

Seed banks in jeopardy

The Washington Post reports that Somalia's two seed banks have been looted and emptied during the past months of social and political upheaval in the region.

The banks contained samples for many hundreds of varieties of food crops adapted to this northern African country's soil and climate. With many starving farmers having eaten the seed they would normally save for planting, sources of adapted seed varieties will have to sought from scarce overseas collections.

Samples of some 300 varieties of corn and sorghum, the most commonly grown crops, were taken to Kenya in 1989 for safe keeping. But because the samples only amount to a few ounces of seed each, it make take several years before stocks can be built back up.

Fields in many regions are lying fallow due to the lack of seed. Some have been planted with seed from elsewhere but it is unknown how well or poorly the varieties will do, or whether they will succumb to pests and diseases that they have no resistance to.

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