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Preparatory action on EU plant and animal genetic resources

SAVE Foundation

Overview

1. Objectives

The objective of this case study is to give an overview of objectives, activities and achievements of the European I-NGO SAVE Foundation. The case study also includes recommendations based on a (SWOT) analysis of SAVE.

2. Description of the case

SAVE is the abbreviation for "Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe". The SAVE Foundation is the European NGO organisation for the safeguarding of agricultural varieties. The SAVE Foundation was established as a network association in 1993, at an international meeting of national representatives and independent experts, confirming an urgent need for action in a supranational European framework. The SAVE Foundation was officially founded in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, in 1998. The main aim of SAVE is the endorsement and facilitation of the networking of (national) organisations that strive to halt and reverse the trend of the genetic erosion of biodiversity in agriculture.

The SAVE Foundation has partner organisations. The Foundation has a Board of Directors, a Management Committee, a Council of Cooperation Partners and an Advisory Board. The SAVE Network currently consists of 22 partner organisations in 15 European countries. 46% of the partners focus on livestock, 31% on seed varieties and 23% of the partner organisations do not distinguish livestock and crops. The exchange of information and/or project collaboration takes place with more than 20 additional organisations of the formal and informal sector in the field of the conservation of biodiversity and nature conservation.

The SAVE Foundation runs a Network Office in Wageningen, the Netherlands and a Project Office in St. Gallen, Switzerland and has supporter associations in Germany (Konstanz) and Switzerland (St. Gallen). To have more possibilities to generate funds, the "Monitoring Institute for rare breeds and seeds" was established as an association in St. Gallen, Switzerland. It acted as a "scientific branch" of the SAVE Foundation. The Monitoring Institute was integrated in the *SAVE Project Office* at the end of 2010.

Analysis

3. Funding and support

In the past few years, the SAVE Foundation has had an annual budget of around 200,000 EUR. The majority of the budget is project-related funding. On average the summed annual contributions of network partners has been less than 5,000 EUR. The available budget for the SAVE Network is not sufficient to manage and to further expand the network and its networking activities at European level. A minimum of 50,000 EUR would be needed to run the SAVE network at an acceptable level.

Currently, SAVE does not receive (co)funding from the European Commission. Direct access to funding through the EU rural development programme is not possible. Between 2007 and 2010 the SAVE Foundation received project funding from the European Commission for the ELBARN project (GENRES programme, 870/2004, AGRI GEN RES 066). The SAVE Project Office regularly applies for project funding from different sources, in collaboration with consortium partners. Most project applications are at sub-regional or even at national level. For small NGOs like SAVE the administrative burden of participation in consortia, applying for European subsidies, is high.

4. Positioning at local or regional level

SAVE's (project) activities are well appreciated and accepted in Europe, particularly in the South-East of Europe. SAVE is considered as a capable and neutral leader of projects across borders at sub-regional level within Europe, involving a variety of actors. Project partners appreciate the exchange of knowledge and information that SAVE facilitates, but they would like to have more influence at European level through SAVE, e.g. through networking and strategic partners.

SAVE is not part of the supply chain, but SAVE can support partners to strengthen their position in the supply chain. For the preservation of traditional breeds and varieties, the marketing of their products or their services is important. For this purpose, SAVE has created two labels, the Arca-Deli Award® and the HERITASTE® label. Both trademarks are legally protected. The "Arca-Deli Award" is a prestigious award with market value but no prize money. It is awarded annually by the SAVE Network for delicacies and innovative services originating from the circles of the European Ark Network "Arca-Net"¹ and the Variety-Savers Network². The "HERITASTE" label is registered with the European Trademark Office and identifies products and services provided by indigenous livestock and crops. The word "HERITASTE" is a contraction of the words "Heritage" and "Taste". HERITASTE® is used to characterise high-quality and tasty products and related services. The product must be local, extensive and non-industrially made, and it has to represent a cultural asset. The new label was planned to come into force mid-2014, but has not been introduced yet.

