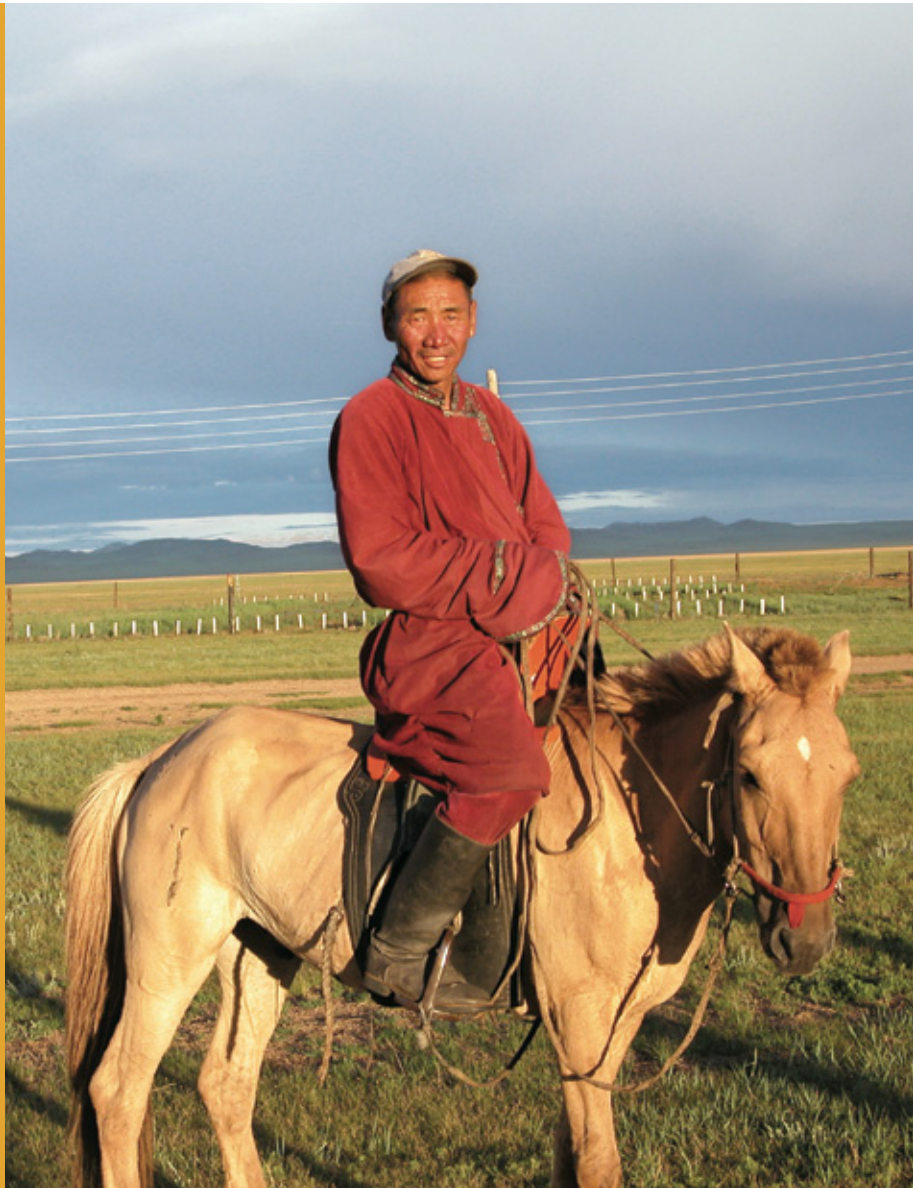


Summary Report of the First International Stakeholder Meeting

Rome, Italy, 29 – 31 May, 2006



Message from Dr Ahmed Djoghlaf,
Executive Secretary,
Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Despite the efforts made since 1992, loss of habitat, species and genetic diversity has continued. Agricultural biological diversity is no exception and the challenges we face are considerable.

The scale of agriculture is vast. Nearly one-third of the world's land area is used for food production. But the impacts of agriculture are not confined within the boundaries of farms or fields. As agriculture seeks to meet the rising demand for food, conversion of forest and marginal lands is substantially reducing levels of biological diversity. Unsustainable water consumption and excessive use of nutrients and pesticides have significant effects beyond agriculture.

