

Community Seed Banks in Practice

ORIGINS, PURPOSE AND COMMUNITY BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Klára Hrdá, Semínkovna, z.s.



Funded by
the European Union

Financováno Evropskou unií. Vyjádřené názory a stanoviska jsou však pouze názory autorů a nemusí nutně odrážet názory Evropské unie ani Evropské výkonné agentury pro vzdělávání a kulturu (EACEA). Evropská unie ani EACEA za ně nenesou odpovědnost.

SEEDS OF GROWTH:

Strengthening Community Seed Banks and Sustainable Seed-Saving Practices in Europe

The project aims to strengthen seed-saving practices and support community seed banks in preserving and sharing locally adapted, diverse seeds for more resilient food and farming systems in Europe.

The logo for Seeds of Growth features the words "Seeds of Growth" in a large, rounded, sans-serif font. The letter "o" in "Seeds" is replaced by a brown seed with a green stem and two green leaves. The entire logo is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

SEEDS OF GROWTH

Expected Outcomes:

- Support people working with seeds to grow their knowledge, skills and confidence
- Create space for sharing experience and learning across Europe
- Raise awareness of the importance of seed diversity for food systems and resilience
- Connect seed-saving with education through schools and partner institutions

The logo for 'Seeds of Growth' features the words 'Seeds of' on the top line and 'Growth' on the bottom line in a dark grey, rounded sans-serif font. The letter 'd' in 'Seeds' is replaced by a stylized seedling: a brown circular seed at the base, a thin black stem, and two green leaves with black outlines at the top.

Seeds of
Growth

Community Seed Bank LABS (CSB Labs)

A Seeds of Growth online training series of **3 interactive workshops** to explore how CSBs work in practice, from governance and seed quality to the policy and legal frameworks shaping access and exchange of seeds.

The workshops are free and open to all.

To join, please register here >



WED 11.03.2026

16:30 - 18:30 (CET)

WS1. COMMUNITY SEED BANKS IN PRACTICE:

Origins, purpose & Community Biodiversity management

Organised by: Seminkovna, Elkana, Alica Foundation, Magház

WED 18.03.2026

16:30 - 18:30 (CET)

WS2. DON'T WASTE YOUR EFFORT:

How to ensure good quality of your seeds

Organised by: SEED, CELL, SOS Faim

WED 25.03.2026

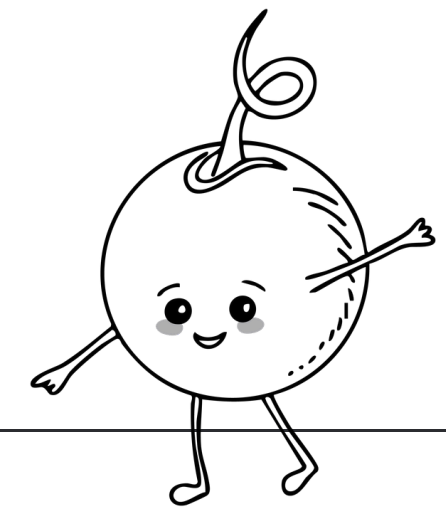
16:30 - 18:30 (CET)

WS3. SEEDS, ACCESS & RULES:

Policy and Legal Frameworks for CSBs

Organised by: EC-LLD, Rete Semi Rurali

ABOUT



Klára Hrdá

Founder of Semínkovna (Czech Republic) since 2015

- initiative focused on seed saving, cultivated biodiversity and public education
- Semínkovna EDU seed saving educational platform (activity for kids and adults, Seed Patron Program...)
- today: 200+ seed libraries across the Czech Republic
- the model has inspired activities beyond the Czech Republic, including Slovakia, Poland, Georgia, Moldova and Uganda
- growing interest in links between seed libraries and community seed bank approaches

Seeds connect diversity, knowledge and community.



Community Seed Banks are not primarily about storage. They are a response to loss: loss of diversity, loss of access and loss of knowledge.

WHY DID COMMUNITY SEED BANKS EMERGE?

Community Seed Banks have been developing worldwide for more than 40 years as part of informal seed systems.

Community Seed Banks did not emerge as a trend or educational hobby. They emerged because many communities realized that locally adapted varieties were disappearing, and that the formal seed market was not maintaining the diversity they needed.

In Europe, these initiatives grew quickly, but they are very diverse and often use different names: **seed houses, seed archives, seed networks or seed libraries.**



FROM CONSERVATION TO COMMUNITY BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

- The Convention on Biological Diversity introduced *in situ* conservation of agrobiodiversity in 1992
- But static conservation approaches often did not fit farmers' livelihoods and seed practices.
- This led to a shift toward on-farm management and later **Community Biodiversity Management (CBM)**
- CBM connects conservation with use, adaptation, seed exchange, local knowledge and community decision-making



WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SEED BANK?

