluated sorghum, groundnuts, millet, and cowpeas. Twenty-one promising lines have been selected, blending local adaptation with modern breeding outputs.

3. PARTICIPATORY VARIETY DEVELOPMENT (PVD)

PVD takes participation a step further. It is used when no single variety possesses all the desired traits. Farmers and breeders cross varieties to create new combinations, bringing together traits such as high

yield, early maturity, and pest resistance.

So far, Zambian farmers have developed seven new sorghum lines and one maize variety through PVD. Although these varieties are not yet officially released due to regulatory barriers, farmers have already adopted them widely, demonstrating community acceptance and confidence in their innovation.

SEED PRODUCTION AND COMMUNITY SEED BANKS

Once suitable varieties are identified, farmers move to seed multiplication. Over 400 farmers have been trained and over 270 registered as seed producers with SCCI, producing nearly 30 tonnes of quality seed (beans, maize, and groundnuts) between 2022 and 2023.

However, because only registered varieties qualify for official certification, most farmer-developed seeds remain uncertified. To maintain quality and integrity, CTDI promotes peer-to-peer seed inspections, allowing farmers to collectively ensure standards for purity and germination.

The Community Seed Banks (CSBs) serve as both conservation centers and local seed markets. Farmers deposit seed after harvest and can borrow from the bank at the next planting season. These seed banks also act as hubs for seed testing, display, and exchange ensuring a culture of local seed management and sharing. In Shibuyunji, for instance, the CSB has become a local symbol of resilience and innovation.

CHALLENGES IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Despite these advances, Zambia's seed regulatory framework still limits the full realization of Farmers' Rights. Because the law recognizes only registered varieties, most farmer-produced seed cannot legally be sold, distributed, or certified. The current registration system emphasizes Distinctness, Uniformity, and Stability (DUS), criteria that exclude the genetic diversity inherent in farmer varieties.

THE WAY FORWARD: OPTIONS FOR REALIZING FARMERS' RIGHTS

To truly recognize and protect Farmers' Rights, Zambia and other countries in the region can take several steps:

- ▶ Establish a Farmer Variety Registration Framework, allowing registration based on practical field performance and community use, not rigid DUS standards.
- ▶ Delegate Registration Oversight, institutions like the Zambia Agricultural Research Institute (ZARI) could manage farmer variety registration and documentation.
- ▶ Adopt a Dual Quality System, blending formal certification with community-based quality assurance models such as Quality Declared Seed (QDS).
- ▶ Integrate FMSS into the National Seed Policy, ensuring that farmer varieties have space within official programs and seed catalogues.

The Zambian experience demonstrates that farmers are not just seed users, they are innovators and breeders in their own right. Participatory plant breeding, community seed banks, and localized seed production show that with the right support, farmers can strengthen biodiversity, improve livelihoods, and make their seed systems more resilient.

Recognizing and supporting farmer-led efforts is key to turning the principles of the International Treaty into reality. Farmers' Rights will not be realized through legal reforms alone, but through practical action that values local knowledge, nurtures diversity, and puts farmers at the heart of seed systems.

PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY: CBS IN EUROPE (RICCARDO BOCCI, RSR)

KEY ELEMENTS FROM THREE CASE STUDIES

For more than 40 years, CSBs around the world have emerged as part of the so-called informal seed system typically driven by farmers and gardeners who sought to preserve agrobiodiversity. The first CSBs were established in the 1970s in regions such as the Global North and Australia, often emerging as networks of seed savers or similar grassroots organizations. In the Global South, CSBs began to appear in the late 1980s, largely supported by international organisations and NGOs. In Europe, the Heritage Seed Library in the United Kingdom was among the earliest, founded in 1975. This was followed by other initiatives in the 1980s, including De Oerakker in the Netherlands, HDRA in the UK, Arche Noah in Austria, PSR in Switzerland, SESAM in Sweden, and VEN in Germany. Since the year 2000, the number of CSBs has grown rapidly across Europe.



Image 8: Riccardo Bocci presenting CSB models in Europe.

