

**Message from Mr. Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator
United Nations Development Programme
on the Observance of the World Food Day**

I am delighted that the theme of this year's World Food Day is Biodiversity for Food Security. In a world of plenty, the fact that some 840 million people across the world go hungry is a global tragedy. Everyday this situation translates into millions of underweight children, millions of people who never achieve their full physical or mental capacity, disease, death and billions of dollars in unfulfilled human potential. The links between hunger and poverty are clear. Unless we take effective action, the cycle of hunger and poverty will continue from generation to generation thwarting global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger from our world.

Today, the biodiversity evident in the vast range of crop and animal varieties originally selected and refined for us by smallholder farmers thousands of years ago are under threat, and it is the poor, often dependent upon biodiversity in a very direct way to protect them from hunger, that suffer disproportionately. With the changing agricultural practices that cause farmers to shift to new varieties and breeds, and the valuable diversity of their land races and livestock being lost, farmers are increasingly being exposed to the dangers of drought, flood, pest attack and plant and animal diseases if their restricted range of varieties and breeds proves susceptible. The protection of agro-biodiversity is vital, both on farms where the original biodiversity is found and in the deep freezes of research establishments.

UNDP believes that one of the keys to protecting biodiversity is by empowering people – particularly women who play a central role in growing crops, feeding children and nurturing the family – together with good, far-sighted legislation. People who have rights to resources usually manage those resources well. Legislation that recognizes people's needs and capacities is most likely to be respected. Where decision-making and financial authority is decentralized, people become empowered to make good decisions.

For UNDP, we will continue to contribute to the protection of biodiversity for food security through policy advice to governments, advocacy for the rights of women and girls, advocacy for the intellectual property rights of poor people as they affect their ability to use their traditional seeds and breeds, the decentralization of governance, the reform of land tenure regimes, water rights and the strengthening of local capacities to manage resources well.

Protecting biodiversity has an important role to play in achieving the overarching aim of Millennium Development Goals, to halve the number of people that suffer from hunger and live in extreme poverty. Let us today recommit ourselves to these goals which have the potential to transform the lives of millions of people that live in want today.