

# Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research

*Agricultural biodiversity, or agrobiodiversity, includes all the components of biological diversity that are relevant to food and agriculture as well as the components of biological diversity that constitute the agro-ecosystem: the variety and variability of animals, plants and microorganisms, at genetic, species and ecosystem levels, which sustain the functions, structure and processes of the agro-ecosystem. Agrobiodiversity is part of our daily lives. It is central to the livelihoods and well-being of millions of rural communities, small-holder farmers and indigenous peoples throughout the world and constitutes the resource upon which families, communities, nations and future generations depend.*



# Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research



Photo: International Potato Center - Centro Internacional de la Papa (CIP)

## Background

Only three crops—maize, rice and wheat—now provide more than 60% of the world's food energy. Only five species of animal—cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and poultry—account for the vast majority of the animal products we consume. Not only is the diversity of crops and livestock disappearing as markets enforce more uniformity in food products, but the agricultural production systems themselves are becoming increasingly simplified with loss of trees, hedgerows, soil organisms, pollinators, species that help control pests, and the many other useful wild species found in agricultural production systems. Reduced agrobiodiversity can significantly increase the vulnerability of farmers and agro-ecosystems, affecting the generation of ecosystem services and diminishing farmers' abilities to respond and adapt to environmental change and to improve production. This is especially important in the face of climate change and the evolving economic and political pressures faced by farmers throughout the world.

The problem is most acute in developing countries, where the livelihoods of resource-poor farmers depend on ecologically sustainable food and agricultural production systems. Small scale farmers, rural communities and indigenous farming communities depend not only on crop and livestock diversity for their well-being; they also rely on wild species to provide food, medicines, construction materials and other raw materials. Healthy agricultural ecosystems provide water, pollination, pest and disease control and other benefits for both rural and urban populations as well as responding to cultural and spiritual values. The conservation and use of agrobiodiversity is central to improving sustainable food production and supporting livelihoods of poor farmers throughout the world.



Photo: S. Mann/Bioversity International

## Why a Platform?

In 2001 the Fifth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) highlighted the lack of understanding of the magnitude, causes and consequence of loss of agrobiodiversity. It also stressed the gaps in knowledge regarding the benefits of high levels of agrobiodiversity and management practices that can help increase agricultural sustainability and productivity. The idea of establishing a Platform was welcomed by the Seventh Conference of the Parties to the CBD in 2004. The Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research (PAR) was formally set up through a stakeholder meeting held in Rome in 2006 with the participation of UN Agencies, international and national research organizations, universities and a range of civil society organizations. The Platform aims to support the development of knowledge needed to maintain and use agrobiodiversity optimally.

The Platform is an independent entity which provides a framework for interaction and collaboration among those working in different areas of agrobiodiversity research with a common concern to maximizing agrobiodiversity's contribution to human well-being. These include UN and other international agencies and institutions, networks, national research centres, universities, civil society organizations, the private sector and individual researchers and others working on different aspects of agrobiodiversity.

# What is the role of the Platform

The overall goal of the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research (PAR) is to enhance the sustainable management and use of agrobiodiversity by improving knowledge of all its different aspects. It seeks to promote research and integrate, mobilize and share research findings on the sustainable use and management of agrobiodiversity.

## The Platform's objectives are:

- ⊙ **To support the development of an adequate agrobiodiversity knowledge base** through collating, synthesizing and disseminating agrobiodiversity knowledge, making available the relevant tools and practices that support improved stewardship and use of agrobiodiversity for development, and identifying areas where information is lacking and new knowledge is needed.
- ⊙ **To identify ways in which agrobiodiversity can contribute to addressing some of the major global challenges faced today** by making available the information and options that ensure the contribution of agrobiodiversity in these areas (e.g. food security, nutrition environmental degradation, poverty alleviation, climate change, water quality and scarcity, and pest control and new global disease threats).
- ⊙ **To identify and facilitate relevant new and innovative research partnerships** that strengthens multidisciplinary and participatory agrobiodiversity research, involving work on different agro-ecosystem components (such as livestock, crops, soils, pollinators etc.) and their interactions, and contribute to building agrobiodiversity research capacity for development, particularly in the developing regions.

## The Platform achieves its objectives through

- ⊙ Supporting the development of linkages and sharing experiences between PAR partners;
- ⊙ Exchanging information and supporting access to information, e.g. on methodologies, indicators and protocols;
- ⊙ Identifying knowledge gaps and developing research plans to address them;
- ⊙ Providing discussion fora and creating new knowledge chains and communities;
- ⊙ Supporting the preparation of state-of-the-art reviews and synthesis papers;
- ⊙ Fostering and stimulating the creation of an agrobiodiversity community;
- ⊙ Linking different groups to build synergies and strengthen research collaboration;
- ⊙ Responding and contributing to the major international agendas developed by the CBD, the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and to other relevant organizations.



## How does the Platform work?

Central to the effectiveness of the Platform are its members – the individuals, groups and organizations who bring together different expertise and knowledge and perspectives, and are able to identify, undertake or stimulate research and analyses to provide a better understanding of maintenance and use of agrobiodiversity for development.

A set of guiding principles ensures that the Platform adds value to the global effort to create the knowledge base that is needed to maintain and sustainably use agrobiodiversity for development.

**Consistency** – maintaining regular and effective communication with key stakeholders through timely dissemination of reliable information;

**Demand driven** – responding to information needs and requirements arising from members and stakeholders;

**Add value** – information disseminated should add value to strategically complement or build on members' research activities and policy decisions;

**Participatory** – involving the farmers and local communities' views, perceptions and recognize their customary knowledge and generate tools and findings that can be used by agrarian communities around the world;

**Integrative** – linking custodians, managers, scientists and other key stakeholders within ecosystems, across sectors and across similar eco-regions in the developing and between developed and developing world.



Photo: Z. Zhang/Bioversity

The principles not only define the Platform's strategic role within its domain but serve to guide its scope of work, the range of partnerships the Platform will engage in, and the type of research that will be undertaken to fill in the knowledge gaps in agrobiodiversity.

The Platform's emphasis is on making available relevant information to support the provision of knowledge and information for development to the different user communities. Through its website and other

activities it provides access to information on agrobiodiversity, to discussion of key issues, and to others working in relevant areas. The PAR Secretariat is hosted by Bioversity International and is managed by a small number of staff led by the Project Coordinator. The work of the Secretariat is overseen by an international Platform Steering Committee selected by Platform partners.

**Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research**

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