CSBs vary widely in form and function, ranging from formal institutions to informal community-managed spaces. They serve as repositories of agricultural diversity and are often distinguished by whether they operate as centralized “banks” or decentralized “houses.” CSBs can advance breeding objectives and priorities, training and advocacy through collective action. CSBs in Europe are increasingly recognised by the plant genetic resources for food and agriculture community for their role in the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity in complementarity with the ex-situ management system. Genebanks and CSBs should not be considered as competitors but as complementary actors, each having specific objectives, targets and rules. Perhaps the most relevant difference is that genebanks are committed to the long-term conservation of PGRFA and to granting facilitated access to a wide range of users, while

CSBs aim at short-term conservation and easy availability of seed for the aims of the community managing the CSB. This complementarity means that together, they can contribute to creating inclusive and integrated conservation strategies at national and regional levels.

OPPORTUNITIES

Different pathways are available for CSBs to sustain themselves. Rete Semi Rurali operates on a project-based model, while Swiss-based Pro Specie Rara receives support from private foundations and seed marketing. Some are sustained by large networks of individual members—Arche Noah has more than 5,000 individual members—who contribute to seed exchange and conservation efforts. Engaging in seed marketing also acts as a source of financial income. These models demonstrate the potential for CSBs to be both community-driven and economically viable.

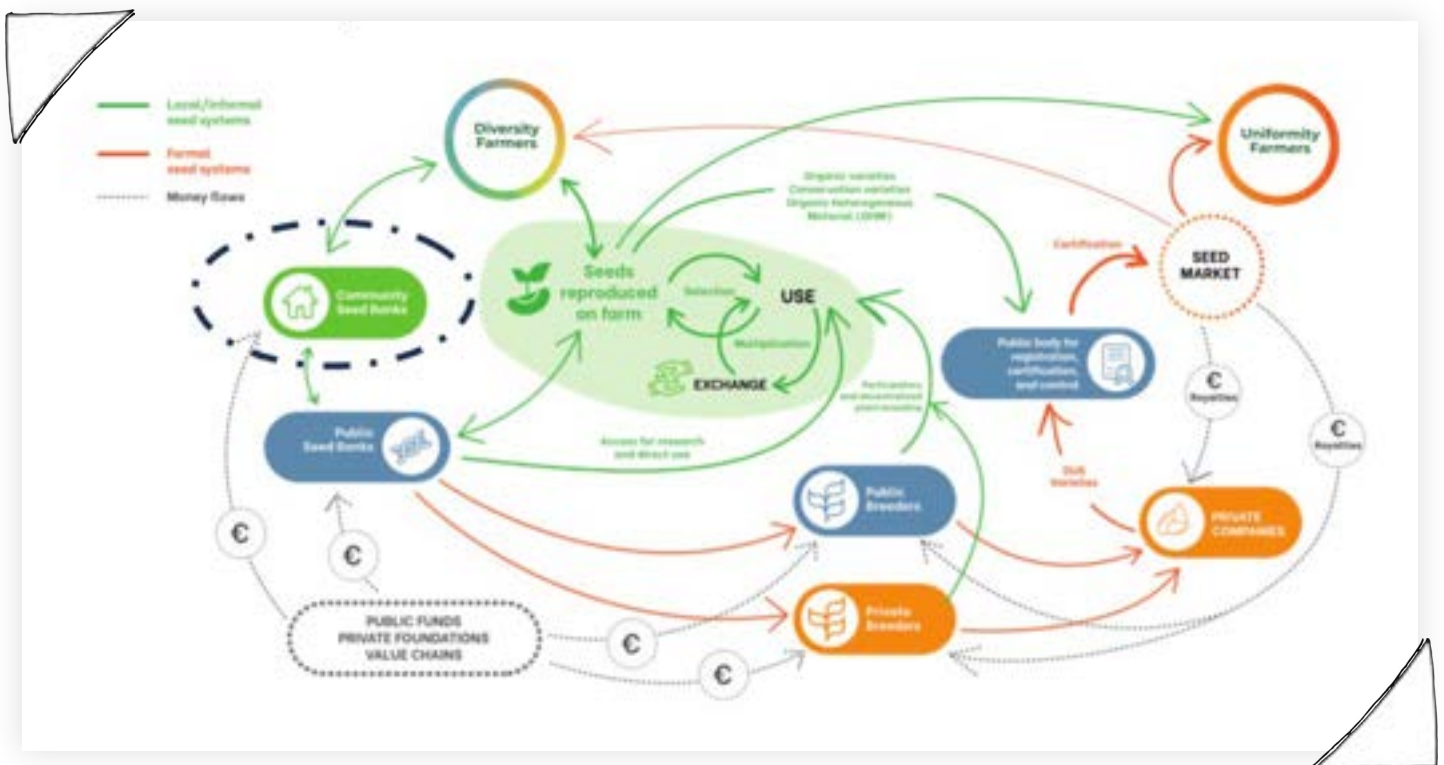


Figure 3: Schema of the local and formal seed systems in relation to institutions, funders, and use.

