



(25 August 2010)

International Symposium on Sustainable Agricultural Development and use of Agrobiodiversity in the Asia-Pacific Region

**13-15 October, 2010
RDA, Suwon, Republic of Korea**

Background and Rationale:

Agrobiodiversity is the foundation of sustainable agriculture development. Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA) are an essential resource to meet the future food security. However, on one side the threats to these resources are growing, whereas on the other side efforts to conserve and use genetic diversity are not very satisfactory. At the same time, the large scale adoption of few improved varieties has resulted in displacing diverse genetic variability. Also the traditional knowledge associated with the use of old varieties/landraces, has largely been ignored and rather disappearing. Besides, the reduced agricultural biodiversity on farm can significantly increase the vulnerability of farmers and existing agro-ecosystems. In view of these concerns, concerted efforts have been made by various international/regional organizations and some national governments towards collecting, characterizing, evaluating, documenting, conserving and utilizing available crop diversity. As a result, currently a large number of *ex situ* collections, including wild relatives, are being maintained.

Several scientific studies in the past have alerted both the public and the Governments about the danger of basing crop improvement programmes on narrow genetic base. The world leaders did explicitly recognize this fact. As such, the FAO Global Plan of Action (GPA) and the CBD have laid considerable emphasis on conservation of agricultural biodiversity. At its Ninth Session in 2002, the Commission of Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture emphasized “the importance of promoting the sustainable use of PGRFA, through germplasm characterization, evaluation and enhancement, plant breeding (including participatory plant breeding), seed production and distribution; and its contribution to food security”. Promoting sustainable use of biodiversity is also one of the seven 2010 Biodiversity Targets of CBD (Decision VII/30). These priorities have also been endorsed by the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)-Article 6: Sustainable use of Plant Genetic Resources. “Genetic Resources Partnership” is also identified as one of the four areas for elaboration under the Global Partnership Initiative for Plant Breeding Capacity Building (GIPB) being implemented by the FAO. It is now increasingly accepted that future crop productivity increases can only be achieved sustainably through an increased use of PGRFA, including wild relatives and exotic materials. Therefore, the sustainable conservation of agrobiodiversity through use is central to any sustainable food production initiative and can improve the livelihoods of poor farmers as well as help in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, this all can only be possible through easy access and benefit sharing (ABS) of PGRFA.

The legally non-binding International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources was adopted in 1983 by the state members of the inter-governmental FAO Commission on Genetic Resources. The underlying principle of the undertaking originally was that plant genetic resources are common heritage of mankind and should be available without restrictions. However, this principle lost its favour, in particular with the recognition of sovereign rights of countries over their own genetic resources, as envisaged under the CBD. Considering this paradigm shift for access of genetic resources for the betterment of humankind, it is of paramount importance that we devise ways and means for effective conservation through use of these resources. In recognition of the critical role played by biodiversity in sustaining lives and livelihoods, the United Nations General Assembly at its sixty-first session decided to designate 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity (Resolution 61/204 dated 20 December 2006). The declaration hopes to bring greater awareness to the importance of biodiversity by promoting different initiatives that can reduce current rate of loss occurring globally and enhance PGRFA activities aimed mainly at conservation through use.

The Asia-Pacific region encompassing South, Southeast, East Asia and the Pacific sub-regions, is the largest supplier of the world's food and agricultural products. It houses about 58% of the world's population and 74% of the agricultural population, but, has only 38% of the world's agricultural land. Attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly alleviating poverty, assuring food security and environmental sustainability against the background of declining natural resources, together with changing climate scenario, presents a major challenge to most of the countries in the Asia-pacific region during 21st century. The Asia-Pacific region is the center of diversity of many important species of crops, animals and livestock. Resource poor farmers in the region are largely dependent on the agrobiodiversity of minor crops, wild relatives of crops and wild species of plants and animals for their food security and livelihood.