5. Partnerships and networking

¹ <http://www.arca-net.info/link>

² <http://variety-savers.net/>

The SAVE Foundation is primarily a network organisation. Two key objectives can be identified for the SAVE Foundation. First of all, the exchange of knowledge and experience between network partners. Secondly, awareness raising and lobbying at national and European level to support the *in situ* conservation of endangered breeds and varieties.

SAVE has partner organisations. The SAVE Network currently consists of 22 partner organisations in 15 European countries. 46% of the members focus on livestock, 31% on seed varieties and 23% of the member organisations do not distinguish livestock and crops. The number of partner organisations has the potential to grow. The exchange of information and/or project collaboration takes place with more than 20 additional organisations of the formal and informal sector in the field of conservation of biodiversity and nature conservation. The SAVE Network should be financially supported and driven by partner organisations, but generally SAVE partners (usually NGOs) have limited funding possibilities. The main drivers of success for SAVE are its clear objectives and its added value to the partner organisations.

The SAVE Foundation has had a consultative status at the FAO as an I-NGO since 2009 and has an accreditation to provide advisory services to the UN Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage since 2013. SAVE is member of IUCN, RBI and the AVALON Network (Promoting Sustainable Rural Development in Central and Eastern Europe).

6. Communication

SAVE maintains a website³ and publishes the SAVE newsletter. The newsletter is distributed to partner organisations and to a wider distribution list of interested persons and organisations. The website is in the process of being modernised. SAVE organises an annual meeting for SAVE partners. Unfortunately, there is hardly no possibility to have (regional) meetings where partner organisations can meet in person.

The target group of the SAVE network are the current and potential partner organisations, and the *in situ* and on-farm conservation community for plant and animal genetic resources in Europe. The number of partner organisations is still limited, in particular in the Western part of Europe. The main challenge for the SAVE Network is maintaining good communication between partner organisations, as well as strengthening and enlarging the network towards the future.

Besides project-related communication (SAVE Project Office), a SAVE Network Secretariat and “Broker”/Co-ordinator are key roles to make the SAVE Foundation successful in the long run. Currently, the SAVE Network does not have sufficient funding.

7. Outputs and added value

Currently, the key activities of the SAVE Network include:

³ <http://www.save-foundation.net/english/>

- Organisation of the annual SAVE meeting
- Distribution of the SAVE Newsletter
- Maintenance of the SAVE website

Within SAVE, there are also more specific/targeted networks and specific websites:

- AgroBiodiversity Network: Network portal of European NGOs working on the conservation of genetic resources of livestock and cultivated plants⁴.
- Arca-Net – the European Ark Network: Internet portal for the networking and promotion of institutions in Europe showing rare breeds and plant varieties to the public, as ark-farms, pedagogic farms, open air museums, animal parks, variety gardens etc.. Search functions in English, French, German and Italian⁵.
- Fruit-Net: Network for neglected and forgotten fruits and berries: Online-Inventory of the still existing varieties and the active conservation organisations in Europe⁶. ELBARN: European Livestock Breeds Ark and Rescue Net⁷.
- Variety-Savers.Net: International Community for Breed and Seed Savers in Europe (multilingual)⁸.

Projects are carried out by the SAVE Project Office and partners, at European, sub-regional and national levels. They are characterised by the broad involvement of actors. The following four examples are among SAVE's most successful projects:

- Agricultural Genetic Resources in the Alps (2000-2001)
- ELBARN – European Livestock Breeds and Rescue Net (2007-2010)
- Bushalive (2013-2015)
- Fruit Genetic Resources in Romania (2013-2015)

The general impression of SAVE's outputs and added value is positive, however the output is often project specific and most projects are sub-regional. SAVE's activities have a positive impact on the conservation of genetic resources in the long run and raise awareness for society. SAVE's activities result in more awareness on food diversity, ecosystems and farming systems, and on the role and value of breeds and biocultural heritage.

8. Sustainability

SAVE has already existed for 20 years, and the number of partner organisations has been rather constant over time. There is a clear potential for growth of the number of SAVE network partners, but currently the capacity is missing to discuss objectives with, and to demonstrate benefits to, potential partners.

