



## FINAL ANNOUNCEMENT

### Title

### **International Conference Revealing the Appeal and Potential of Agricultural Biodiversity<sup>1</sup> For Africa: Status, Trends and Outlook for Future**

### Executive Summary

The year 2010 is designated by the United Nations as the International Year of Biodiversity. This is a great opportunity for Africa to highlight the potential of the component of biodiversity resources essential for food and agriculture, and its role in ensuring food security and environmental stability. Despite the crucial role of agricultural biodiversity for food agriculture, social and economic development, and environmental health in Africa there are serious and growing challenges in the sustainable management, use and conservation of the resource. To reveal the appeal and potential of Africa's agricultural biodiversity resources and examine ways for optimal conservation and use, FARA in partnership with Bioversity International and the support of sponsors, is organizing a conference on Agricultural Biodiversity in Africa. The conference, in celebration of 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity would seek to plan towards strengthening the management, use and conservation of Africa's agricultural biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations. The conference, which is to be held during this year's Africa Science Week and FARA General Assembly, will also be used to launch a special FARA initiative on agricultural biodiversity for Africa.

### Introduction

Africa abounds in agricultural biodiversity resources – genetic resources, crop species, trees, fish, livestock, as well as microbes, pollinators, and production environments. The continent is unique in having altitudes ranging from below sea-level to high flat-topped mountains, which contain many agro ecological zones and ecosystems suitable environment for growth of diverse flora, fauna and microbial resources. These present opportunities for resilient environmental conditions to buffer climatic change and variation as a base for biological diversities.

- Africa is the centre of origin of some crops and contains major regions of global crop diversity. Endemism is high, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and therefore the conservation and use of diversity of these biological resources is of fundamental importance not only to the continent but to the world at large. In addition to these agricultural biodiversity resources, African communities have developed strong indigenous/traditional

<sup>1</sup> Agricultural biodiversity covers all the key components of plants, animals, soil micro organisms, fishes, and pollinators

knowledge, innovations, practices and customary norms which enabled them to cope with the conservation of agricultural biodiversity resources under changing environmental conditions.

- No country is independent when it comes to genetic resources. Access to diversity in genetic resources for food and agriculture is critical, especially in helping adapt to potential effects of climate change and increasing productivity to assure sustainable availability of adequate food to meet the nutritional requirements of people and their livestock across different parts of the continent. In the current circumstances of the global challenges arising out of climate change and food shortages, the value of Africa's agricultural biodiversity becomes even more crucial. It also underlines the fact that Africa's agricultural biodiversity has value that goes beyond Africa, and touches on global public good.
- In making sustainable progress towards Africa's development objectives of poverty reduction, agriculture growth and food security as identified in the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and national agriculture plans, agriculture biodiversity plays a pivotal role. Any economically sound strategy for tackling these challenges will need to harness the wise use and conservation of agricultural biodiversity.
- Agriculture is of fundamental importance to Africa, contributing significantly to food security and to the overall gross domestic product (GDP). The continent's rich agricultural biodiversity has been the pillar behind the progress that Africa has made in agriculture.
- Currently, there are initiatives at national, sub-regional and regional levels targeting the conservation and use of agricultural biodiversity. These include the establishment of national programmes on plant genetic resources, national gene banks, sub-regional PGR networks (SPGRC, EAPGREN, GRENEWCA, etc.), establishment of national and regional strategies and action plans on biodiversity, etc. Most of these initiatives are however skewed towards plants, to the exclusion of other components such as livestock, fish, microbial resources, pollinators, etc. The key point, however, is that even the initiatives and programs focusing narrowly on crop plant genetic resources have not been functioning as they should; they have all been inadequately resourced and poorly coordinated.

### The problem

- It is widely recognized that the state of agricultural biodiversity management, use and conservation in Africa is still problematic. The full value and potential of Africa's agricultural biodiversity remains largely unrealized and unreachd; and a large domain of these resources remains largely underutilized. The lack of awareness on the issues surrounding Africa's agricultural biodiversity has led to a situation in which a number of agricultural biodiversity species have experienced genetic erosion, and in some cases gone extinct.
- Of the several thousand plant species that have been used for food only about 150 are cultivated today and no more than three, rice, wheat and maize, supply 60-80 percent of the calories and protein derived from plants.
- In the case of Africa, significant erosion of our genetic stock has been facilitated by changing dietary habits which now focus attention on very few crops and species -- a situation that has led to increased under-utilization of our biodiversity resources, increased malnutrition, and increases in diseases such as obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure. It must also be noted that farmed aquatic genetic diversity still resides almost exclusively in the wild.
- Climate change is projected to have major changes in environment for agriculture. Agricultural biodiversity and the stock of genetic resources would be crucial in adaptation strategies for responding to climate change. This requires serious attention to the management, use and conservation of Africa's agricultural biodiversity.

In summary, it could be said that a lot still needs to be done in respect of Africa's agricultural biodiversity. Africa therefore needs to give increased attention to the coordination, consolidation and cohesiveness of efforts for the rationale use, management and conservation of its agricultural biodiversity and genetic resources, which is critical to sustaining livelihoods in the continent.

