

SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS AFFECTING AGRODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE YUCATAN, MEXICO: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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In situ conservation of maize, bean, squash, and chili in the “*Milpa*” (farmer plot system) is influenced by a combination of economic, social, and cultural factors that affect diversity management by the farming community. Milpa farmers in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico recognize that at the household level, crop diversity plays a special role for the satisfaction of their primary food needs. A study was conducted to determine the affect of possible relationships between social, cultural, and economic factors and activities performed by different family members, on the intra-specific diversity of maize, bean, squash, and chili at Yaxcaba, Yucatan, Mexico. The research focused on (1) complementary activities at the household performed by both women and men, (2) how the social, cultural, and economic factors affect the maintenance of crop genetic diversity, (3) how economic incentive and factors increase or reduce the farmer interest to continue growing diverse crop populations, and (4) how farmer values derived from human “use” of intraspecific crop diversity to prepare diverse dishes. The study included examining the questions of (1) what are the factors that affect the decision-making of men and women, and subsequently influence their management of diversity on-farm, and (2) were there specific social, cultural or economic classes or distinctions between those farmers who manage more diversity and those who manage less diversity. In addition, information was disaggregated on (i) who does the actual management of crop diversity in the field, at home, at markets, and (ii) who makes the decisions on how the management is done and on which varieties are sown or kept or discarded. Thus, for the sites for this study in Yaxcaba, Yucatan, men are in performing most of the activities at the *Milpa* (or in the field), while women are responsible for preparing traditional dishes at home. However both women and men are responsible for deciding which variety to grow for different environmental, economic and cultural conditions. Women not only have knowledge of cooking qualities of different varieties but also have knowledge of agronomic qualities such as earliness and quality of straw, and ecological adaptive qualities such as disease resistance and drought resistance of varieties in different soils. The results also showed that it is possible to define certain farmers groups with similar economic activities who belong to distinct social and cultural groups. For example, farmers who conserve high crop diversity have a higher economic, social, and cultural recognition at the community level than those farmers who conserve a low number of varieties.