The role of informal farmers' seed systems, including CSBs, must be more widely recognized and supported. This requires an enabling political and legal environment that acknowledges the value of community-managed agricultural biodiversity. CSBs can play a vital role in implementing farmers' rights, including recognition, participation in decision-making, benefit-sharing, and the development of supportive policies and legislation.



PLENARY DISCUSSION

Are CSBs for commercial purposes in Europe?

Not only, CSBs also test and multiply varieties (new/old from other communities).

Which varieties are being worked on?

Landraces and heterogenous populations accessed through the public domain.

How is Europe navigating the policy environment?

By working outside of UPOV frameworks and engaging in collective action to effect changes.

COMMUNITY SEED BANK WORLD CAFÉ



THEME 1: GOVERNANCE

Management; operations; gender awareness; managing the balance between decentralisation and maintaining cohesion across the district/state level.



THEME 2: INTERLINKAGES

Role of CSB in relation to [inter]national gene banks; sharing of genetic material; establishing relations.



THEME 3: ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Rethinking models of financing; transitioning from donor funding to policy funding.



THEME 4: CSBS IN SOCIETY

Rethinking of CSB approach for the community in changing conditions (urbanisation, demographics, migration, ageing population), and as a source of community cohesion and empowerment.



GOVERNANCE

HOW TO DECENTRALIZE CSBS

Decentralization of CSBs requires empowering local communities and ensuring inclusive participation. This involves creating governance structures that allow decision-making at the grassroots level. Local resource persons should be trained and engaged to manage CSBs effectively. Regulations need to be adapted to support decentralized models, and there should be clear frameworks for accountability. Involvement of farmers in governance processes is essential to maintain transparency and trust.

WOMEN'S ROLE AS SEED GUARDIANS IN CSBS

Women play a critical role in seed conservation and management. To retain this role, CSBs must actively involve women in leadership and operational activities. Training programs should focus on enhancing women's skills in seed selection, storage, and documentation. Policies should recognize women as key custodians of agrobiodiversity and provide incentives for their participation.

COMMON FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT MODELS IN CSBS

Successful CSBs share several characteristics: strong community involvement, participatory governance, and clear accountability mechanisms. They often have partnerships with local organizations and access to technical resources. Inclusivity and transparency in decision-making are central to their success, along with mechanisms for benefit-sharing among members.



INTERLINKAGES

Recognising the role of CSBs as the bridge between in-situ and ex-situ conservation is vital to establishing and improving interlinkages between CSBs and gene banks. Establishing national networks and processes to facilitate the exchange of genetic material between gene banks and CSBs would ensure that communities have access to material to engage in participatory plant breeding programmes and thereby act as the bridging point for ex-situ and in-situ conservation. This entails a relationship based on equal partnership, mutual trust, and joint capacity-building exercises. CSBs and gene banks, in partnership with academic institutions, can engage in participatory and farmer-led research for the development, enhancement, and selection of crop varieties.

ACADEMIA

- ▶ Academia can support FMSS by conducting research on seed diversity, climate resilience, and socio-economic impacts.
- ▶ Collaborative projects should involve farmers in participatory research to ensure relevance and applicability. Universities and research institutions can provide technical training, develop quality standards, and create platforms for knowledge exchange.
- ▶ Evaluation-based policy development and evidence-based advocacy are crucial for scaling FMSS.



ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Economic sustainability of CSBs depends on diversified income streams and supportive policies. Key strategies include:

- ▶ Introducing membership fees, seed sales, and service charges for training and capacity building.
- ▶ Establishing partnerships with local businesses and cooperatives to create market linkages.
- ▶ Leveraging donor support for initial setup while planning for long-term self-reliance.
- ▶ Developing policies that integrate CSBs into national seed systems and provide financial incentives.
- ▶ Ensuring transparency and accountability in financial management to build trust among stakeholders.



