

International Treaty project participates in the 1st International Wheat Landraces Conference.

The 1st International Wheat Landraces Conference for Healthy Food Systems took place in Bologna, Italy June 11-15, 2018 and attracted more than 125 participants from all continents. The conference brought together like-minded scientists to discuss the topics of landraces, including modern populations, ancient and heritage wheat with a focus on health and nutrition as well as natural flavors and aromas. These scientists have recognized the many problems that many modern wheat varieties are causing and have been studying alternatives to this kind of modern wheat as well as current industrialized farming systems and high speed, high volume food processing models. The International Treaty Project W2B-PR-41: “Improving food security by enhancing wheat production and its resilience to climate change through maintaining the diversity of currently grown landraces” took the opportunity and attended the conference with 11 participants. The project has four main objectives:

1. Participatory selection of drought and heat tolerant wheat landraces among the set of the germplasm recently collected from the farming communities in the target countries using modern phenotyping and genotyping tools in collaboration with farming communities, research institutions, NGOs and extension services.
2. Development of germplasm combining drought and heat tolerance with disease resistance through crosses, marker assisted selection and backcrossing to the landraces.
3. Promotion of selected drought and heat tolerant landraces in the targeted regions through enhanced on-farm seed production and bulk selection, improved agronomic practices and large scale awareness campaign.
4. Training of farmers, extension services and local administration, policy-makers, NGOs and researchers on sustainable cultivation of wheat landraces and role of biodiversity in mitigation of adverse effects of climate change.

All the project objectives fit the Conference agenda and were selected for oral presentations. Project Consultant Prof. Cal Qualset gave an overview of wheat landraces improvement for sustainable farming and on-farm diversity. Project Leader Dr. Alex Morgunov gave an overview of the Treaty activities, its benefit-sharing mechanism, the project, activities and outputs. Dr. Rajiv Sharma presented project activities in Afghanistan and Dr. Saber Golkari – in Iran. Dr. Elif Basak Aksoy made a presentation on importance of farmers’s wives in keeping and diversifying wheat landraces on-farm. Many questions and discussion originated from the presentations. Generally, the Treaty and the project were very well presented in the conference. The project team appeared to be a leader in working with the poor farmers and subsistence communities. The project visibility and technical excellence contributed to the project staff to be included in the association to be formed and in organization of the next conference. The project also conducted its Steering Committee meeting in Bologna, prior to the conference. Very productive discussion was held and recommendations developed. Overall, the project contributed to the conference objectives, was incorporated into the research and development community working on landraces and had productive internal discussion on the results and future plans.

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Prof. C. Qualset (University of California, Davis, USA) gives a key-note presentation at the conference.



The Project Leader Dr. A. Morgunov (CIMMYT-Turkey) makes a presentation about the project.



The Project Gender Specialist Dr. E. Aksoy (Hacettepe Univ., Turkey) makes a presentation about the role of women in keeping wheat landraces.



The Project Leader for Turkey Dr. Fatih Ozderim discusses the presentations.



The Project Leader for Afghanistan Dr. R. Sharma presents project activities in this country.



Conference group photo.



The Project Leader for Iran Dr. Saber Golkari (left) (Dryland Agricultural Research Inst.) and the project Steering Committee member from Iran Dr. Rasul Zare (right) (Agricultural Research and Extension Organization) during the field visit.

fertilizer have been increased by 3 times and many improvement in the field management have been implemented by the local farmers resulted in up to 50% increase in yield and income by some farmers.

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Local women in Turkey contribute to wheat landraces diversity

Project W2B-PR-41: “Improving food security by enhancing wheat production and its resilience to climate change through maintaining the diversity of currently grown landraces”

We believe, through time in history, women have always been the silent carriers of local ecological knowledge thanks to their deep understanding of nature, their inner wisdom and dedication. In the meantime, it seems like men have chosen to focus on day to day, profound matters such as market value and basic economics. Had the women not had a great knowledge on wheat landraces and production we wouldn't have been discussing the current situation in Anatolia region of Turkey. Our team also acknowledges the power of women in the household decisions as well and this is why we also tried to find ways to encourage modern women and men to continue cultivation of on-farm native wheat bread diversity. Therefore, we, as the gender team with CIMMYT, for implementation of International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources Project, acknowledging the importance of women in agriculture conducted an anthropological field study in Turkey and gathered information on how farmer's wives contribute to maintenance of on-farm wheat diversity.

We used semi-structured interview method in our research. We reached out to women from the villages who are involved in wheat production and benefit from that. We visiting 26 villages from 7 provinces and met 137 women.

We realised that in general women have great knowledge on wheat landraces however age is an issue when it comes how detailed their knowledge is. Ecological knowledge is transferred from mother to daughter until daughters migrate from the villages. As the farming gets more mechanized, the role of women in both decision and production process decreases. In places where traditional agricultural practices continue, women are still very effective on household decisions. They reckon native landraces are better in quality and taste but their production is limited. In villages that landraces are grown, locals exchange seeds they found productive or more suitable for hay to feed their animals. Villagers, who live in tough ecological conditions, know their own landraces are more suitable for their climate but they claim the pesticides and fertilizers they are using ruined their seeds.

In districts where land sizes are generally small, people plant wheat for their household needs, not for sale. We realize that they did not even sell wheat when they were more involved in wheat production either, because families were more crowded then. They used to plant more wheat and planted either different landraces or varieties or use mixed seeds to make sure they obtain grain at any condition. As their lands are small and the production is not for trade they cannot afford extra expenses. In this situation farmers can be motivated by quality and taste of the landraces. So by educating and motivating women who have local knowledge and traditional experience in wheat production, it is possible to protect landrace diversity if migration rate is not very high.

In the regions with bigger lands, wheat grain trade is practiced. Women prefer selling their wheat and use commercial, processed flour and bread in their houses. Productivity is more important than taste or quality as long as they can sell the product. If people cannot profit from wheat because of the prices and inputs, they try to produce different things like

tobacco, olive, chickpeas, pistachio, cauliflower, potato etc. Farmers can be motivated by commercial value of the wheat landraces like siyez (Eincorn).

As a preliminary conclusion, despite the contemporary problems affecting rural areas and agriculture (migration, loss of land, loss of landraces, climate change, input expenses, mechanization, industrialization and urbanization of local culture) women still have the power to contribute to wheat landraces diversity in Turkey through their muted ecological knowledge.

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