Biodiversity also plays an important role in providing ecosystem services that underpin agricultural production in complex ways that often result from the interactions among components of biodiversity within and outside production areas. Our knowledge of these is slight although their importance is increasingly recognized.

The term agriculture includes the word culture. The attempt to sustain agricultural biodiversity is not only about sustaining seeds and crops. It is about sustaining the diversity of our diets, our ways of life and our cultures. The importance of local and indigenous communities is enshrined in the CBD and is likely to be important to the work of the Platform.

We should not forget the contributions that agriculture has made to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the potential that exists to use that diversity to improve sustainability and productivity. The maintenance of diversity by farmers is based on centuries of experience. Farmers understand better than most the concept of sustainability.

As the challenges facing agriculture and conservation of biological diversity increase, the many different organizations working in this area need to redouble their efforts if they are to reverse global trends. The Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research can play an important role in this regard by strengthening the knowledge base needed to support the development of a more sustainable agriculture and halt the loss of biodiversity in and around agricultural areas. I welcome its successful establishment and wish it well.



Photo: Helen Moss (Biodiversity International)

Summary Report of the First International Stakeholder Meeting

Background

Agricultural biodiversity, or agrobiodiversity, includes all the components of biological diversity of relevance to food and agriculture as well as the components of biological diversity that constitute the agro-ecosystem: the variety and variability of animals, plants and microorganisms, at the genetic, species and ecosystem levels, that sustain the regulatory functions, resource structure and ecological processes of agro-ecosystems for the production of goods and services. The wild species within agricultural landscapes also constitute elements of agrobiodiversity and contribute to the ecosystem services produced in agro-ecosystems. The continued conservation, enhancement and use of agrobiodiversity is central to: securing sustainable agricultural production world-wide with farming practices that are technologically, socio-economically and environmentally viable; improving the livelihoods of poor farmers throughout the world; achieving the Millennium Development Goals; and, ensuring the adaptability of agriculture necessary to cope with such challenges as climate change, resource degradation and conservation, international trade and newly emerging diseases.

In order to maintain, enhance and use agrobiodiversity effectively a much stronger knowledge base is needed. The Fifth Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Decision V/5) highlighted a general lack of understanding of the magnitude, causes and consequences of the loss of agrobiodiversity. Many international discussions and meetings have also stressed the gaps in knowledge that limit capacity to enhance and use agrobiodiversity optimally—in particular, this was highlighted at the International Technical Workshop on Sustaining Agricultural Biodiversity and Agro-Ecosystem Functions (organized by FAO, CBD Secretariat and Government of the Netherlands, Rome, 2–4 December 1998) and the International Symposium on Managing Biodiversity in Agricultural Ecosystems (CBD Secretariat, United Nations University [UNU] and Biodiversity International [formerly known as

IPGRI], Montreal, 8–10 November 2001). The International Workshop on Managing Agricultural Biodiversity for Sustainable Development, Nairobi, 23–25 October 2003 (System-wide Genetic Resources Programme [SGRP] of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research [CGIAR] and Bioversity International) moreover noted the value-added benefits of developing and maintaining collaboration on strengthening research on agricultural biodiversity and suggested that there was a timely opportunity and need to create a framework that would link existing initiatives and organizations. This view has been endorsed by many individual researchers. It was suggested that this collaborative mechanism might be supported by a ‘facilitation unit’ for research on agricultural biodiversity or secretariat, an idea subsequently welcomed by COP 7 in its Decision VII/3. Bioversity International indicated that it would be pleased to host such a unit.

A range of consultations have suggested that the framework for collaboration might best be constituted as a Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research supported by a small secretariat. In May 2006, a group of stakeholders from a wide range of organizations, including international agencies and institutes, networks, national research centres, universities, civil society organizations and representatives of the private sector working on different aspects of the conservation and use of agrobiodiversity (see Annex), met to discuss the establishment of the Platform, its aims and objectives, the form it should take, the way it should work and the activities it should undertake. This document summarizes the conclusions of the meeting, providing the basis for the establishment of the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research and a basis for its operations in the immediate future.

