



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**Views, Experiences and Best Practices as an example of possible options for
the national implementation of Article 9 of the International Treaty**

Note by the Secretary

At its second meeting of the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (AHTEG), the Expert Group agreed on a revised version of the template for collecting information on examples of national measures, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights

This document presents the updated information on best practices and measures of implementing Article 9 of the International Treaty submitted by Fridtjof Nansen Institute on 3 July 2019.

The submission is presented in the form and language in which it was received.

Submission of example of the realization of Farmers' Rights

According to the template for submission of Measures, Best Practices and Lessons Learned from the Realization of Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty

Basic information

Title of measure/practice:

Ejere Farmer Crop Conservation Association (FCAS) and Community Seed Bank

Date of submission:

Resubmitted within the framework of the new template on 3 July 2019

Name(s) of country/countries in which the measure/practice is taking place:

Ethiopia

Responsible institution/organization (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s) and contact person)

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Type of institution/organization (categories)

Development and research NGO

Collaborating/supporting institutions/organizations/actors, if applicable (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s))

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Evaluator of the measure and provider of this example (upon approval from EOSA):

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Description of the examples (mandatory information):

Short summary to be put in the inventory (max 200 words):

The community seed bank (CSB) in Ejere attracts many visitors each year, from Ethiopia as well as abroad, who wish to learn about their achievements and success. Through conservation and participatory improvement of local crop diversity and related activities, the CSB has significantly improved seed and food security, nutrition and livelihoods in the whole area. Initiated by USC Canada in collaboration with the then Plant Genetic Resources Centre, Ethiopia, in 1990, the work was later taken over by the NGO Ethio-organic Seed Action, with support from the Development Fund, Norway. The objective is sustainable climate change adaptation among farmer communities through enhanced capacity to sustainably manage, develop and utilize local agrobiodiversity as an adaptive mechanism to climate change. Core components include reintroduction of traditional crops, conservation, participatory varietal selection to adapt promising crops to changing environmental conditions and improve desired properties, quality seed production and distribution, seed fairs, training in advanced organic production methods and income generating activities. The success of the CSB has been achieved *inter alia* through awareness raising, competent supervision, solid research prior to project planning, sufficient financial support over a sufficient period of time and a democratic and transparent organization with good governance.

Brief history (including starting year), as appropriate:

By the end of the 1980's farmers in Ejere had lost most of their crop diversity due to the catastrophic drought that rode the country in 1984/85 and due to pests. The government had provided them with high-yielding varieties of grain, requiring chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The yields were high in the first years, but then more fertilizers were required to obtain the same yield levels, while fertilizer prices increased. On top of this, farmers found that the crops were less resistant to pests and diseases and the effects of climate change. They also struggled with the use of chemical pesticides, as they lacked protection, and had a hard time applying them, often vomiting and getting ill.

In 1990, Mr. Hailu Getu arrived in Ejere. He was Manager of the Seeds of Survival/Ethiopia project of USC Canada, that was implemented in collaboration with the then Plant Genetic Resources Centre, Ethiopia (PGRC/E, now Ethiopian Biodiversity Institute). Mr. Hailu brought with him local seeds from Ejere that had been stored in the national gene bank of PGRC/E. The first farmer he met was Mr. Alemu Tulema. Mr. Hailu opened his hand towards Mr. Alemu and showed him a tiny handful of seeds. He asked Mr. Alemu whether he had seen such seeds before. Mr. Alemu was very surprised. He knew these seeds, they were the seeds from his childhood time. Mr. Hailu asked him whether he would like to grow them, and sure he would. After this, Mr. Hailu asked farmers in Ejere to try to remember the varieties from their childhoods and tell him which ones they would like to grow again. He provided the seeds from the national gene bank, in just as small amounts, and the farmers multiplied them in their fields. This is how community-based agrobiodiversity management started in Ejere, ultimately leading to the establishment of a farmers' association, a community seed bank and the re-introduction and improvement of lost and desired varieties to the whole area.

In 2003, the organization Ethio-Organic Seed Action (EOSA) was established by Mr. Regassa Feyissa, former Executive Director of PGRC/E. With the support of various development NGOs through the Community Biodiversity Development and Conservation Programme (CBDC), EOSA further developed a model for community-based agrobiodiversity management through community seed banks. After the phasing out of the CBDC programme, the Development Fund of Norway continued supporting Ejere from 2011, including support for the construction of a new building for seed storage, offices and meeting facilities. Today, the community seed bank at Ejere is a resource site and show case not only for community seed banks in Ethiopia but also for interested people and groups from all over the world. The CSB is not only conserving diversity, but also adapting the materials to climate change, improving it along the preferences of farmers and it is providing improved livelihood opportunities for its members.

