



Agricultural Heritage Systems:

the important role in revitalizing ecosystems for biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural livelihoods

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, which has evolved as a result of the co-adaptation of a community with its environment and its needs and aspirations for sustainable development.



The stubborn persistence of millions of hectares under traditional farming is living proof of a successful indigenous agricultural strategy and is a tribute to the 'creativity' of small farmers throughout the developing world.

Today, well into the first decade of the twenty-first century, throughout the world there are millions of smallholders, family farmers and indigenous people practicing resource-conserving farming. This is a testament to the remarkable resiliency of these agro-ecosystems in the face of continuous environmental and economic change. These systems continue to contribute substantially to the conservation of biodiversity and food security at local, national and global levels.



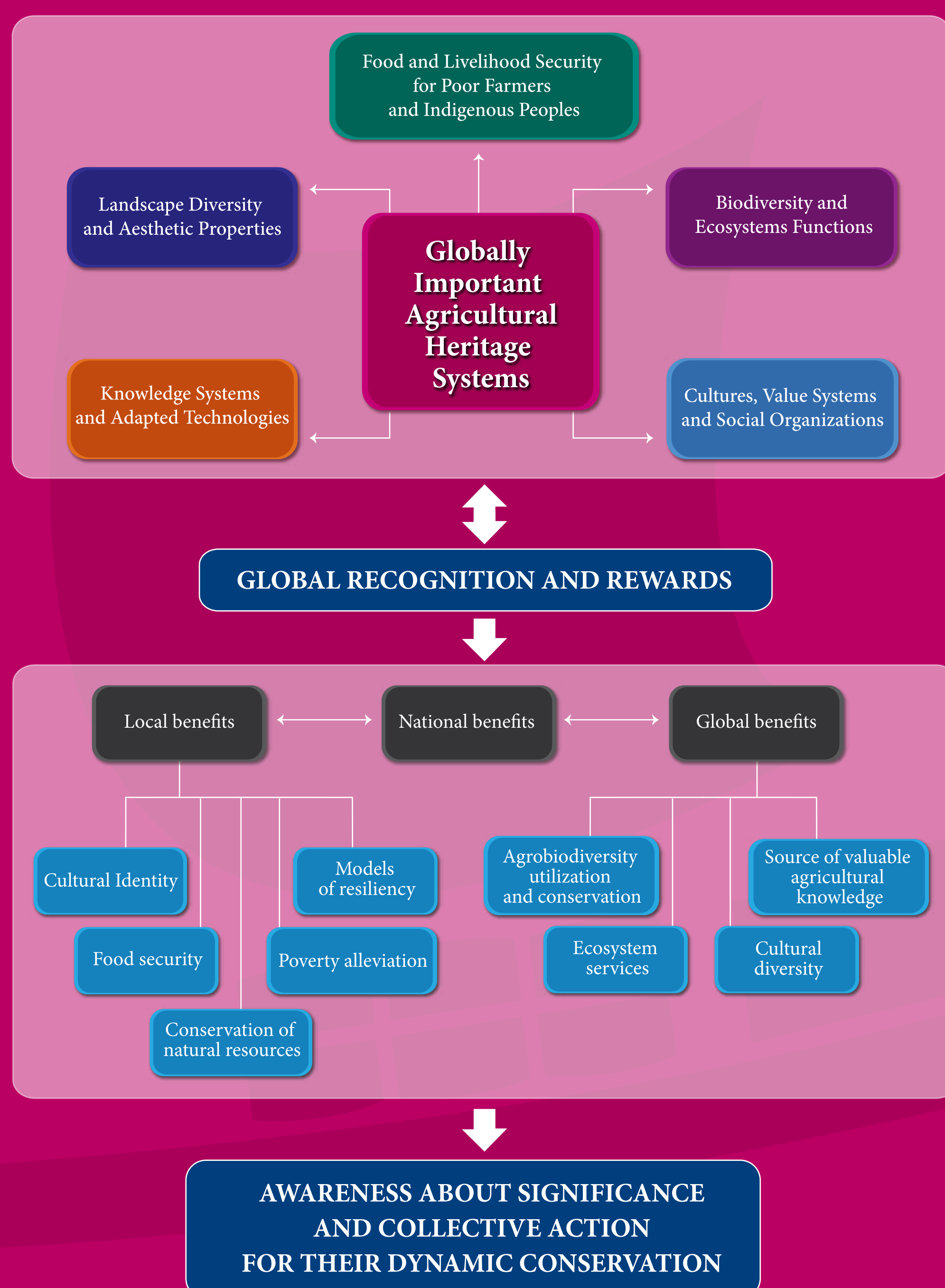
FAO's GIAHS Initiative

GIAHS Initiative seeks to identify and promote recognition and dynamic conservation of agriculture heritage systems including where necessary the revitalization—and the outstanding role these systems played in the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity of global significance. The initiative does not intend to freeze agricultural systems in time, but rather calls for “dynamic conservation”, emphasizing a balance between conservation, adaptation and socio-economic development. It aims to empower smallholder family farming communities, indigenous peoples and minority/tribal groups to conserve their traditional agricultural systems and to create an economic stake in the conservation of (agricultural) biodiversity so that nature and people can prosper together.



The unique features and principles of GIAHS

Agricultural heritage landscapes are not only important landmarks having historical value, they also depend on living and evolving communities. These communities are the custodians of an institutional, ecological and agri-cultural heritage that provides a variety of benefits and services at the local, national and global levels.



Over the last few years, FAO–GIAHS initiative with its innovative, integrated and holistic approach has raised awareness, interest and enthusiasm in a wider audience both from local and international bodies. This has lead to a paradigm shift and policy change regarding small-holders, family farmers and indigenous communities. The initiative has made significant contributions to revitalizing ecosystems for biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural livelihoods of family farmers and indigenous communities at pilot sites in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and Latin America.



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