



Preparatory document for the LINKAGES final workshop

Florence, Italy, 4-5 June 2018

Dear invitees to the LINKAGES final workshop,

Hoping to contribute to your interest and commitment to attend the LINKAGES final workshop, we are sharing this brief document which summarises the main results emerging from the surveys and outlines a few preliminary points of discussion for our meeting.

As you know, the LINKAGES project circulated two surveys, one among genebank curators and one among on-farm representatives (farmers, seed savers, and their collective organizations), to gather data on how “direct use” germplasm requests were handled. While defining direct use was challenging, we kept the definition quite broad, intending to capture all those requests for germplasm which do not fall within the conventional research/breeding pipeline but are rather made to genebanks by individuals or communities who wish to embed crop genetic diversity in their on-farm sustainable production or participatory research endeavours.

Ex situ findings

We received 45 complete answers from genebank curators in 21 countries, covering a range of different crops and distributing an average of around 100-200 samples per year. With just one exception, all genebanks have received “direct use” requests for germplasm, and these types of requests were reported to be increasing by half of our respondents. Most “direct use” requests came from farmers and seed savers, and a relatively smaller proportion from their associations or organizations. While most curators declared not to have a specific policy for dealing with direct users’ requests (70%), around a quarter of our responses indicated they had a specific policy in place, although not all specified what it consisted in specifically. The use of an SMTA was quite frequent even in dealing with direct users but often in a simplified form, while around 22% of curators stated not to be using a transfer agreement at all in these cases. Finally, in terms of collaborations with the on-farm world, the majority of genebank managers answered positively, being engaged more or less sporadically with on-farm actors and farmers in projects or networks.

On farm findings

We received 45 complete answers from “direct users” in 8 countries, covering a range of different actor types including farmers, farmers associations and technicians working closely with local farmers. Respondents are equally involved in commercial organic/biodynamic production as well as

on farm conservation of landraces and breeding/selection activities. Most of the respondents already experienced an interaction with a gene bank to request seeds and the vast majority obtained the material requested. An intermediary organization or network often helped individual users with the request. The promotion of a specific variety through collective processes and seed exchanges was the main purpose for which the respondents asked for germplasm. A large proportion (over 75%) of surveyed direct users declared a high level of satisfaction with the material received, while some dissatisfaction was expressed in terms of the associated information. Finally, more than 40% of the direct users reported being engaged with one or more *ex situ* institutions in collaborative projects or networks.

Tentative issues for discussion

- Do we have a shared and common view of what can be considered a “direct use” request and of what kind of actors are making these types of requests?
- Which specific agreements or policies are in place (if they differ from the default ones) for direct use requests (what do “simplified SMTAs” look like? Are they reported to the Treaty’s Governing Body or other relevant institutions in a similar way as “normal SMTAs”?)
- How does the *ex situ* community see the “direct users” communities they serve, in terms of potential collaborations and synergies in carrying out conservation and innovation around genetic resources?
- Who are the “direct users” interacting with the *ex situ* community? Are they perhaps not only private farmers/gardeners but actors embedded in communities where meaningful on farm conservation and experimentation take place?
- How can we improve the interaction between these direct users and the *ex situ* community and how could this contribute to an integrated strategy for conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources?
- What can be the role of “direct users” involved in collective processes and seed exchanges in agrobiodiversity conservation policies? Could their activity become complementary/synergic to the one of the *ex situ* community and how to foster this?
- How can knowledge exchange between *ex situ* and on farm actors involved in collective experimentation/innovation processes improve the information associated to crop germplasm?

While we finalise the analyses of the two surveys to present the complete results during the meeting, we encourage you to develop your own questions and curiosities which will surely enrich our two day discussion.

We hope to see you soon,

The local organizers from Rete Semi Rurali,

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