Core components of the measure/practice (max 200 words)

- Awareness raising
- Reintroduction of diversity of local varieties that farmers wish to grow
- Community seed bank for seed storage and providing easy access
- Seed diversity blocks for conservation of local varieties and for the development of these through participatory varietal selection, to adapt them to changing environmental conditions and farmers' preferences.
- Training in quality seed production and participatory variety selection
- Establishment and operation of a Farmer Conservators Association to manage the activities
- A revolving seed loan system based on seed shares provided by the members to receive a fixed amount of seeds annually, returning it with an interest (20% or more as fixed by each FCA, paid in-kind).
- Fall-back options for farmers in case of unexpected crop failure experienced in the early period of the season, enabling the farmers to replant their fields with crops that have shorter time for maturity
- Seed fairs to display and share seeds of a wide diversity of crops available in the community
- Income generation for members, also facilitated through women groups and youth groups.
- Promotion of seeds for diversified home gardening
- Training in organic home gardening methods to enhance farm productivity and family nutrition
- Introduction of new crops from the national gene bank and from other sites
- Facilitating experience sharing between farmers and exposure visits to other sites
- Trainings and capacity building on the topics above

Description of the context and the history of the measure/practice is taking place (political, legal and economic framework conditions for the measure/practice) (max. 200 words)

Smallholder farmers in Ethiopia face many challenges. The most serious ones is rapid climate change resulting in unpredictable seasonal fluctuations, droughts, and pests and diseases that were unknown before. Over the past decades, the government promoted high yielding commercial varieties in an effort to boost food production to an ever-increasing population. The seeds and associated external inputs (fertilizers and chemicals) are expensive, with escalating prices over time, while the production risk is high, since these varieties are prone to climate change, pests and diseases. The risk of loss of crop harvests is high, and even if they succeed, the economic benefits are declining due to the increasing costs of production. The authorities and extension services used to push improved varieties some 10-15 years ago, they are now familiar with the real situation and Ejere community seed bank enjoys high recognition among the local authorities.

The community seed bank offers seeds of crops that are locally adapted to climate change and other environmental challenges, with high levels of nutrition, and providing straw that is palatable for cattle. The yields are relatively high for some varieties. It is often more economical to grow these due to low input costs and other reasons. In addition, the community seed bank offers a platform for capacity building and joint action towards poverty alleviation, through improved seed and food security as well as improved livelihoods.

To which provision(s) of Article 9 of the International Treaty does this measure relate?

Art. 9.1

Art. 9.2a

Art. 9.2b

Art. 9.2c

Art. 9.3

Other information, if applicable

Please indicate which category of the Inventory is most relevant for the proposed measure, and which other categories are also relevant (if any):

No.	Category	Most relevant ¹	Also relevant ²
1	Recognition of local and indigenous communities', farmers' contributions to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, such as awards and recognition of custodian/guardian farmers		
2	Financial contributions to support farmers conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA such as contributions to benefit-sharing funds		

¹ Please select only one category that is most relevant, under which the measure will be listed.

² Please select one or several categories that may also be relevant (if applicable).

3	Approaches to encourage income-generating activities to support farmers' conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA		X
4	Catalogues, registries and other forms of documentation of PGRFA and protection of traditional knowledge		
5	In-situ/on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA, such as social and cultural measures, community biodiversity management and conservation sites		X
6	Facilitation of farmers' access to a diversity of PGRFA through community seed banks ³ , seed networks and other measures improving farmers' choices of a wider diversity of PGRFA.	X	
7	Participatory approaches to research on PGRFA, including characterization and evaluation, participatory plant breeding and variety selection		X
8	Farmers' participation in decision-making at local, national and sub-regional, regional and international levels		
9	Training, capacity development and public awareness creation		X
10	Legal measures for the implementation of Farmers' Rights, such as legislative measures related to PGRFA.		
11	Other measures / practices		

- In case you selected 'other measures', would you like to suggest a description of this measure, e.g. as a possible new category? _____

Objective

Sustainable climate change adaptation among farmer communities through enhanced capacity of farming communities to sustainably manage, develop and utilize local agro-biodiversity as an adaptive mechanism to climate change

Target group(s) and numbers of involved and affected farmer

Farmers in Ejere are the target group. Women and youth are particularly addressed. Around 600 households are members of the association, and this is around 21 percent of the population in the area. Through seed exchange and sales, members have contributed to disseminating the local seeds to the whole area, and they share their knowledge with neighbours and relatives. Thus, the whole area of Ejere, as well as neighbouring areas are positively affected.

