Strengthening Farmer-Managed Seed Systems for Improved Seed Quality and Access to Preferred Varieties of Finger Millet in Malawi

SMALL HOLDER FARMERS ACROSS MALAWI GROW CROPS THAT ARE ESPECIALLY VALUED FOR UNIQUE USES AND TASTES. However, these crops have been either neglected or underutilized (NUS) by research and extension. Consequently, seed of most of these NUS crops is only available when saved by farmers from their previous harvest.

Our project is working with farmer research networks and farmer field schools to strengthen their capacity to produce high quality seed and make it available for local use. The project started the work in five Extension Planning Areas (EPAs) with varied agro-ecological environments in four districts of the country, with focus on finger millet varieties that were prioritized by farmers and released varieties. The team together with farmers identified best of the preferred varieties to increase seed for local production.

Challenges that farmers pointed out in the production of finger millet seed included the scarcity of quality seed, lack of markets and low profit margins. High diversity of finger millet exists and farmers have over the year preserved their preferred cultivars that prove to be well adapted to the local environments. Agronomic and seed yield performance vary across and within sites. Some farmer cultivars performed better that released varieties. Farmer variety preferences varied within farmer groups and across sites. Promoting seed multiplication of finger millet varieties in environments where they are best adapted will ensure production of quality seed.

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