

Conservation and Adaptive Management of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) Project



GIAHS: A heritage for the future



GLOBALLY IMPORTANT AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE SYSTEMS (GIAHS) are remarkable land use systems and landscapes that are rich in globally significant biological diversity. They have evolved from the co-adaptation of a community with its environment and its needs and aspirations for sustainable development (FAO, 2002).

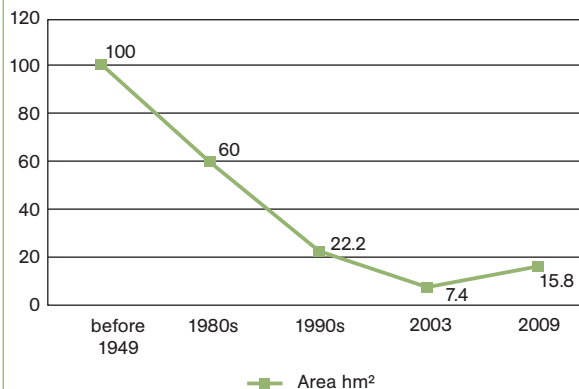
Worldwide, specific agricultural systems and landscapes have been created, shaped and maintained by generations of farmers and herders based on diverse natural resources, using locally adapted management practices. Building on local knowledge and experience, these ingenious *agri-cultural* systems reflect the evolution of humankind, the diversity of its knowledge and its profound relationship with nature. These systems have resulted in the maintenance and adaptation



Rice – Fish system, China

A Chinese clay plate dating to the Han Dynasty 2000 years ago shows fish swimming from a pond into a rice field. Ecological symbiosis exists in the rice-fish agricultural system, fish provide food and fertilizer to rice, regulate micro-climatic conditions and eat larvae and weeds in the flooded fields, reducing the cost of labour needed for fertilizer and insect control.

Cultivation of traditional rice varieties in Wannian County, China



Making an impact

The cultivation of traditional rice varieties in Wannian county, China was in steady decline until the introduction of GIAHS in China in 2003 and a policy shift in government support to agricultural heritage systems combined with public awareness, which impacted farmers' decisions and increased the area of cultivation of traditional rice varieties to 15.8 hm². Source: Wannian Rice System, 2010.

of globally significant agricultural biodiversity, outstanding landscapes, indigenous knowledge systems and resilient ecosystems, but above all, in the sustained provision of multiple goods and services, food and livelihood security for millions of poor and small farmers.

The Uniqueness of the GIAHS

GIAHS' uniqueness derives from their presentation of a fascinating story of the human ability and ingenuity to adjust and adapt to the vagaries of a changing environment throughout generations and to create "agri-cultural" civilizations that have been sustainable over millennia. Having been founded by ancient agricultural civilizations, GIAHS are linked to important centres of origin and



Maasai Agro pastoral system (Kenya and Tanzania)

The system embodies highly flexible natural resource use patterns and strong cultural conservation values, providing synergies with wildlife.

diversity of domesticated plant and animal species, the *in situ* conservation of which is of great economic importance and global value. However, the continued survival of GIAHS is threatened by several factors such as:

- loss of customary institutions and forms of social organization that underpin their management;
- conversion of habitat and land use change, unsustainable and intensive farming practices;
- displacement of indigenous communities; and
- dilution of traditional varieties by invasive species and exotic varieties.

Dynamic conservation of GIAHS

Ten pilot countries – Algeria, Chile, China, India, Kenya, Morocco, Peru, Philippines, Tanzania and Tunisia – have committed to the dynamic conservation of their GIAHS. The US\$18 million project is primarily funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the Government of Germany, FAO, IFAD and the countries involved. Through this project, FAO emphasizes the concept of sustainable agriculture and rural development while promoting cultural diversity and economic viability of the small scale and family farming communities. The project will:

- leverage global and national recognition of the importance of GIAHS and institutional support for their safeguard;
- build capacity of local farming communities and local and national institutions to conserve and manage



Chiloé agriculture, Chile

This landscape in Chile presents an adaptive management system based on scientific knowledge introducing diversity for sustainable intensification.



Oases of the Maghreb system, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia

The oases of the Maghreb region are green islands flourishing in a harsh environment. Dominated by date palms and intertwined with trees and crops, these ancient systems produce a surprising variety of fruits and vegetables, cereals and forages, medicinal and aromatic plants. Sophisticated irrigation architectures, supported through traditional local resource-management institutions ensure a fair water distribution - a crucial element of the oases system.

GIAHS, generate income and add economic value to goods and services of such systems in a sustainable fashion;

- promote enabling policy, regulatory and incentive environments to support their conservation, evolutionary adaptation and viability.

For more information, please visit:

www.fao.org/nr/giahs

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