CSBS IN SOCIETY

RETHINKING THE CSB APPROACH

CSBs should be viewed not only as seed repositories but as hubs for community development. They can integrate activities such as nutrition education, climate adaptation strategies, and cultural preservation. Networking among CSBs can strengthen resilience and enable resource sharing. Incorporating digital tools for seed cataloging and exchange can modernize operations and attract younger generations.

CSBS AS SOURCES OF COMMUNITY COHESION AND EMPOWERMENT

CSBs foster social solidarity by promoting collective action and shared responsibility. They provide spaces for knowledge exchange and cultural continuity, reinforcing community identity. Empowering marginalized groups, including women and indigenous communities, through CSB participation enhances equity and social justice.



Image 9: CSB World Café session.

III. THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR FMSS

The development of the CoP included defining the objectives, expectations, values, roles and responsibilities of CoP members and ultimately the vision. Below is a summary of steps taken and contributions made by the members during the workshop in developing the Community of Practice.

DEFINING THE BROADER OBJECTIVE OF THE COP

The CoP aims to foster climate-resilient agriculture through ecological principles, emphasizing agrobiodiversity and farmer-led seed systems, while enabling collaborative knowledge creation and exchange.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Members expect to engage in capacity building, knowledge sharing, advocacy, networking, funding opportunities, problem-solving, resource sharing, and effective dissemination of information. The focus is on both global-to-local and local-to-global information flow.

DEFINING COP VALUES

The values that guide the CoP include solidarity, authenticity, inclusivity, transparency, justice, recognition of diversity and provision of safe space for constructive dialogues.

GOVERNANCE

Members are expected to provide technical support, advocate for farmers' rights, co-organize events, contribute to research, engage with various institutions or other Communities of Practice, promote awareness and build capacities of its members, stakeholders and broader public.



Image 10: Defining the vision of the CoP.

THE VISION

The CoP aspires to empower farmers to enable seed sovereignty, promote biodiversity, influence relevant policies, and mainstream farmers' rights within agroecological practices. The participants collaboratively developed and established a clear and actionable long-term vision of the Community of Practice, which has been defined as the following:



Our Community of Practice provides a space for recognising and strengthening farmer-managed seed systems, including community seed banks, through collective learning, knowledge sharing, and meaningful collaboration, thereby contributing to seed sovereignty and food and nutrition security among smallholder farmers and to the realization of Farmers' Rights.

- The Community of Practice for Farmer-Managed Seed Systems, Manila, 2025

Different groups expressed their visions, expectations, and roles within the CoP, the following being a summary of these discussions¹:



GROUP 1

Emphasizes global communication, advocacy for farmers' rights, and knowledge sharing.



GROUP 2

Underlines the need to recognise and implement farmers' rights through building a strong network for advocacy efforts.



GROUP 3

Focuses on policy environments and food sovereignty, highlighting the importance of recognizing and supporting various agricultural frameworks.



GROUP 4

Aims for coordinated stakeholder participation, supportive national policies for farmers, and the effective integration of cop principles in members' programming.

¹ Refer to Group Contributions [here](#).



Image 11: Dr. Lorna Sister presenting on the vision for the CoP's activities.

DEFINING SUCCESS FOR THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Achieving success within the Community of Practice (CoP) involves establishing a vibrant, sustainable network that actively contributes to policy victories and empowers its members. A successful CoP is characterized by a dynamic and engaged community that fosters collaboration, innovation, and shared learning.

KEY INDICATORS OF SUCCESS:

- ▶ **Vibrant Network of the CoP:** An active and interconnected community where members regularly exchange ideas, best practices, and resources, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and mutual support.
- ▶ **A well sustained CoP:** The community maintains its activities over the long term through effective governance, resource management, and ongoing engagement strategies, ensuring resilience and ongoing relevance.
- ▶ **Policy Victories:** The community successfully influences policy decisions, leading to tangible improvements that benefit the broader ecosystem and demonstrate the impact of collective advocacy.
- ▶ **Valued and Empowered Farmers:** Farmers are recognized for their vital role, with opportunities for capacity building, leadership, and active participation in decision-making processes, thereby enhancing their influence and sustainability.
- ▶ **Engagement of the Younger Generation:** The community effectively involves and mentors' younger members, ensuring the continuity of advocacy efforts and fostering innovative approaches to address emerging challenges.

