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Efforts to upscale PLEC approaches are paying dividends

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From the local to global scale, PLEC members are helping institutions and people to use demonstration approaches that have been proved to facilitate the exchange of integrated resource use knowledge and techniques among the rural poor. As a result of these efforts, PLEC's 'expert farmers' are becoming key players in extension programmes in several countries. Agrobiodiversity produced and conserved by expert farmers is also becoming a very important resource for diversifying production in communities affected by the collapse of single crop economies such as coffee in Kenya and sugar cane in Jamaica. In a number of international and regional meetings that I have participated in the last couple of months, I emphasized PLEC achievements and the focal points of PLEC methodology. Outlined below is the essence of what I presented.

PLEC has particular aspects of its work that are different from what our colleagues do in other institutions. PLEC focuses on biodiversity at the landscape level. We look at the biodiversity in fields (both planted and not planted) as well as in the fallows, forests, edges, streams – the entire landscape, both cropped, managed, and not managed. We focus on management diversity, the many ways in which resources are managed, and this diversity is included together with biodiversity in our central concept which is 'agrobiodiversity'. We especially focus on what we call 'hybrid systems' – those that combine traditional management with new forms of production and management technologies. So, although we understand the value of 'traditional' or 'indigenous' practices, we are most interested in management systems that use biodiversity to solve production problems, systems that are productive and beneficial to all small-scale farmers, whatever category they fall into. We try to understand and value the integrity of smallholder systems. Separation into production categories such as agriculture, forestry, etc., is unhelpful when working with farmers.



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