Aims and objectives

The Platform provides for interaction and collaboration between those working in different areas of research on agrobiodiversity. It provides a framework whereby organizations and individuals from many different backgrounds can share knowledge and experiences and collaborate on areas of common concern based on mutual shared interests within a participatory framework on the basis of equality.

The overall goal of the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research is to enhance the sustainable management and use of agrobiodiversity for meeting human needs by improving knowledge of all its different aspects. The Platform does this through providing information, identifying the contribution of agrobiodiversity to major global issues and promoting research. It seeks to integrate, mobilize and share research findings on the sustainable management and use of agrobiodiversity.

The Platform objectives are:

- 1. To support the development of an adequate agrobiodiversity knowledge base** through collating, synthesizing and disseminating agrobiodiversity knowledge, making available the relevant tools and practices that support improved use of agrobiodiversity, and identifying areas where information is lacking and new knowledge is needed.
- 2. To identify ways in which agrobiodiversity can contribute to addressing some of the major global challenges faced today** (e.g. environmental degradation,

poverty alleviation, climate change, water quality and scarcity, and new global disease threats) by making available the information and options that ensure the contribution of agrobiodiversity in these areas.

- 3. To identify and facilitate relevant new and innovative research partnerships** that strengthen multidisciplinary and participatory agrobiodiversity research, involve work on different agro-ecosystem components (such as livestock, crops, soils, pollinators, etc.) and contribute to building agrobiodiversity research capacity, particularly in the developing regions.

The work of the Platform will include:

- ⊙ Supporting the development of linkages and sharing of experiences between organizations and individuals working in different areas of agrobiodiversity research.
- ⊙ Exchanging information and supporting access to information held by relevant groups, organizations and Platform partners.
- ⊙ Identifying knowledge gaps and developing research plans to address them.
- ⊙ Providing discussion fora and creating new knowledge communities on specific research topics.
- ⊙ Supporting the preparation of state-of-the-art reviews and synthesis papers.
- ⊙ Putting forward information to ensure that results of research on agrobiodiversity issues are included in other relevant areas (e.g. health, education, development, environmental protection).
- ⊙ Identifying relevant policy issues that would benefit from inputs from the agrobiodiversity research community.
- ⊙ Making available common methodologies, indicators and protocols.
- ⊙ Linking different groups to build synergies and strengthen research collaboration (especially the agricultural development and conservation communities).
- ⊙ Providing support for the development of new cross-cutting research initiatives on agrobiodiversity conservation, enhancement and use.
- ⊙ Providing promotional and educational materials to improve public awareness of the importance of agrobiodiversity.

Developing the Platform's programme

Guiding principles

The work of the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research will be guided by a set of principles that ensures that the Platform adds value to the global effort to create the knowledge base that is needed to maintain and sustainably use biodiversity. The principles define the Platform's strategic role within agrobiodiversity research and serve to guide the Platform's scope of work and the range of partnerships that the Platform will engage in. The principles also guide the type of research that will be undertaken to fill the gaps in knowledge of agrobiodiversity, its status, functions, and uses.

The Platform will work in ways and in areas that complement existing work and that ensure its contribution adds qualitatively to the existing agrobiodiversity research effort. It will be particularly concerned with research that:

- ⊙ Increases knowledge and understanding of how agrobiodiversity is maintained as an essential resource for sustainable development and well-being.
- ⊙ Has potential to be of global significance and influences the research, development and policy agendas on agrobiodiversity.
- ⊙ Addresses more than one component, level or element of biodiversity in agro-ecosystems and related ecosystems and examines their interactions (e.g. for livestock and forests, crops, pastoral systems and soils, agricultural and coastal marine or inland aquatic resources, wild and cultivated interface); the Platform affirms that this is the most effective way to complement and supplement existing work and fill gaps in knowledge and its application.
- ⊙ Reflects the importance of wild species in agricultural landscapes (e.g. as sources of medicines, pollination and key ecosystem functions).
- ⊙ Involves farmers and local communities, respects and strengthens their customary knowledge systems and generates tools and findings that can be used by agrarian communities world-wide to improve the management of and increase the benefits from agricultural biodiversity.
- ⊙ Links custodians, managers and beneficiaries of agrobiodiversity within ecosystems, across sectors and across similar ecoregions in the developing world and between developing and developed countries.
- ⊙ Integrates global agrobiodiversity issues emphasizing the common and shared global responsibility to maintain and secure agrobiodiversity in both developing and developed countries, with priority to the needs of developing countries.
- ⊙ Can be used in global fora to alert stakeholders to trends, emerging policy and scientific challenges and technical opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and use of agrobiodiversity.