Overall, success in this context is measured by the community's ability to foster collaboration, influence policy, empower its members, and ensure long-term sustainability.

PRACTICE TO POLICY: NEXT STEPS AND STRATEGY

MOBILISATION OF INTERNAL RESOURCES OF THE COP

The participants of the workshop discussed approaches to ensure effectiveness of the Community of Practice which largely depend on the availability and utilization of various resources that support its objectives. These resources were categorized into several key areas, each playing a vital role in strengthening the community's capacity to address shared challenges, build on opportunities and achieve its goals.

SHARED CHALLENGES AND COMMON CONCERNS

Recognising one of the primary resources is the collective understanding of common concerns faced by members in the implementation of Farmers' rights, CSBs and related seed policies. Addressing these issues requires open communication and a willingness to learn from each other's experiences.

HUMAN CAPACITY AND EXPERTISE

Recognising that there is need to build and leverage on CoP members human capacity is crucial. This involves leveraging on individuals within the CoP with solid backgrounds, extensive experience, and in-depth knowledge related to Farmers' Rights (FRs) and seed policies. Such experts are capable of articulating the COP's position on complex issues, providing informed insights, and guiding strategic decision-making. Developing this capacity ensures that the community remains well-informed and capable of influencing policy and practice effectively.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND UTILIZATION OF EXPERTS

Continuous capacity building through training, workshops, and knowledge exchange is essential. Utilizing the expertise of practitioners within the community enhances the collective skill set, promotes best practices, and encourages innovation. Hence the CoP becomes a dynamic platform where members can learn from each other and adapt to emerging challenges.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

The networks between SEARICE, CTD, SKI, PELUM, SEED SAVERS, AFSA, RSR and all the members of the CoP expand the resource base thereby facilitating resource sharing, joint initiatives, and increased influence.

Ultimately, a well-rounded resource framework encompassing shared understanding, human expertise, capacity development, and strategic alliances is vital for the success of the Community of Practice.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE COP

Participants of the Community of Practice (CoP) identified several critical issues that warrant further exploration and action. These issues included:

- ◆ **CSBS AND NATIONAL GENE BANKS** – the need to establish effective linkages between Community Seed Banks (CSBs) and National Gene Banks. Strengthening this connection is essential for ensuring the conservation, management, and accessibility of genetic resources. A key concern is how to effectively integrate CSBs with national gene banks to facilitate resource sharing and collaboration while maintaining the integrity of local seed varieties.
- ◆ **PROTECTION AGAINST BIOPIRACY** – Another significant issue pertains to the protection of farmers' materials and the rights of farmers themselves. There is an ongoing debate on how to safeguard farmers' indigenous seed varieties and genetic resources from potential exploitation or unauthorized access. Developing policies and mechanisms that **SECURE FARMERS' RIGHTS** and prevent the misappropriation of their materials is crucial for promoting equitable benefit-sharing.
- ◆ Furthermore, the **SUSTAINABILITY AND FUNCTIONALITY OF CSBS** being vital for their long-term success. Strategies to enhance their operational capacity, financial sustainability, and community contribution are necessary to ensure that CSBs can continue to serve as vital repositories of local biodiversity.
- ◆ CoP members also suggested addressing **THE HISTORICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO COLLECTIONS OF GENETIC MATERIALS**. Specifically, it can raise awareness about materials collected during the colonial era, examining issues of ownership, consent, and the ethical implications of utilizing such resources in contemporary conservation efforts.

Overall, the issues highlighted speak to the importance of developing comprehensive policies and collaborative frameworks that *support the conservation of genetic resources, protect farmers' rights, and promote the sustainability of community-based seed systems.*



Image 12: Dr. Regine Andersen presenting on CSB Policy to Practise: Evidence from India.

LEARNING TRAJECTORY DEVELOPMENT

What are the most critical learning questions needed for members of the CoP?

UNDERSTANDING AND DOCUMENTATION

1. **What works and what does not work in farmer-managed seed systems (FMSS) and community seed banks (CSBs)?**

PURPOSE: To document practical lessons, innovations, and bottlenecks in seed conservation and exchange systems. This will help members identify best practices that can be scaled and pitfalls to avoid.

2. **What mechanisms can farmers use to balance the conservation of their crop diversity while accessing improved materials from breeding programs and responding to market/government pressures (including GMOs)?**

PURPOSE: To explore practical strategies for ensuring genetic diversity is not eroded while still embracing new opportunities.