A Community Seed Bank is a collective, locally governed seed management initiative embedded in informal seed systems

Its core functions typically include:

- conserving locally relevant crop diversity
- maintaining and regenerating seed through cultivation
- improving access to seed adapted to local conditions
- sharing knowledge, training and awareness
- organising communities around seed stewardship

In Europe, many such initiatives do not call themselves “Community Seed Banks”. They may identify as:

- seed houses
- seed networks
- seed archives
- seed libraries

ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Origins: different contexts, shared concerns

- The earliest documented CSBs emerged in the Global South, often to protect farmers' varieties under pressure from disasters, conflict, famine or rapid agricultural change.
- In the Global North, similar initiatives were often launched by farmers' associations, agrobiodiversity networks and amateur seed savers

In Europe, many of these initiatives grew from grassroots responses to:

- agricultural modernisation and industrialisation
- the disappearance of traditional and locally adapted varieties
- lack of access to non-commercial seed
- interest in seed sovereignty, agroecology and local food systems.

CORE PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

What do CSBs do in practice?

Typical purposes include:

- conservation of local, farmers' and older varieties
- access to seed not available through conventional channels
- regeneration and multiplication of seed
- training and awareness-raising
- support for participatory breeding, adaptation and resilient local food systems.

Typical materials managed include:

- landraces / farmers' varieties
- old commercial varieties
- mixtures and evolutionary populations
- often hundreds of accessions per initiative.



PATTERNS IN EUROPE

- In Southern Europe, initiatives were more often founded by producers / farmers
- In Northern and Central Europe, private gardeners often played a central role, sometimes together with teachers, breeders or activists
- Most were non-profit; many were associations, and in some clusters only about half had a formal legal structure



ACTIVITIES, RESOURCES AND SCALE

Main aims include:

- training and sensitisation
- providing seeds
- conservation
- providing data
- crop adaptation

Resources vary greatly:

- average membership ranged from 30 to 1,800

Activities include:

- seed multiplication
- storage
- distribution of seed samples
- training and education
- database management
- characterisation and evaluation of accessions
- in some cases participatory plant breeding

COMMUNITY SEED BANK VS SEED LIBRARY

Seed library

- lower-threshold public access model
- often located in a public library or community space
- strong educational and outreach role
- easier entry point for the public

Community Seed Bank

- stronger emphasis on systematic conservation, regeneration and stewardship
- often includes multiplication, documentation, seed quality and governance structures
- may serve farmers, gardeners or defined user groups over the long term

Seed libraries often broaden participation; Community Seed Banks deepen long-term conservation and management.



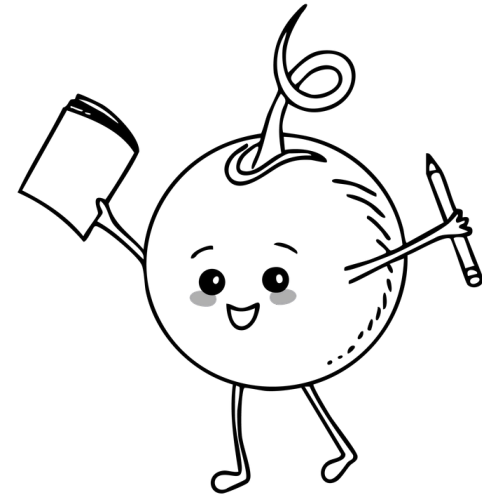
KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- CSBs are part of a broader shift from static conservation to community-based dynamic management
- In Europe, they are highly diverse in form, but share common values: diversity, conservation, exchange, participation, sovereignty and innovation
- They are not only technical structures, but also social, educational and governance-based institutions.
- Seed libraries and CSBs are best understood as different but overlapping community seed models

Where does a seed library end and a Community Seed Bank begin — and what model is most useful in your own context?



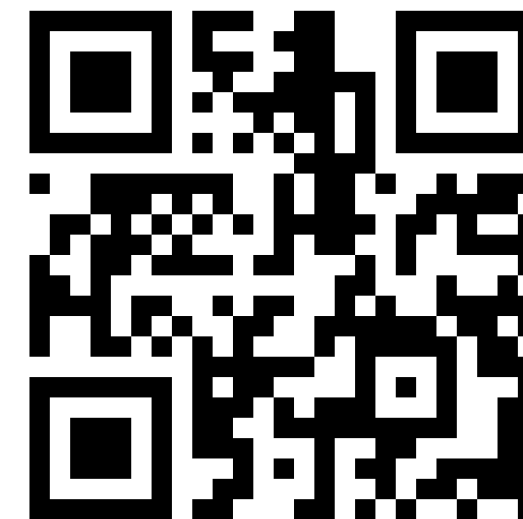
Thank you!



Klára Hrdá

<https://seminkovna.cz>

info@seminkovna.cz



Seeds of
Growth



Funded by
the European Union

Financováno Evropskou unií. Vyjádřené názory a stanoviska jsou však pouze názory autorů a nemusí nutně odrážet názory Evropské unie ani Evropské výkonné agentury pro vzdělávání a kulturu (EACEA). Evropská unie ani EACEA za ně nenesou odpovědnost.