In this way the Platform will seek to ensure that it creates additional value and increased support for the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity to improve the welfare of people and their environments around the world.

The programme

The programme of the Platform will evolve as participation grows and discussion of the key areas continues at meetings or through the Platform Web site. Some topics that are likely to be considered as Platform priorities include the contribution that research on agrobiodiversity can make in different areas of world-wide importance such as:

- ⊙ The ways in which agrobiodiversity management policy and practices can contribute to addressing hunger and malnutrition, particularly through the support for the relevant CBD programmes of work and cross-cutting initiatives.
- ⊙ The ways in which agrobiodiversity management policy and practices can contribute to addressing major global issues such as desertification, climate change and the emergence of new globally significant diseases such as Avian flu.
- ⊙ Strengthening the use of agrobiodiversity, particularly in food production systems with unsustainable intensive production practices associated with high negative externalities.

Another set of issues concerns the importance of working with farmers and reflecting social issues and includes:

- ⦿ The conservation and use of agrobiodiversity under intensification and its increased application in supporting farmers who face the challenge of adapting to market-oriented production systems.
- ⦿ Supporting farmers with the necessary tools and methodologies that would allow them to better monitor, manage and sustainably use the agrobiodiversity present in their production and livelihood systems.
- ⦿ Addressing the wrong assumption that agrobiodiversity conservation and use are the unique responsibility of poor farmers from developing countries where such diversity is high, and providing ways of supporting their contributions for wider fair and equitable benefit-sharing internationally.



Photo: I. de Boreghyi (Bioversity International)

Areas of research relevant to the different components of agroecosystems and related ecosystems (such as crops, livestock, soils and pollinators) are also likely to be of interest to many partners such as:

- ⦿ Bridging the gap between traditional biodiversity conservation approaches, which always tend to see agriculture as the problem, and a perspective concerned with optimizing the conservation and use of agrobiodiversity for meeting human and environmental needs.
- ⦿ Exploring an ecosystem approach that considers the interface and interactions between agrobiodiversity and biodiversity beyond agricultural systems.
- ⦿ Developing a better understanding of the role of agrobiodiversity in providing resilience, stability and adaptability in production systems as well as in achieving productivity growth that is ecosystem friendly.
- ⦿ Developing better ways of valuing and monitoring agrobiodiversity at farmer, community, national and international levels. In this regard, the Platform may consider publishing a regular assessment of its understanding of the state of world agrobiodiversity.

In working in these different programme areas the Platform will focus on integrating and synthesizing existing information from different subject areas. It will provide materials that can help farmer management, contribute to increased public understanding and inform policy debate and decision-making. A key role could be to identify success stories where agrobiodiversity has made demonstrable contributions to improving agricultural practice, well-being and livelihoods.



Photo: Bioversity International

Platform operations

The way in which the Platform operates will reflect its objectives and will emphasize the importance of facilitating participation and collaboration, sharing information and furthering understanding around the common agrobiodiversity research agenda. The Platform will be independent of other organizations and able to bring together different public, private and civil-society partners on shared concerns and agendas. It will respond to, and contribute to, the major international agendas developed by the CBD, the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and other relevant initiatives. The Platform's emphasis will be on making available relevant information but it does not expect to be a primary supplier of information. Rather it will seek to support the provision of partners' knowledge and information to the various user communities.

The activities of the Platform will particularly support the integration and synthesis of existing information. Thus it will seek to facilitate information exchange, to support analysis, interpretation and consideration of available information through discussion fora and meetings and to promote and support the development of common tools and methodologies by making these available to interested users. The information exchange activities will also support the exchange of experiences and expertise by partners working in different areas of agrobiodiversity research so as to broaden and extend our knowledge of what works and what does not in different situations.

