



Second Regional Orientation Workshop on Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) for Asia and the Pacific

5 – 7 May 2015, Bangkok, Thailand

Concept Note

Background

Today, a major challenge facing humanity is how to achieve a sustainable agriculture that provides enough food and ecosystem services for present and future generations in an era of climate change and accelerated environmental degradation. In continuously looking to survive and coping through centuries with extreme weather events and climatic variability, farmers living in the world have developed and/or inherited their own farming practices managed in ingenious ways, allowing smallholders to meet their subsistence needs in the midst of environmental variability without depending much on modern agricultural technologies. The stubborn persistence of millions of hectares under traditional farming is living proof of a successful indigenous agricultural strategy and constitutes a tribute to the “creativity” of small farmers throughout the developing world. Today, well into the first decade of the 21st century, there are in the world millions of smallholders, family farmers and indigenous peoples practicing resource-conserving farming which is testament to the remarkable resiliency of these agroecosystems in the face of continuous environmental and economic change, while contributing substantially to conservation of biodiversity, household food security and traditional cultural heritage. Many of these agro-ecosystems are unique in their attributes and maintain a specific landscape in rural areas.

Since 2002 FAO implements a global initiative on dynamic conservation and adaptive management of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage systems (GIAHS)¹ aiming to identify and ensure global recognition of the importance of these unique traditional agricultural systems for food security and sustainable development. The GIAHS initiative explicitly recognises that change in “traditional” political, social and economic processes is inevitable; they cannot be frozen or re-created.

Over the past decade, the GIAHS initiative has been piloting an innovative model of engaging communities, local and national governments in the adaptive management of agricultural heritage and conservation of system’s goods and services. It has served as a learning laboratory for identifying new ways to sustain nature’s bounty, the health of ecosystems, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and genetic resources for food and agriculture, protection of traditional knowledge systems, culture, and more importantly, building a bridge for the sustainable future. The GIAHS initiative promotes activities aimed at: (i) assisting in formulation and implementation of national policies aimed at preserving these agricultural heritages systems and the biodiversity, traditional knowledge and natural resources management systems; (ii) empowering local communities and indigenous peoples to sustain their livelihood that is based on these systems and explore options for

¹ For more information, www.giahs.org

improvement of these systems without jeopardizing their ecosystem resiliency, goods and services; and (iii) recognizing the links between “agri-cultural” diversity and cultural diversity and the achievements of local community members and indigenous peoples. In parallel to the in situ activities, the GIAHS initiative is looking for a stronger recognition, at the highest level of the policy making agenda, of the contribution made by traditional agricultural systems to the conservation of the biological and cultural diversity of the planet.

Ultimately, it will help the small farmers, indigenous communities and rural peoples living in and around GIAHS to establish strengthened socio-political systems (governance) and economic processes (markets and employment opportunities) that help them address the challenges of today’s world (with all its modern pressures) and let them to take advantage of the opportunities of modern living, while at the same time maintaining the traditional agro-ecosystems and interlinked cultures they have.

There are a total number of 31 designated GIAHS sites in 13 countries, as of 29 August 2014, supported by the GIAHS Secretariat, including those in Africa, Latin America and Asia. In the Asia-Pacific region, the participating countries are limited to China India, Japan, the Philippines and recently Republic of Korea while Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Iran, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand Vietnam are in the process of formulating GIAHS proposals.

In May 2013, an international forum on GIAHS was held in Noto, Ishikawa, Japan where participants from around the world shared their knowledge on the fundamental values of agricultural patrimony as well as their experiences on managing and revitalizing local economies through GIAHS dynamic conservation. The GIAHS forum featured, among others, the adoption of the Noto Communique that recommends: (i) the progressive designation of further GIAHS sites to promote the conservation of agricultural heritage and its contributions towards global food security and economic development; (ii) promotion of on-the-ground projects and activities, particularly in developing countries; (iii) the existing GIAHS support the recognition of candidatures of GIAHS areas in less developed countries; and (iv) promote the twinning of GIAHS sites between developed and developing countries.

