



GROWING DIVERSITY PROJECT

Recent Developments in Asia, Africa and Latin America

February 2002

1. INTRODUCTION

The Growing Diversity Project, which was launched in January 2000, aims to organize an International Workshop on the Local Management of Agricultural Biodiversity following a regionally oriented preparatory process in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This project is an initiative of Bread for the World, Crocevia, GRAIN and Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, all NGOs that have long been supporting on-farm approaches to agricultural biodiversity management, through policy research, advocacy work or direct project support. The GD Project has as its main objectives: to provide a forum for discussion and sharing of experiences; to contribute to the empowerment and strengthening of the groups involved; to increase awareness on the central importance of biodiversity in rural livelihood systems; to promote the local management of biodiversity within the wider context of rural development and policies.

This is a unique initiative involving local organisations working on biodiversity management in its broadest sense, which includes those involved in agriculture, forests, aquatic resources and indeed all life that sustains people. The project was organised in three phases: (i) identification of interested groups and organisations, (ii) documentation of experiences, (iii) regional and international workshops. The Mid Term Activity Report released in July 2001 discussed the results of the consultation phase and the achievements of the documentation activities, showing that the project has reached far beyond its initial objectives and expectations. This report provides an update of the project a few months before its conclusion, including the results of the Regional Workshops and the preparatory activities for the International Workshop.

2. REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

Five regional workshops were organised during September, October and November 2001 in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The Overall Coordinator participated in all Regional Workshops, except in South Africa. Therefore, it was possible to get an overview of the relationships, similarities and differences amongst regions and participants. In Africa, Regional Coordinators participated in other sub-regional meetings, reinforcing links between North, West and South Africa. Representatives from GD project initiators were present in Latin America, Asia, and West Africa Workshops. Results from each region are described below.

2.1 Latin America

The Latin America Workshop was organised in Bogotá, Colombia, from 15-18 September 2001. A total of 43 people participated in this workshop, including farmers, indigenous people and NGO representatives from Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Peru. The fourth day was organised as an open session for other Colombian organisations and institutions.

Despite peoples' different experiences, there were many shared problems and also possible solutions.

Common problems identified:

- Impact of the green revolution on the loss of biodiversity
- Introduction of pesticides, hybrid and transgenic seeds by multinational corporations
- Biopiracy and patents on life
- Introduction of commercial varieties without concern of the impact on local varieties
- Peasant seed is not officially recognized and has no value in the market
- Lack of credit and financial support for peasant agriculture
- Lack of support from governmental policies and no coherence between those policies and peasants proposals
- Lack of land reform policies and access to land
- Western education promotes cultural erosion. Young people migrate to the urban regions and local knowledge exchange is interrupted

Particular problems of some countries:

- No sustainable management of natural resources
- Petrol companies contaminate land in indigenous and traditional community areas
- Lack of transport system
- Large media coverage and propaganda of commercial seeds and no recognition of peasants' varieties and culture
- Health care system does not value traditional medicine
- Political parties intrude on community organisations
- Lack of development at local level on management skills
- Presence of illegal crops
- Distance between farmers and market, with lots of "mediators"
- Official institutes prioritise ex-situ conservation strategies

Perspectives for solving those problems

- Strengthen local organisations and linkage amongst themselves
- Increased training activities
- Improve agroecosystem management
- Continue and improve activities to recover local varieties
- Influence public policies and obtain State recognition
- Promote market access, fair price and local certification system
- Strengthen cultural identities
- Defence and protection of territories and struggle for land reform

2.2 South and East Africa.

The research and development workshop held from 10 - 14 September 2001 marked the end of the farmer innovation documentation exercise in East and Southern Africa that began in

February 2001. The workshop brought together different stakeholders namely, the researchers, farmers and the policy makers from South Africa, Zambia, Lesotho, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi and Zimbabwe where the exercise took place.

The first day was reserved for sharing research experiences by researchers and farmers. The workshop also used this day to identify the issues they hoped would be addressed during the course of the workshop. The second and third days were set aside for analysing individual case studies and identifying the gaps, which needed to be filled in by the researchers. The exercise was done first in groups of the different categories under which each case study fell. The categories were as follows: Integrated Farming, Soil and Water Conservation and Biodiversity Management. For the farmers, the second and third days of the workshop were set aside for field visits in communal areas surrounding Masvingo and Zvishavane where they visited, studied and critiqued one of the innovations documented in this project and others.