The Platform's Web site will play a key communication and information role in the work of the Platform. The Web site can offer easy and fast communication between partners, global access to agrobiodiversity information held by partners and the ability to support discussion fora and other search and query operations. It is not intended that the Web site will rival existing search engines or sites of partners. Rather, its role

is to facilitate identification of, and access to, useful information and to provide a framework for the development and synthesis of a common framework of experience, knowledge and practice in agrobiodiversity research.

The Platform will actively seek to engage civil society, the private sector and the business community, including not only farmers and their organizations but also multinational and national companies and smallscale local businesses.

Platform governance

The Platform will adopt management and governance principles that allow efficient and transparent operation and decision-making, provide necessary independence and allow for sufficiently speedy decisionmaking on key issues. Participation will be open to both individuals and organizations ('platform partners') and the continuing support of a wide range of organizations is seen as essential. The Platform will operate in ways that respect partners' concerns and perspectives and maximize participation. The Platform will hold meetings for partners whenever possible so as to ensure continued discussion and debate of key issues and to facilitate participation by partners in decisions on Platform activities and management.

A Steering Committee will be established, consisting of about 8–10 people drawn from different areas of expertise, regions and types of institution. The Steering Committee will consist of individuals prepared to move the Platform agenda forward and its terms of reference will include supporting the development and implementation of the Platform's programme of work, and overseeing the operations of the Platform Secretariat. Following the Stakeholder Meeting an Interim Steering Committee was identified and members agreed to serve until the 2007 meeting of the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources, which was agreed to be a timely opportunity for a meeting of Platform partners.

The Interim Steering Committee will lead the development the Platform's governance and operating practices and the development of full Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee and Secretariat. It will identify additional groups of partners to provide advice in specific areas such as: the Platform's work plan and investment needs; resource mobilization; and operating practices and governance. It will also identify a number of internationally recognized experts who can provide advice to the Platform and act as advocates for the Platform and its activities.

The Secretariat of the Platform is currently provided by Bioversity International and will continue to be hosted by Bioversity International.

The Secretariat will remain small and will be led by the Platform Coordinator. It will, *inter alia*:

- ⊙ manage the day-to-day work of the Platform;
- ⊙ provide support for the development of the Platform website;
- ⊙ arrange and organize meetings;
- ⊙ report on the meetings and the progress of work;
- ⊙ support the work of the Steering Committee and
- ⊙ undertake resource mobilization activities.

Resources

The support of Bioversity International, FAO, SGRP, the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) and the Netherlands to the functioning of the Platform to date is particularly appreciated and continued support of this nature will be essential to its effective operation. However, a firm basis of direct support to the Platform is essential to ensure its effective operation.

A first priority for the Secretariat and the Interim Steering Committee is to raise awareness of the Platform among the donor community. Platform partners should be active in identifying and participating in discussions and meetings where this might be possible.

Another immediate need is to identify activities the Platform could undertake that would be supported by donors. This should focus on areas where agrobiodiversity could contribute to addressing key global issues and might include, inter alia, development of small grants programmes or young researcher fellowships. The Interim Steering Committee will identify some immediate tasks that might be fundable and look particularly for innovative areas of possible interest to a wider range of funding agencies. The Secretariat will seek to coordinate the development of an inventory of ongoing agrobiodiversity research that would be useful in providing a better understanding of existing work and in identifying gaps of possible interest to donors.

Next Steps

The International Stakeholder Meeting recognized the need for the Platform to start to undertake some urgent activities and proposed that priority activities for the Platform in 2006 should include:

1. **Engaging the agrobiodiversity research community** and seeking its involvement in the developing Platform programme; contacting existing supporters and identifying further interested individuals and institutions.
2. **Establishing and beginning to use the Platform Web site** for Platform activities; initiating Web-based discussions on key issues.
3. **Identifying selected areas of research** that should be given priority by the Platform.
4. **Securing and mobilizing resources** to support the work of the Platform.
5. **Participating in selected key meetings** to present the Platform (e.g. Global Forum on Agricultural Research Triennial Conference, CGIAR AGM, Subsidiary Body for Science, Technology and Technical Advice of the CBD, Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture).

Annex

Participants and supporters of the First International Stakeholder Meeting of the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research

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For further information about the Platform and its work and to become involved in Platform activities contact:

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