### The Conference

*So, why do we need this conference, and why this time?*

The conference on agricultural biodiversity for Africa is intended to open eyes with respect to this essential resource, and to strengthen partnerships and strategic action in respect of its rational use, management and conservation. The conference will review the state of management and

conservation efforts on agricultural biodiversity; analyze the linkages and partnerships at country and regional levels; and make strategic analysis and planning towards improving collaboration, cooperation and consolidation efforts for the better management and use of agricultural biodiversity in Africa. The conference will be a contribution to the wider goal of the international year on biodiversity and additionally be used as a platform for the launching of a FARA-led Agricultural Biodiversity Initiative for Africa (ABIA).

### Goal and Objectives

**The overall goal of the conference is to increase awareness, raise the appeal and generate support for research and development in relation to agricultural biodiversity for development in Africa.** The conference will facilitate the sharing of innovative ideas in areas of agricultural biodiversity conservation and use science, research and development in Africa. It will also provide an opportunity to bring the agricultural biodiversity research community together to exchange experiences and lessons learnt, establish linkages and foster post-conference networking.

#### *Expected Objectives:*

The conference seeks to achieve four key objectives:

1. Understand agricultural biodiversity resources - the present and future threats and challenges. This will cover all the key dimensions of agricultural biodiversity (including plants, livestock, fishes, pollinators, soil micro-organisms, etc).
2. Assess the state of knowledge and celebrate the value and contribution of Agricultural biodiversity for development on the continent.
3. Identify the weaknesses and the gaps that exist in the optimization of use of agricultural biodiversity on the continent. This would also include methodologies and principles and approaches.
4. Develop mechanisms, approaches and pathways for strengthening engagement on agricultural biodiversity for food and nutrition security and environment.

### Convenors/ Organizers

The principal convenor of the conference is FARA, in partnership with the four sub-Regional Organizations (ASARECA, CORAF, NASRO and SADC-FANR), and Bioversity International.

### Intended Participants

Participants are expected to come from a broad range of institutions and organizations both within and outside Africa. Key African stakeholders are expected from:

- National Agricultural Research Institutions, Universities, etc.
- Private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations
- Africa regional & sub-regional economic organizations: Africa Union (Agriculture & Rural Economy, Science & Technology), NEPAD (Agriculture, Science & Technology), SADC, COMESA, ECOWAS, CEMAC etc.
- Sub-regional research organizations: ASARECA, SADC-FANR, CORAF/WECARD, institutions in North Africa.
- International institutions & initiatives working on agricultural biodiversity: CGIAR centres; Advanced Research Institutions; Platform on Agro biodiversity Research (PAR); The Africa Fish Initiative; System wide Livestock Programme; Crops of the Future etc.
- International multilateral institutions: FAO, IFAD, UNDP, etc.
- Donor agencies: Various

It is estimated that number of participants will be about 200 people.

### Conference structure and content of the

The conference will be opened with two keynote addresses on the following topics: "Agricultural biodiversity for productivity improvement, climate change adaptation & production system resilience", and, "Making use of diversity to improve nutrition and health". The opening session will be followed by a plenary session on the theme: "Revealing the appeal

## programme

and potential of agricultural biodiversity for Africa: status, trends and outlook for the future". Five invited papers will address the following areas: crop plant biodiversity and food security; livestock genetic resources and food security; fish genetic resources contributions to food security; domesticated tree species and food security; and below ground diversity and food security. Three groups of parallel sessions will be held during which research papers and strategic analysis relating the above components to food security, ecosystem services and environment will be presented. Four cross-cutting themes will be addressed in plenary by lead papers. These are: "Climate change implications for management and use of agricultural biodiversity resources in Africa"; "Importance of Knowledge Management/Sharing to biodiversity conservation and use"; "Policy and law dimensions in the management, conservation and use of genetic resources for food and agriculture"; and "Mainstreaming agricultural biodiversity through education and capacity development". Each of these presentations will set the stage for targeted discussion on the respective issues.

### *Poster Session*

There will also be a poster session which will provide opportunities for scientists working on agricultural biodiversity in Africa to present research and development findings and issues on the six themes. Poster presentations could cover such topics as:

1. Potentials of crop plants & domesticated trees in agricultural landscapes for food and nutrition security.
2. Agro biodiversity-nutritional diversity-health nexus
3. Roles of microbes and pollinators and their diversity for food production.
4. Role of diversity in production system resilience and/or resistance.
5. Livestock and fish diversity contributions to food security and meeting protein needs of households.
6. Community seed systems, seed systems policy and regulatory framework to conserve and facilitate exchange and use of genetic resources for food and agriculture.

## Venue

### **Venue:**

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (during Africa Science Week and FARA AGM).

## Dates

**Dates:** 19-20<sup>th</sup> July 2010.

## Info Contacts:

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## Other Partners

WorldFish, ILRI, CIAT-TSBF.