



Working with others for Crop Wild Relatives (CWRs)

Stakeholder engagement in the use and conservation of CWRs

Introduction

The conservation and sustainable use of CWRs is often undercut by a disconnect between people working in the food and agriculture sector, conservation agencies, professional breeders, and everyday citizens living on the land. To design effective strategies for the long-term management of CWR, it is paramount to build bridges between these disconnected areas and co-create solutions with all actors involved.



Objectives

CWRs can provide benefits to all segments of society by diversifying agroecosystems, adapting to climate change, offering possibilities for bioprospecting, or improving the quality of diets. To reap these benefits, COUSIN aims to engage a wide variety of existing and potential stakeholders, such as breeders, farmers, consumer groups, climate regulatory and implementation bodies, food manufacturers, and farming businesses.

There are many advantages of doing this, for instance, harnessing the expertise of various fields, tailoring research, breeding and conservation efforts to local contexts and needs, identifying pitfalls early and ensuring the credibility of project results while increasing policy uptake. Stakeholder involvement can also help enhance the recognition of CWR's value for society and, perhaps most importantly, create a culture of collaboration among the different actors.





Results

COUSIN partners mapped key stakeholders at the project's start and tailored a 'value proposition' for each, reflecting local realities. They engaged business (43%), academic (40%), civil society (32%), and policy actors (17%) to support research, implementation, and policy uptake. Engagement ranges from information sharing (e.g., newsletters, conferences) to collaborative efforts like joint conservation planning with landowners. Such collaborations foster context-specific solutions for CWRs that respect cultural practices, legal frameworks, and resource availability.

Recommendations

Experiences from COUSIN show that the long-term conservation and use of CWRs will (should) depend on local people: farmers, civilians, landowners, conservationists, breeders, and many others whose daily work impacts the future of these species. Therefore, the long-term needs and wellbeing of these actors is a central question in stakeholder engagement. It is a two-way relationship that can be nurtured by listening and by creating a shared vision of how to maintain and best utilise CWRs. This process should be a conscious effort to facilitate social processes locally for sustained collaboration. Another important finding is that policymakers, food and feed manufacturers, and consumers are generally less engaged in CWR-related work. It would be important to widen the scope of engagement and raise more awareness of the value of these species for the entire food industry as well as for biodiversity conservation policy.