3. **How should monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of CSBs and FMSS be conducted, and what are the most appropriate modalities or tools?**

PURPOSE: To compare and test different approaches to M&E that reflect the values of farmers and communities rather than only external indicators.

4. **How can the CoP identify, nurture, and retain champions of farmers' rights (FRs)?**

PURPOSE: To sustain advocacy and leadership within the community by supporting committed individuals who can influence change at multiple levels.

STRENGTHENING SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES

1. **What strategies can strengthen farmer-managed seed systems and help "level them up" to be more resilient, effective, and integrated into national systems?**

PURPOSE: To guide interventions for capacity building, networking, and institutional support.

2. **How can CSBs and farmer seed systems adapt to climate change, particularly regarding seed production and availability?**

PURPOSE: To develop climate-resilient practices and ensure that communities can cope with shifting agro-ecological conditions.

3. **How can CoP members be equipped to develop clear, evidence-based positions and engage effectively in negotiations at local, national, and international levels?**

PURPOSE: To strengthen advocacy capacity, including skills for synthesizing complex issues into actionable messages.

ADVOCACY AND INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGES

1. What does an “enabling environment” for CSBs and FMSS look like, and how can it be advocated for and achieved?

PURPOSE: To define policy, institutional, and financial conditions that sustain community-based seed initiatives.

2. What mechanisms can effectively link CSBs with national genebanks, and what hinders these connections?

PURPOSE: To improve complementarity between community conservation and formal ex-situ conservation systems.

3. What models of sustainability (financial, institutional, social) are most effective for CSBs?

PURPOSE: To identify ways communities can maintain seed banks over the long term without heavy external dependency.

GOVERNANCE AND INCLUSIVENESS

1. How should the CoP itself be organized, structured, and coordinated across regions?

PURPOSE: To clarify governance, roles, and operational mechanisms that will ensure the CoP remains functional and inclusive.

2. How can CoP members best support small-scale farmers with practical strategies for conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity?

PURPOSE: To strengthen the direct service and knowledge-sharing role of the CoP with farmers.

3. How can inclusiveness be ensured in CoP processes so that all voices, including marginalized groups (e.g., women, youth, indigenous peoples), are heard and valued?

PURPOSE: To embed equity and participation in all CoP activities.

IV. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY TOPICS

- CSBs are critical in the implementation of FRs – need to sustain CSBs with investment and financing through public policy that goes beyond the donor-funded model.
- PPB (and FFS approach) is also key (developing climate resilient varieties) in the implementation of FRs and there is a need for long-term funding. PPB work as part of the FMSS and its role in the realisation of FRs.
- Protocol and funding mechanisms for areas affected by conflicts – fragile areas.
- Need to recognize agrobiodiversity stewards – incentives.
- Need for capacity building and a participatory approach to the drafting of regulations/laws in the Global South that adequately reflect the local context and realities of farmers.
- Proposal to establish an academy connecting the community and youth to FMSS.
- Broadening Annex 1 schedule to include opportunity crops – Bioversity Int is already working on this – can the CoP leverage on this work?
- Huge concern regarding the impact, potential and ongoing, of DSI on Farmers' Rights.
- Dichotomy in the application of UPOV91: as countries in the Global South face pressures to adopt UPOV91, the EU is being forced to respond to internal pressure from farmers and civil groups to recognise and protect FRs – what can the CoP do to counter this?

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF FARMERS' RIGHTS

Governments and relevant stakeholders must fully recognize and protect farmers' rights to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seed, as enshrined in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA).

Legal frameworks should explicitly guarantee these rights and shield them from restrictive seed laws or intellectual property regimes that criminalize traditional seed practices.

Awareness-raising campaigns should be undertaken to ensure that both policymakers and farming communities understand these rights and the pathways to exercise and defend them.

FLEXIBLE MECHANISMS FOR FARMER VARIETY REGISTRATION

Develop simplified and flexible procedures for the registration and release of farmer varieties that take into account farmers' innovation, traditional knowledge, and customary laws.

Such mechanisms should avoid overly technical or costly requirements that exclude smallholder farmers and instead recognize participatory plant breeding outcomes.

