

Summary Report

CONFERENCE ON AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY IN AFRICA



Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. 19-20 July, 2010.

OPENING

The conference was opened by the Chairperson of the Forum on Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), Dr. Dennis Kyetere, who highlighted his delight that FARA had initiated the conference and the creation of a new initiative to champion issues of agricultural biodiversity for Africa. Dr. Monty Jones (Executive Director of FARA) and Dr Emile Frison (Director General of Bioersivity International) presented the keynote addresses. Dr. Jones focused on FARA/CAADP perspectives on challenges and pathways to food and nutrition security. Dr. Frison focused on agricultural biodiversity as assets for improving nutrition and health in Sub-Saharan Africa. Both keynote speakers highlighted the crucial importance and potential of agricultural biodiversity for development in Africa, but regretted that inadequate focus and attention has been given to this resource.

Invited thematic papers on six components of agricultural biodiversity (crop, livestock, fish, domesticated trees, soil biota diversity, and pollinators) were presented during plenary sessions, followed by highly interactive discussions. Working groups on each of the six thematic areas further discussed key issues and identified key proposals for action by FARA Stakeholders.

The conference further benefited from presentations and discussions, on strategic cross-cutting elements relevant to agricultural biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in Africa. The presentations covered the following issues: climate change and agricultural biodiversity; knowledge management in ABD; international policy and legal frameworks in ABD; mainstreaming ABD in tertiary education; and the issue of informatics and documentation in agricultural biodiversity.

Key messages/issues distilled from Presentations:

1. Diversity in Africa's genetic resources represents critical assets and opportunities for meeting the challenges of food security, nutrition and in particular adaptation to climate change.
2. Inadequate knowledge and documentation on the different components within agricultural biodiversity (Animal, Fish, Crops, Trees, Below-Ground Biodiversity, Pollinators).
3. Africa's vast diversity of genetic resources, including neglected and underutilized species (NUS), need to be promoted by government agencies and further developed through value chain approaches and linkage to markets.
4. Agricultural Biodiversity management should be more than just conservation in gene banks, etc. Sustainable management and use needs to be given more emphasis. The concept of conservation through USE should be promoted; on-farm management and USE of genetic resources.
5. Some agricultural practices (e.g. excessive pesticide use & focus on narrow range of improved varieties to the neglect of diversity of locally adapted varieties) threaten Africa's useful diversity in crops, livestock, pollinators, and soil biota.
6. Climate change impact on diversity of Africa's local genetic resources and food availability is of great concern. Diversity in our genetic resources will be an essential tool in adaptation to climate change.

Key proposals for Agricultural Biodiversity Initiative in Africa (ABIA)

There was great excitement and support for FARA's establishment of a continental agricultural biodiversity initiative for Africa (ABIA). This was seen as a timely development 'which should have happened yesterday'.

ABIA will support efforts of SROs, NARS & Partners in R&D on agricultural biodiversity in Africa; it will build partnerships for action, seek resources, and commission research; it will engage in advocacy for right policies and for R&D in agricultural biodiversity. Bioversity International will be a technical partner with FARA in the technical implementation of ABIA.

The key "PRODUCTS" to be generated through ABIA include the ff:

1. Political level policy intervention (nationally, regionally, AU/NEPAD, donors), advocacy and public awareness to promote proper management and sustainable use of genetic resources in Africa;
2. Strategic studies and analysis on key ABD issues (Policy Briefs)
3. Support to Africa's negotiators in international policy fora on genetic resources and agricultural biodiversity;
4. Mainstreaming ABD into tertiary education, universities;

5. Support establishment of Farmer/Community platforms in ABD use
6. Knowledge management in Africa's ABD, including indigenous knowledge capture.

Declaration (Conference Statement)

In a declaration endorsed at the end of the conference,

PARTICIPANTS:

- convinced of the value of conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food security, good nutrition and health as well as livelihood improvement of Africa's people;
- aware of the paucity of national capacity and investment in R&D to fully implement the conservation and optimally explore the value and contributions of the wide diversity of local genetic resources; and
- convinced that FARA is best placed to undertake much needed political level policy and advocacy roles to give greater impetus to the conservation and use of Africa's diversity of GR for the benefit of the population.

URGED FARA's 2010 General Assembly to use the occasion of the celebration of the year 2010 as the UN **International Year of Biodiversity**, to formally resolve to take concrete and urgent steps in promotion of the functioning of the Agricultural Biodiversity Initiative for Africa (ABIA). It also called on **Donor Organizations** to support and partner with FARA in the urgent implementation of the FARA-led programme on Agricultural Biodiversity Initiative in Africa. A sense of **URGENCY** was declared, in order to halt the further deterioration in this resource, and to help unleash the potential of agricultural biodiversity for development in the continent.

Formal Launch of ABIA

Following the conference declaration, ABIA was then formally launched at a Press Conference, attended by members of the press and over 200 participants. The launching was performed by the Honorable Minister of Agriculture of Sierra Leone, Dr. Joseph Sam Sesay, the Executive Director of FARA, Dr. Monty Jones, and the Deputy Director General of Bioversity International, Dr. Kwesi Atta-Krah.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The conference was sponsored by FARA, the Swiss Development Cooperation, CTA, the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and Bioversity International. Other supporting organizations were ICRISAT and ICRAF.