

Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems, traditional farming practices and cultural identity

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Since its inception in 2002, FAO's GIAHS program has built a strong local and international reputation in the fields of agricultural heritage and agricultural development. Up to present 51 GIAHS sites have been implemented in 21 countries all over the world. FAO describes these sites as "outstanding landscapes of aesthetic beauty that combine agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and a valuable cultural heritage which provide multiple goods and services, food and livelihood security for millions of small-scale farmers".



Photo: João Roberto Ripper, RJ

The traditional agricultural system of "Sempre Viva" flower picker communities becomes first GIAHS in Brazil and broadens options for inclusive land governance and sustainable use of natural resources
<http://www.fao.org/brasil/noticias/detail-events/en/c/1142103/>



Photo: João Roberto Ripper, RJ

Over the last couple of years, the topic "Access to Land" has become a priority field of intervention for HEKS/EPER's work in development cooperation. Convinced that access to land is not only about land mobilization and land titling, HEKS/EPER also supports the development of inclusive land governance models and sustainable land use practices. There is also a clear understanding that these models should focus on a territorial working approach which emphasizes the role of ecosystems and their potential to contribute to the food and livelihood security of rural communities as well as their resilience to face the risks of climate change. This vision also emphasizes the crucial role of local communities and their traditional knowledge to protect and use natural resources such as forests, water and biodiversity as common goods. Studies like the recently published document "Missing Pathways to 1.5°" of the *Climate Land Ambition and Rights Alliance* recognize the relevance of these land governance models. Convinced that FAO's GIAHS initiative provides a useful framework to strengthen its approach to access to land, HEKS/EPER and its Brazilian implementing partners approached the FAO to discuss the possibilities of setting up a first GIAHS pilot experience in Brazil.

"...community-based approaches to land governance and forest management is one of the most urgent and effective steps we can take for climate protection, ecosystem resilience, and the protection of vulnerable front-line defenders." **Source: Missing Pathways to 1.5°, CLARA, 2018**

The flower picker communities of the Serra do Espinhaço

The Serra do Espinhaço range is part of the semi-arid region of Minas Gerais. It is the home of a large number of traditional communities, such as Quilombolas and indigenous groups. One of these groups are the traditional Sempre Viva flower picker communities. They live in a vast territory of different altitudes and ecosystems of the Serra do Espinhaço where they practice their own way of life. Part of these communities are organized in the *Commission for the Defense of the Rights of the Flower Picking Communities* (CODECEX), a regional movement of local communities which integrates more than 50 different local organizations. Over generations these traditional communities have practiced a complex agricultural production system which combines the cultivation of a highly diversified food production system, particularly around their homesteads, and a collectively



Photo: João Roberto Ripper, RJ

organized, non-timber management system of the natural resources of their ancestral territories. The most important activities are the gathering of wild fruits and medicinal plants of the Cerrado ecosystem and the collecting of dry wild flowers and grasses in the upper parts of the region.

The migration routine of the families during a certain period of the year to the higher parts of mountains where the flowers are, is very similar to what rural communities practice in the alpine regions of Switzerland when the families send their milk cows to the pasture grounds of the alps for cheese production.

For the rural communities of the Serra do Espinhaço, the flower picking, processing and selling is the most important source of income. Without access to these collecting areas, food security of the communities is threatened and their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change increases. Moreover, these communities play an important role as custodians of the enormous biodiversity and water resources of the fragile ecosystem of the savannah rangelands, known as Cerrado. Today, the access to their ancestral territories is increasingly threatened by green grabbing, the implementation of huge eucalypt plantations and mining activities. All this has led to increasing land disputes and violence in the region. HEKS/EPER supports CODECEX in their efforts to claim their right to land and develop sustainable land use strategies.

The GIAHS dossier prepared by CODECEX and its network partners was now officially submitted by the Brazilian Government to FAO's international GIAHS secretariat. The document includes a description and analysis of the traditional agricultural system of the flower picker communities as well as a dynamic work plan for the use of the natural resources. It also proposes a set of participative instruments to promote inclusive land governance, such as **Biocultural Community Protocols** and the regulation of **Free, Prior and Informed Consent** processes.



Photo: Valda Nogueira

Some lessons learnt

Since the start of the GIAHS process in 2015, this agenda has contributed enormously to strengthening communities' identities and their understanding of their role and responsibilities on the way towards more inclusive land governance based on collective land rights and land use practices. The interest of the FAO to give an international label to the flower picker communities has increased the visibility and recognition of the traditional communities, particularly by government authorities. The fact, that the most important urban center of the region, the city of Diamantina, is already registered as an UNESCO World Heritage Site has been helpful in generating an understanding among the population that the unique agricultural system of the traditional flower picker communities should also be protected. By putting the regional agricultural heritage in the center of the political agenda, the GIAHS initiative was able to invigorate a positive, enabling environment. Various stakeholders became part of the process, particularly governmental authorities at local and state level, national and regional institutions responsible for cultural and heritage issues, international organizations as well as civil society, research institutions and the tourism sector. All this has led to a better recognition of CODECEX as the legitimate interlocutor of the traditional local communities in the political negotiations with government authorities concerning issues of land governance. In times of shrinking space for civil society in Brazil, international agendas like the GIAHS initiative might offer opportunities for civil society to continue to work on sensitive and conflictive political issues, such as the right to land and inclusive governance. The GIAHS label will not be able to avoid further green grabbing or agro-industrial investments in the region, but there will be a constant monitoring and a public control by the FAO, CODECEX and its partners to supervise that the traditional agricultural system of the local communities remains a living system, able to adjust production strategies and negotiate frameworks for inclusive land governance.

Perspectives and next steps

CODECEX is now waiting for the final approval of its candidature by FAO's scientific committee at the international GIAHS secretariat in Rome. This is expected to happen in early 2019. A field mission organized by FAO to visit the heritage site after the official approval and the emission of the certificate will conclude the process. As far as it concerns HEKS/EPER's strategies to further develop land use and land governance processes in Brazil, there are already ongoing discussions with its implementing partners, the National Agricultural Research Institution (EMBRAPA), National Bank of Development (BNDES) and the National

Institute for Culture and Heritage (IPHAN) to replicate and extend the GIAHS experience with the flower picker communities to other regions, i.e. the traditional riverside communities of the São Francisco valley. HEKS/EPER is also analyzing the possibilities of piloting a similar experience of GIAHS in the context of land use systems of pastoralist communities in Western Africa.