

# **FOLK *IN-SITU* CONSERVATION AND FOOD SECURITY: INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT IN ENSET AREAS IN SOUTH OMO, ETHIOPIA**

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Enset (*Ensete ventricosum*, Musaceae) is a monocarpic plant that grows wild and is also cultivated extensively in the highlands of southern Ethiopia. The Omotic Ari people in the South Omo area maintain a diverse range of landraces in cultivated populations of enset. Their livelihood is sustained through an enset-based agricultural system, which provides a stable supply of a staple food. However, the South Omo Zone is an administrative unit of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, and is one of the areas in Ethiopia that has been severely affected by droughts and floods. This has resulted in an insecure food supply. Therefore, to achieve a more secure food supply in the area, development of the indigenous enset system is being considered.

I contend that the genetic diversity of enset has been maintained through the biological and cultural processes involved in the interaction between the plants and the local people. I call these processes based on indigenous agricultural sciences "folk *in-situ* conservation." However, the current socio-economic changes and the religious shift from an indigenous belief system have resulted in conditions that are critical to the process of maintaining landrace diversity.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it discusses the origins and dynamics of enset landrace diversity and the formation of enset gardens by Ari farmers. Second, it reevaluates indigenous development in the enset area by examining the possibility of sound intervention in the folk *in-situ* conservation activities.

I suggest that a full understanding of the dynamics of these processes will provide promising clues for organizing indigenous conservation activities in a participatory manner based on local initiatives, and will contribute to enhancing food security in the area.

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