Bioversity International in partnership with several international and regional organizations in the Asia-Pacific has initiated several programmes to promote conservation and use of agrobiodiversity for sustainable agricultural production. Four sub-regional networks have been organized to promote regional collaboration for strengthening PGRFA conservation and use. These are: (i) South Asia Network on Plant Genetic Resources (SANPGR), (ii) the East Asia PGR network (EA-PGR), (iii) Regional Cooperation for Plant Genetic Resources in Southeast Asia (RECSEA-PGR) and (iv) the Pacific Plant Genetic Resources Network (PAPGREN). In addition, there are also several commodity focused PGR networks like the Banana Asia Pacific Network (BAPNET) and the International Coconut Genetics Resources Network (COGENT). These sub-regional networks are operated in close partnership with APAARI.

APAARI, in collaboration with its stakeholders, especially CGIAR Centers, ARIs, GFAR and other regional fora, and the national agricultural research systems (NARS) continue to review the role and direction of agricultural R&D to efficiently address especially the above challenges. As a part of these on-going efforts, the proposed international symposium on "Sustainable Agricultural Development and Use of Agrobiodiversity in the Asia-Pacific Region", to be held in partnership with Rural Development Agency (RDA), Republic of Korea, Bioversity International and other International Centers from 13 to 15 October, 2010 in Suwon, will provide an opportunity to the major stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific region to review, identify and redefine the role and directions of agricultural R&D especially in the context of conservation through use of valuable agrobiodiversity for sustainable agricultural development. It will also help in deciding the 'Way Forward' for access and benefit sharing of valuable genetic resources for the posterity and better future of our younger generation.

Objectives:

1. To review the current status and trends for the conservation through use of agrobiodiversity for sustainable agricultural development at national, regional and global level
2. To bring together stakeholders to discuss issues that hinder currently the use and exchange of agrobiodiversity
3. To discuss issues and concerns relating to access and benefit sharing of agrobiodiversity in the region
4. To discuss policy framework and research priorities of NARS in the region aiming at effective conservation and use of agrobiodiversity for sustainable agriculture production

Expected Outputs:

1. Better understanding on the status of conservation and utilization of genetic resources for sustainable agricultural development in the region
2. Strengthen partnership to ensure access and benefit sharing of agrobiodiversity for improved livelihood in the region
3. Redefined policy and research agenda for conservation through use of agrobiodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region
4. To have endorsement of “Suwon Declaration on Sustainable Agricultural Development and use of Agrobiodiversity in the Asia-Pacific Region”

Program:

The meeting will be organized in sessions comprising country reports, global initiatives, thematic lectures, group discussions and plenary sessions. International and national experts on scientific, technical and policy aspects will be invited to make presentations and participate in the discussions. Representatives of civil society and farmers’ organization will be requested to present stakeholders’ perceptions. The proceedings of the international symposium will be published jointly by APAARI, RDA and Bioversity International. Detailed programme is presented at Annexure I.

Host:

Rural Development Administration (RDA)

Participation:

The following will participate in the meeting:

1. Representatives from APAARI and APAARI member institutes in the Asia-Pacific region
2. Representatives from Bioversity international
3. Representatives from FAO and the Treaty Secretariat
4. Representatives from CGIAR Centers (IRRI, ICARSAT, ICARDA, CIMMYT, CIAT, ILRI, AVRDC etc.)
5. Representatives from PGR Networks in Asia-Pacific
6. Representatives from NGOs, Donor Organizations/Foundation

Sponsors:

1. APAARI and Bioversity International and Rural Development Administration (RDA) are the sponsors for this conference with funding support from following co-sponsors:

Co-sponsors:

The following organizations are the co-sponsors for this conference:

2. International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)
3. International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)
4. International Wheat and Maize Improvement Center (CIMMYT)
5. International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA)
6. International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)
7. Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
8. AVRDC- The World Vegetable Center
9. Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR)

International Advisory Committee:

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Thomas Lumpkin	-	Member (CIMMYT)
Seong-Yeol Na	-	Convener (DG, ICB, RDA)

Local organizing committee:

The local organizing committee will be constituted by the RDA.

Technical working group:

A technical working group consisting of representatives from APAARI, RDA and Bioversity International will work jointly to finalize the technical program and the publication of the proceedings of the conference.