

**Drawing on knowledge of local farmers in planning conservation of crop landraces: the case of yams (*Dioscorea* spp.) in Wolayita zone, Southern Ethiopia.** (Oral Presentation)

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**Introduction**

Yam (*Dioscorea* spp.) is among the major tuber crops grown in Ethiopia, an important center of yam cultivation outside the “yam zone” of West Africa. Despite its long history of cultivation and significance in local livelihood, the diversity in yam and associated indigenous knowledge has not been properly investigated. Consequently, issues concerning conservation and improvement of yam are yet to be addressed.

**Objectives**

Assess the diversity and management of yam landraces, and implications for conservation.

**Methods**

A farm-level survey covering 299 households was conducted during the 2003/2004 cropping season. The households were selected following a stratified sampling procedure to cover the ecological range of yam. Methods of data collection included field visits, and in-depth individual interviews using structured and semi-structured questionnaires.

**Results**

Wolayita farmers possess extensive knowledge about the diversity present in yam, which is selected and managed accordingly to meet household demands. Diverse yam landraces are grown with respect to time of maturity, adaptation to environmental conditions, and culinary properties. Overall, 37 named landraces were described throughout the study area and, on average, farmers managed 2.9 landraces per farm. Farmers principally rely on own supply of seed tubers, but local markets and exchanges with neighbors are also among possible sources of planting materials. Yam generally has significant economic and social importance in Wolayita.

**Conclusion**

The high value that local farmers place on yam is expressed in its continued cultivation despite the lack of support from researchers and policy makers. Nevertheless, factors such as erratic rainfall, declining soil fertility, market demand, and shortage of land and staking materials are affecting the number and type of landraces grown and the extent of production. Ensuring continuity of farmers' maintenance of the available germplasm calls for the need to address the problems facing the yam-based production system. Any conservation and improvement program must take into account the multiple objectives of farmers and the importance of diversity in local agriculture. The attributes that farmers find important in each landrace, the local seed supply system, and the place of yam in the cropping calendar are among the lessons that such preprograms can rely on.

**Keywords:** landrace diversity, local knowledge, Ethiopia

**Selected references**

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