THE CHALLENGE

Seeds are the soul of agriculture. Over the past 30 years diversity has decreased dramatically. Only 25% of important food crops like rice and maize remain. Without access to a rich diversity of seeds, each with its own specific characteristics, farmers are not able to adapt to droughts or floods, to new pests and diseases, changing rainfall patterns and other climate change challenges.

Governments, research programs and extension services seek collaboration with the private sector to make improved seed varieties available. However, profit driven companies do not develop products for resource poor farmers, for farmers with different preferences or for consumers with another taste. We largely have to eat what is on the menu of major seed companies. Patenting further supports private companies asserting exclusive ownership over seeds and thereby extracting them from the commons. Very little is undertaken to support farmers in keeping their seeds healthy and enabling them to contribute to diversity and resilience.

OUR SOLUTIONS

What if we could create a mechanism that increases on-farm diversity? Open source seed systems aim to do that. Seeds remain freely available without patents. Open source seed systems lead to ‘protected commons’. Registration and sharing mechanism through pledges, licenses or other forms of contracts defining general business terms and conditions are important tools to create the necessary moral, ethical and legal protection. These systems also expand the pool of genetic resources for conditional use by scientists, farmers and gardeners now and in the future.

Without ensuring freedom of access to seeds, vulnerable farmers are unable to innovate and adapt to climate change or changing consumer preferences. Diversity is crucial to safeguarding a diverse food production worldwide.

About Hivos

Hivos is an international organisation that seeks new solutions to persistent global issues. With smart projects in the right places, we oppose discrimination, inequality, abuse of power and the unsustainable use of our planet’s resources. Counterbalance alone, however, is not enough. Our primary focus is achieving structural change. This is why we cooperate with innovative businesses, citizens and their organisations. We share a dream with them of sustainable economies and inclusive societies.

www.hivos.org
WHAT WE DO
We are stimulating and supporting national initiatives for open source seed systems. In India we work with Apna Beej (‘our seeds’), a broad movement of farmers, seed companies and NGOs that came together in 2015. Apna Beej develops a viable business model, facilitates the creation of a new registration system and the marketing of open source seeds. The Indian initiative so far registered twenty varieties of rice, vegetables and pulses which remain available for other farmers and seed companies to use in breeding lines.

In East Africa we work with Bioversity International, relentlessly aiming to ensure that we understand the essence of diversity. Together we kick started two programmes in East Africa to increase on-farm diversity in beans, millet and sorghum, crops of little interest to governments, but crucial for the survival of smallholder farmers in the region.

...AND MORE
And - with the Open Society Foundations - Hivos believes in citizens and their capacity to address these important issues. We support an emerging (global) movement of citizens that makes freedom of access to seeds tangible with stimulating frontrunner initiatives and involving social entrepreneurs that can create value in the open source seed sector in Africa. We collaborate with platforms like Wikiseedia (seedmap.org) and the agricultural biodiversity community. Thus, we contribute to a radical transformation of seed systems that lead to resilience in agriculture, an expansion of adaptation and mitigation strategies for farmers, as well as an increase in the ability to recover from shocks. The movement is growing as is the interest in the topic. We want to help to sustain this growth.

HIVOS IS LOOKING FOR OTHER PARTNERS TO CO-CREATE AND IMPLEMENT THE OPEN SOURCE SEEDS AGENDA.

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