

**Project Number: TJK 1105-16**

**Project Title: Enhancing Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Agrarian Landscapes**

**Title: Sharing the Seeds of Change**

A huge courtyard garden surrounds the house, where Hanona Latifova, 56 years old, lives in Jafr village in Rasht province, Northern Tajikistan. The mountaintops of the valley are already covered by the first snow of this year. Over the last weeks, the garden slowly emptied: the fruits from the trees have been picked, the vegetables have been harvested and the soil is being prepared for the rest during wintertime.



1. Hanona in her seeds storage room

In a dry and aerated storage room especially build for that purpose, Hanona keeps her impressive collection of seeds. She is a serene, confident woman, who explains about her experience in reproducing seeds: *“I have been doing it since very long. Since the end of the Civil War, about twenty years, I have been doing it more intensively. In my storage room, I have many different kinds of seeds.”*

In spring this year, she decided to take part in the project “Enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services in agrarian landscapes”,

supported by BMU and Welthungerhilfe and implemented by its local partner organizations.

*“For the first time I heard about this project in March 2018. I wanted to learn something new, more about agriculture and what people do in agriculture.”* The first results of the project are already tangible, as Hanona explains. *“This project has a great impact on the farmers. They learned about fertilizers and watering. They learned not to use pesticides, but instead to use a home-made mixture made from boiled walnut leaves and garlic and to spray it on the plants. And they learned about how to plant, the order of the different crops and vegetables. This time, we did not leave any weed on the fields until autumn and we achieved a very good harvest.”*

Hanona continues the tradition of collecting seeds in her family by following the example of her mother and grandmother who did the same before her. *“It was perhaps first done by my grandmother. And my mother had been doing this since a young age. If you would go to her kitchen garden, you could not find some free spot of land, she had all sorts of crops, and she planted henna.”* But Hanona faced obstacles on her way. Her mother’s seed collection got lost in the time of armed conflict in Tajikistan. During the Civil War the house was hit from an air plane. Most of the households and the gardens in the village were destroyed – and so were the seeds.



2. Hanona and her community members in a training

But some houses remained untouched and not all fields were affected. As soon as the situation ameliorated, her mother started anew to collect and reproduce local seeds. Hanona remembers how they strove to recover her mother’s collection. *“Whenever we were at a wedding, whenever*

we met someone, be it from our neighbours, be it from our relatives, my mother would take a small amount from someone, she would cut the head of a cabbage and plant it again. She had taken the seeds from the neighbours, from nearby villages, if they had something from their hometown, she collected all seeds which she found interesting.”



3. Hanona sorting out the seeds

Hanona has four brothers and three sisters, all of whom took on this tradition to collect seeds. But before her mother passed away three years ago, she took Hanona aside, opened her hand and gave her some special seeds. She told her to keep those seeds, to take care of them and to preserve them, because they were particularly valuable. So Hanona became even more dedicated to this task.

Recently there were changes she observed when comparing the seeds. *“I also buy seeds which*

*are interesting. Once there was a project with school children, they were given spinach seeds, which I could not reproduce, no matter how much I tried. Also with other seeds, first I did not pay attention, so I used the seeds for several years, their management was not hard. But after several years, they would not reproduce themselves any longer. So, I got aware of the lower quality of seeds in the markets. That is why I reproduce local seeds.”*

There have always been people who came and took seeds from Hanona, already before the project. But in the Farmer Field School organized by the project, she decided together with the farmers to exchange seeds to preserve local varieties which are more resistant and therefore achieve better harvests. *“To neighbours who do not earn enough, who do not own a lot, I never sell, I just share and exchange seeds with them, because it is called hamsoyagi.”* This Tajik term translates into “neighbour” and it literally means “having the same shadow”. Also, the other women from the village support this tradition of exchange within the community: *“We never sell, we only share. That is neighbourhood!”*



4. Local seeds varieties from Hanona

*Ph Imke Lass*