For Asia and the Pacific region, the first Regional Workshop was conducted on 12-13 November 2013 to enhance understanding of GIAHS concept and programme, share the experiences and lessons among the countries which have implemented GIAHS and those seeking to join the programme. Pioneering GIAHS countries (China, India, Philippines) and participating countries (total of 18), shared their knowledge and experience regarding the agricultural heritage concept and possible application and engagement in GIAHS programme. The workshop was attended by 55 delegates and participants from 18 Asia Pacific Countries. It was a timely opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of traditional farming systems in the face of climate change and revitalization of rural economies based on lessons learned and best practices gained from the GIAHS existing sites.

In September 2014, the GIAHS High-level Training was held in Beijing, China and supported prospective GIAHS partners in Asia. The training offered a number of lectures covering the multi-dimensional aspects of GIAHS, shared with the participants lessons learned and experiences in implementing development programmes and policies on GIAHS. The training, participated by representatives 12 countries in Asia and the Pacific, concluded with a follow-up action, or Action Plan, proposed by each of the participating countries. The action plans were developed based on the individual country context. Yet, the common features of the action plans are setting up a multi-stakeholder management mechanism, formulating a communication strategy to raise awareness, including policy advocacy, pilot-testing a GIAHS model, and elaborating an initial idea of what could a potential GIAHS site.

The workshops promoted knowledge sharing on GIAHS and capacity building in countries in the region in identifying potential GIAHS sites and in the formulation of GIAHS proposals. However the programme is still new and further promotion and better understanding of the fundamental values,

essential goods and services harboured in agriculture in globally important agricultural heritage systems, sharing experiences gained and lessons learned by Members Countries to-date are essential, the Second Regional Orientation Workshop on GIAHS for Asia and the Pacific will be organized to mainstream GIAHS programme. It also aims to enhance national and regional capacity on identifying potential GIAHS sites and formulating GIAHS proposals for recognition and promoting a network of stakeholders towards creating strong public interest and support and mobilizing resources to achieve GIAHS objectives.

Objectives

The objectives of organizing a GIAHS orientation workshop are:

- 1) to promote awareness of GIAHS, and its basic concept, approaches, impacts and benefits
- 2) to share experiences, lessons and knowledge on dynamics of the implementation of ideas/proposals of GIAHS
- 3) to build up the capacity of countries in the region in identifying potential GIAHS and formulating quality GIAHS proposals for recognition

Output

- 1) Enhanced understanding and awareness on GIAHS Initiative
- 2) GIAHS knowledge, experiences and lessons are shared with the member countries and partners in the region
- 3) Key factors leading to the success (xxx) of the GIAHS implementation discussed and identified
- 4) Capacity of countries in identifying and formulating GIAHS proposal is enhanced

Expected participants (total about 50-60 participants)

One or two senior Government official(s) each from potential and interested countries in the region (20-25 countries), representatives from GIAHS implementing countries (5 countries to share experiences), senior officials from the World Agricultural Heritage Foundation, development partners, donors, CSOs and FAO (RAP and HQs).

Structure of the Workshop and Provisional Agenda

The three-day regional workshop will be organized as follows:

Day 1 will provide the opportunity to learn more about GIAHS and lessons learned in Asia. Keynote speakers and representatives from the existing GIAHS countries (Japan, China, Philippines, India and Korea) will share their views and experiences on Agricultural Heritage Systems and strategies for their dynamic conservation.

The presentations will be organized around three main themes:

- GIAHS: from concept to practice
- Experiences and Lessons learned in implementing GIAHS:
 - Mainstreaming GIAHS at national level
 - Empowering local communities through recognition and dynamic conservation of GIAHS

Day 2 will discuss the criteria and methodological procedures and guidelines of application process for recognition. It will also explore the establishment of the regional partnership and twinning programme between and among sites.

Morning

- Marketing goods and services
- Criteria for enlisting systems as GIAHS
- Application processes and guidelines for preparing a GIAHS proposal for recognitions

Afternoon

- Country presentation

Day 3 will explore and discuss resource mobilization and funding strategy and how to proceed

Morning

- Continue country presentation

Afternoon

- Way forward
- Closing