³ Including seed houses.

Location(s) and geographical outreach

The community seed bank is located directly in Ejere, Lume District, East Shewa Zone in Oromia Region in Ethiopia. It covers 8 villages over an area of some square kilometers. In each village there is a group associated with the association, and each village has a facilitator, helping the farmers with access to seeds, trainings, exposure visits and other activities.

Resources used for implementation of the measure/practice

The total amount is not known, due to the long history of the project.

How has the measure/practice affected the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture?

Ejere CSB is conserving 142 varieties of 15 local crops, it has developed 9 new enhanced durum wheat varieties through participatory variety selection based on local varieties. It produces seeds of these varieties for its members, and the members share seeds with their neighbours and relatives. In effect, most people in the area have access to the seeds.

Please describe the achievements of the measure/ practice so far (including quantification) (max 200 words)

Ejere is an area of origin of various crops, such as wheat, barley and tef. It used to have an immense diversity of crops. For reasons mentioned above, almost all this diversity was lost. Through the project the diversity was reintroduced and/or restored in Ejere, and further maintained, adapted and developed to meet the needs of farming and nutrition. The measure is a great success in restoring diversity for the benefit of the people. It has not only managed to bring back the diversity, but also contributed greatly to seed and food security and to improving the livelihoods among the target farmers in the area. As a result, they are now able to diversify their dietary sources, achieving better nutrition, they can meet household needs and send children to school for a longer period of time. The community seed bank is a platform not only for conservation and sustainable use of crop genetic resources, but for food security, livelihoods improvements and community empowerment.

Other national level instruments that are linked to the measure/practice

The Agricultural Development Office and the Cooperative Development and Promotions Office in Lume district are very supportive and help out with technical and institutional training and backstopping. The Agriculture Development Office, wishes to scale-out the activity to the rest of Lume district in order to enable all farmers in the district to benefit at equal terms.

Are you aware of any other international agreements or programs that are relevant for this measure/practice?

The measure is relevant for the realization of Farmers' Rights, in that it enables the sharing of traditional knowledge related to the seeds when jointly working on seed diversity blocks and through gatherings in the association; because it constitutes benefit sharing in practice; because it enables farmers to participate in decision making related to participatory crop improvement, and to interact with policy makers visiting Ejere,

thereby influencing policy development; and because it enables farmers to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed.

Other issues you wish to address, that have not yet been covered, to describe the measure/practice

The measure is very beneficial for women, as it enables them to gather, to share experiences, strengthen their capacities, develop joint activities, generate income, thereby acquire recognition, and empowerment. The leader of the women group expresses it this way: "Before I lived in the dark. Now I live in the light."

Lessons learned

Describe lessons learned which may be relevant for others who wish to do the same or similar measures/practices (max 250 words).

It would be very useful to systematically analyse the conditions of success for a community seed bank like this. Such an analysis could provide the basis for a manual or guidelines for others who wish to develop similar activities. Here are a few factors that are of importance:

- An organization which is highly competent in guiding such activities
- Sufficient research to successfully adapt an initiative to the needs and priorities of the people
- Awareness rising and capacity building
- A democratic and transparent organization with good governance
- Access to seed from the National Gene Bank and other areas that may have such seeds
- A storage facility with some office space and meeting facilities, if possible
- Basic equipment to manage the gene bank
- A long-term commitment to establishing structures and procedures as well as good decision making processes
- Financial support to enable the above and get a revolving seed fund started.
- A sustainable economy, in that farmers pay an interest on the revolving seed stock they access as a loan, and that this interest is used for recruiting new members and for covering operating costs.
- An exit strategy for external funding ensuring that the association is able to continue its operations after the end of external support.
- Good collaboration with local authorities.

What challenges encountered along the way (if applicable) (max 200 words)

The main challenge in Ejere is the financial sustainability, as the organization is not yet able to cover all the operating expenses. This can, however, be solved by operating the revolving seed stock along certain principles relating to the interests that farmers are obliged to pay back. These interests should be used for covering operating costs and for recruiting new members. It could also be considered to develop more income generating activities, aimed at covering the operating costs, including the services provided as a resources site.

What would you consider conditions for success, if others should seek to carry out such a measure or organize such an activity? (max 100 words)

Conditions for success are mentioned above, under 'lessons learned'. However, as highlighted above, more systematic work is needed to establish more precisely the conditions for success.

Further information

Link to further information about the measure/practice

An evaluation report will soon be available with detailed information about the measures. Please contact Elin Ranum at the Development Fund Norway for further information: Elin@utviklingsfondet.no . You may also contact the evaluator and provider of this example: Regine Andersen: regine.andersen@fni.no