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Strengthening the Implementation of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems Initiative through capacity development

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) initiative aims to safeguard the world's threatened agricultural heritage by promoting, at the global level, the identification, conservation and international recognition of remarkable agricultural heritage sites and their associated landscapes, agricultural biodiversity, knowledge systems and cultures. The cultural and ecological diversity, as well as the legacy, of these ancestral agricultural sites are most often maintained by local communities. Supporting such systems and enhancing their benefits requires securing their dynamic conservation and sustainable management, in order to preserve their unique environmental, biodiversity and cultural attributes in the long term.

DEVELOPMENT SOLUTION

The FAO–China South-South Cooperation (SSC) project Strengthening the Implementation of the GIAHS Initiative through capacity development has promoted exchanges of experiences and technical knowledge among over 100 participating countries. The project has implemented a systematic and substantial capacity development programme through global conferences, training courses and seminars. These have focused on sustainable development, the GIAHS Programme's conceptual framework and implementation, the registration and

dynamic conservation of GIAHS sites, and the exchange of countries' experiences. These activities aim to strengthen human and organizational capacity at the global, regional and country levels, especially (but not exclusively) in developing countries, to identify and safeguard heritage sites, and to design and implement dynamic conservation plans for their protection and development.

Key results

By organizing high-level workshops and training courses in China benefiting over 300 participants from more than 100 countries, the project has given a new impetus to FAO's GIAHS Programme. Countries are now more aware of agricultural heritage issues, and better equipped for the identification, conservation and sustainable development of their remarkable heritage sites. Other key results include:

- a. The number of recognized GIAHS sites increased by 18 new sites and 6 new countries.
- b. There are now 52 recognized GIAHS sites in 21 countries around the world, with potentially many more to follow – 44 countries are actively engaged in submitting new candidates.
- c. From a regional perspective, the GIAHS sites portfolio now embraces North America and Europe, in addition to Asia, Africa and the Near East / North Africa.
- d. The quality of the candidature documents submitted to FAO for recognition as GIAHS sites has substantially improved. They now systematically include action plans to support the dynamic conservation and sustainable development of the systems concerned.
- e. The renewed interest of member countries in the programme, and the active engagement of many of them in the preparation of candidatures, is a direct output of the SSC project.

Scaling up

These heritage sites are important laboratories of public policies to support sustainable practices and maintain prosperous rural communities, and often provide a reference for changing paradigms in policy making at local and national levels. The influence of agricultural heritage sites in transforming agriculture – and agricultural policies – often goes beyond the boundaries of the recognized sites to benefit national policies and strategic approaches. FAO and the Government of China are currently considering to renew this support, with other funding partners, in order to expand the GIAHS Programme's global coverage and further enhance its quality.



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Contact us

Office of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (OSS)

E-mail: South-South-cooperation@fao.org

Web address: <http://www.fao.org/partnerships/south-south-cooperation/en/>

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla

00153 Rome, Italy



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