

PRESENTATION

In Bolivia, the agricultural sector plays an important role in national economy, being the third biggest contributor to the Gross National Product (GNP) with an average participation of 15% for the last decades. Bolivia is one of the most diverse countries in terms of the variety of Genetic Resources. The country possesses a vast richness in plant and animal species, including those of high social and economic value, such as quinoa (*Chenopodium quinoa* Willd.), potato (*Solanum* spp.), common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris* L.), cacao (*Theobroma cacao* L.) and wild relatives of cultivated species, guinea pig (*Cavia porcellus* L.), camelids (*Lama glama* L., *Lama pacos* L., etc.) and creole bovines, among many others.

Communitarian and small farmer economies predominate. These economies develop relationships of reciprocity and solidarity as a support to social and economic relationships. On the other hand, agroindustry is more intense in the lowlands, with entrepreneurial economies oriented to agricultural, livestock and forestry production. Under this framework, the small farmer family agriculture stands out as an expression of the Bolivian experience of family and community production, developed by familiar economic units. This type of agriculture is characterized by constituting integral and diversified systems, the great diversity of genetic resources that it manages, and by the percentage of cultivated land area that it occupies, which was over 50% in 1985.

Deforestation, urban area growth, introduction and expansion in agricultural areas of improved but genetically uniform crops, as well as the exploitation of rare species have a strong impact on Bolivian natural resources, thus limiting the possibility of developing new genetic combinations with greater capacities regarding yield, quality, and adaptation to adverse conditions in species with importance for humans. The Bolivian National Institute for Agricultural, Livestock and Forestry Innovation (INIAF), under tuition of the Ministry of Rural Development and Land (MDRyT) is the institution responsible for the management of Germplasm Banks, in accordance to decree No. 29611. This institution establishes the Bolivian National Center for Conservation of Genetic Resources in the Experimental Station of Toralapa, located in Tiraque Province, Department of Cochabamba. This Center counts at the present with approximately 15 000 plant accessions.

Germplasm Banks are deposits for the Genetic Resources that serve as the raw material for genetic breeding. These resources play a vital role in the sustainable development of agriculture, with the increase in food production and the fight against hunger and poverty. The seeds kept in Germplasm Banks are a vital and irreplaceable resource, a heritage that must be conserved in order to provide options for the agriculture of the future, in a world that is facing climate change and other challenges.

Sustainable conservation of Genetic Resources depends on the effective labor of the personnel in Germplasm Banks, whose scientific work is important to guarantee that the germplasm is conserved in an effective and efficient manner. This personnel applies adequate procedures for the management of seeds in order to guarantee that these survive and remain available for present and future generations. The first number of this journal gathers a group of articles referred to the conservation of Agro biodiversity Genetic Resources, resulting from scientific research studies performed by the personnel of the Genetic Resources Unit of INIAF in accordance to the objective of "Assuring the conservation and availability of Agro biodiversity Genetic Resources, in the different eco regions, as a base for breeding and food for future generations and as source of genetic variability in order to counteract genetic erosion".

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