The SAVE Network should strengthen its communication and lobbying. The sustainability of SAVE very much depends on the perceived benefits of the network by SAVE partners, that can only improve through more activities and a higher visibility of SAVE.

⁴ <http://www.agrobiodiversity.net/>

⁵ <http://www.arca-net.info>

⁶ <http://www.fruit-net.info>

⁷ <http://www.elbarn.net>

⁸ <http://variety-savers.net>

Often, SAVE does not continue nor follow-up its projects due to lack of financial resources, when the projects officially come to an end. For example, Elbarn was a successful project, but its impact is limited because of the lack of continuation of efforts.

For SAVE, the administrative burden of participation in EU actions or programmes is high. EU projects are difficult to handle for small NGOs such as SAVE.

9. Upscaling and out-scaling

The SAVE Network is connected to other networks in the EU but there is room for improvement in the light of knowledge exchange and awareness raising. Currently SAVE does not have a good coverage and participation within the European region. A minimum capacity and funding for a professional secretariat and a 'broker' leading SAVE's activities and expansion should be established. This is a key condition for upscaling and out-scaling SAVE's activities and objectives.

Conclusions

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Access to broad network and knowledge base through the SAVE network and website; SAVE's objectives are relevant to society and SAVE's partners generally agree on important subjects; The annual SAVE meeting is well established and important for networking and building connections; Different sources of funding for the SAVE Project office; Successful past projects coordinated by the SAVE Project office; Committed and experienced staff at the SAVE Project office.</p>	<p>Goals and added value of SAVE often not clear for SAVE's (potential) partners; Structure and governance of SAVE (Network activities and Project activities) is not fully clear; Hardly any budget available for professionally supported SAVE Networking activities, and hardly any public funding; Livestock activities/partners are relatively dominant in the SAVE Network compared to plants; SAVE's activities and partnerships are not properly balanced across Europe; projects mainly in South-East Europe; West Europe poorly represented among partners; Website is outdated.</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>Growing interest in society in European countries for the conservation of 'living cultural heritage' and quality/origin of food; Community building through the internet; Collaboration with other related European networks.</p>	<p>National interests often prevail; Lack of collaboration/institutions at national level; Little or no funding available for SAVE to develop network activities.</p>

The SAVE Network focuses on two key objectives: i) the exchange of knowledge and experience between network partners, and ii) awareness raising and lobbying at national and European levels to support the *in situ* and on-farm conservation of endangered breeds and varieties. However, the objectives and added value of SAVE should be better explained to current and potential partner organisations.

Furthermore, SAVE's activities related to crop varieties or livestock breeds should be properly balanced. In addition, the case study has allowed to point out the fact that the SAVE Network would need a professional (part time) secretariat and (part time) active 'broker/leader', i) to organise the network, ii) to enlarge the network, and iii) to coordinate communication and lobbying activities. Moreover, communication among the partners of the SAVE network should be stimulated through i) providing an (online) forum for discussion and for the exchange of information and knowledge, ii) organising face to face meetings to discuss important topics, and iii) a newsletter.

Therefore, the SAVE Network will need more substantial funding to meet its objectives.

The SAVE Project Office should continue developing new projects and participate in European consortia applying for project funding. Collaboration between SAVE and other related networks at European level has added value and should therefore be strengthened.

Figures (source: SAVE Foundation)



Annex 1 – List of interviewees

- Geert Boink (supported by Obe Bootsma and Albert Meijering), SAVE Network and Chair of Board of Directors of SAVE Foundation
- Waltraud Kugler, SAVE Project Office

Annex 2 – List of references

ACT Now Consultancy. Towards a stronger and broader save network. Advisory Report.
Wageningen University, April-May 2015

SAVE Websites:

- <http://www.save-foundation.net>
- <http://www.arca-net.info>
- <http://www.agrobiodiversity.net>

SAVE Activity Report 2013-2014

SAVE Activity Report 2014-2015.