National seed policies should harmonize with community-based seed systems, ensuring inclusivity while maintaining quality assurance.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY SEED BANKS

Secure sustainable financial support through public budgets, donor funding, and climate adaptation programs to strengthen community seed banks as vital institutions for conserving agrobiodiversity.

Integrate community seed banks into broader national seed systems, agroecology policies, and climate resilience strategies to ensure their sustainability and impact.

Encourage innovation by linking seed banks with digital documentation, participatory research, and farmer-led monitoring systems.

ENHANCED COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

Strengthen linkages between community seed systems and national gene banks, academic institutions, and civil society platforms to ensure mutual learning and resource sharing.

Build partnerships with regional and international initiatives such as **SEARICE**, **AFSA**, and **EAC REGIONAL PROGRAMS** to enhance policy coherence, capacity building, and advocacy.

Promote participatory research involving farmers, scientists, and policymakers to foster trust, co-creation of knowledge, and shared ownership of seed diversity conservation.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND MAPPING

Undertake comprehensive resource mapping to identify and access diverse funding opportunities, including the **BENEFIT-SHARING FUND (BSF)**, Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, and bilateral donors supportive of agroecology and biodiversity.

Encourage governments to allocate domestic funds specifically for farmer-managed seed systems (FMSS) as part of agricultural development and climate resilience strategies.

Develop multi-stakeholder financing models that involve public-private partnerships while safeguarding farmers' sovereignty over seeds.

MAINSTREAMING FARMER-MANAGED SEED SYSTEMS IN POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Embed FMSS within national agricultural and biodiversity strategies as a cornerstone of food security, resilience, and cultural heritage.

Ensure that seed policies align with broader agroecology transitions, climate adaptation strategies, and commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recognize community seed banks and farmer seed networks as complementary, not parallel to formal seed systems bridging the gap between local realities and national/global commitments

WAY FORWARD TOWARD GB11



POLICY ENGAGEMENT

Present CoP recommendations as a formal input to the GB 11 session in Lima, highlighting the need for a **FARMER-CENTRED MULTILATERAL SYSTEM (MLS)**.



CAPACITY BUILDING

Develop training materials and policy briefs for national delegations, including Tanzania's, to advocate for recognition of farmer varieties.



MONITORING & REPORTING

Establish a CoP knowledge hub to track implementation of farmers' rights commitments and share case studies globally.

SUMMARY

The meeting of the CoP in Manila brought together a diverse range of actors from the Africa, Asia, and Europe regions working in various capacities on farmer-managed seed systems and their contribution to the conservation, cultivation, and diversification of agrobiodiversity. The opportunity to exchange experiences and approaches and to establish and further deepen relationships was invaluable, and the CoP intends to serve as a network for such exchange to develop further. The short-term focus of the CoP is on building knowledge around the functioning of CSBs in relation to governance, financing, relationship to gene banks, and relevance in a changing society, as well as the broader policy environment to enable FMSS including issues around PVP, registration of farmer varieties, and institutional policy support. In the medium and long term, the CoP will work towards the establishment and implementation of a strategy for the recognition of CSBs, institutional support for FMSS, and the creation of a digital space where resources can be disseminated, knowledge centralised, and informal exchange can take place.



Image 13: The CoP for FMSS in Manila.

V. APPENDICES

LIST OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

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LINKS TO PRESENTATIONS

[National Seed Laws & Their Effects on FMSS \(SEARICE\)](#)

[Developments in Plant Variety Protection: The Asian Context \(Third World Network\)](#)

[The Kenyan Context: Cultivating the Realisation of Farmers' Rights \(Seed Savers Network Kenya\)](#)

[Community Seed Banks: Cases of Best Practice & India Meta-Analysis \(FNI\)](#)

[Bridging On-farm, Ex-situ & In-situ Conservation and Utilization in Nepal \(Nepal Gene Bank\)](#)

[Participatory Approaches to Plant Breeding & CSBs in Zambia \(Earthlore, CTDI, SKI\)](#)

[Pathways to Sustainability: CSBs in Europe \(Rete Semi Rurali\)](#)

MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

[FMSS and Seed Policies CoP Members Portfolio.docx](#)

IMAGES FROM THE WORKSHOP

[COP Day 1- Sep 14, 2025](#)

[COP Day 2 - Sep 15 2025](#)

[COP Day 1 & 2 Learning Materials](#)



Select images from the two days. All images can be found in the folders above.