

Crop development: Local and institutional processes.

Projektteam:

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Beginn:

Juni 1997

Projektbeschreibung:

Advances in the life sciences have greatly increased the value of crop variability for breeding in the early 20th century. Equipped with new theories about domestication and distribution of crop plants, plant breeders set out to collect plant specimens all over the world, and to work on these collections in newly established institutions. As 'genetic resources', local diversities were not also transferred to research stations and 'gene banks', but also stripped of most of the locally relevant knowledge which farmers once possessed. In this process, local diversity and its use have been 'decontextualized' to the extent that its reconstruction nowadays is difficult.

Only recently has there been renewed interest in the contribution and functional roles of farmers in processes of crop evolution. This trend emerged in the aftermath of the Rio earth summit in 1992 where the conservation of biodiversity was part of the agenda. While community conservation and compensation for farmers by the industry are debated on the policy level, our knowledge of local processes of crop development appears to be still very limited.

The research plans to document a selected case of institutional development (e.g. formation of plant breeding institutions, scientific plant collection expedition) for genetic resources, to look at ways of construction and reconstruction of local crop knowledge and to derive a conceptual framework which can be used in further research. The main research questions are the following:

- 1. How has the institutional context for genetic resources developed? What have been its ideological presuppositions, how has it been tied to specific political projects, and how has local or farmer's knowledge been represented by collectors and collecting institutions?
- 2. How do local farmers themselves perceive and manage plant diversity in crop-specific cases? How do documented data inform or distort our current knowledge of local crop development?