Day four of the workshop was for interacting with the policy makers. Findings from the case study reports were presented to the policy makers by the researchers and innovators. After the presentations, the policy makers also had the chance to give their opinion and recommendations in as far as policy formulation and implementation is concerned in relation to smallholder farmer involvement in food security, natural resource management, sustainable land use management, biodiversity management and policy influencing. The fifth day marked the end of the workshop. Researchers had the opportunity to highlight the problems they encountered during the research and documentation exercise and the lessons they learnt for the benefit of future and similar research.

The way forward was looked at from two angles. The first one was what was to be done with the documented innovations. The second one was what should be done to ensure that innovations are recognized by the policy makers and are scaled up. The following list shows the propositions by the policy makers for a way forward:

- The policy makers must be exposed and acknowledge the potential of farmer innovations and do some diagnostic activities to discover more innovators, innovations and documentation on innovations.
- Increase interaction to a partnership level among NGOs, policy makers, researchers and farmer innovators
- Select cases (innovations) for potential replication/application to various parts of the region. Develop mechanisms, formats and controls of disseminating the innovations
- Find ways of sensitizing other policy makers from other countries in the region
- Establish an innovators' organization which will bring innovators together and enable them to lobby for their common interests
- Come up with strategies to build the capacity of farmers
- Establish an innovation and creativity fund
- More workshops that will sensitise the farmers at grassroot level of the importance of contributing to policy development
- Need for a mechanism of information exchange and dissemination between policy makers and farmers/farmer organizations
- Farmers need to know the policy formulation process
- There is need for policy makers to get into direct contact/visit farmers innovators
- There is need for policy makers to know the NGOs operating at grassroot levels and their activities
- Conduct a desk study supplemented by field visits on each prioritised innovation to identify similar or related innovations that may have been documented
- Establish the state of the art of the specific technology, its uniqueness, its transferability and is feasible and draw a scaling up strategy (horizontal, vertical or both)
- Conduct further research on the innovations to fill in the gaps. Once convinced about the necessity to scale up, draw a concept note for relevant potential players to spell out the intention and solicit for collaboration

2.3 West Africa

From 16 to 19 October 2001, the “*West Africa workshop of exchanges on local management of biodiversity in agriculture: promoting traditional knowledge*” took place in Cotonou (Benin), with 33 participants from hunters, fishermen, farmers, healers associations, and NGOs of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Togo.

Experiences documented in the region were presented in the first two days, covering areas such agriculture, hunting, fisheries, medicinal plants, and sacred forests. The theatre play prepared specially for the Growing Diversity Project in West Africa “*Doctor Alex and his uncle the hunter*” was presented in the evening of the first day for a broad audience. This play describes the conflicts between traditional and modern medicines. It was written to support public awareness among populations about the objectives of the GD Project and the importance of traditional healers. In the third day participants went to field visits in Ilèma (Center of Benin) to meet hunters and traditional healers, and in Ganvié (a lake village in South Benin) to visit a fishermen community. These field visits provided a good opportunity for exchange and participants decided to create a network to promote traditional management of agricultural biodiversity in West Africa.

A forum for the general public was organised in the last day. Participants include representatives from governmental organisations – The National Institute of Agriculture/INRAB, Centre for Scientific and Technical Research/CBRST, Sustainable Development Centre, CBDD, National Centre of Intellectual Property Rights, CENAPI; representatives of Vodoun (National Gods); and political groups. This forum discussed issues related to intellectual property rights versus local communities rights, and pointed out the importance of local control on genetic resources.

The Workshop came up with the following recommendations:

Internal Recommendations

- Use of the GD Project by local communities of West Africa
- Restitution to each country of Workshop results
- Lobbying in each country for the protection of communities rights on natural resources
- Create a network at Sub regional level for information exchange, training; etc with GD participants
- Value local experiences through exchange and synergy

General Recommendations

- Strengthen the value of local knowledge
- Cooperation between traditional and modern medicine
- Promotion of land policies favourable for local management of biodiversity
- Creation of professional association to influence decision process at different levels
- Promotion of women participation
- Ratification of Carthagena Protocol and promotion of OAU model law
- Moratoria on GMOs Imports during five years at least
- Strengthen local capacity to carry out local management by awareness, information, formation and scientific research
- Share concerns of local communities with donors
- Financial resources to support development of local management of natural resources
- Strengthen partnerships amongst those whom share the same principles of Growing Diversity participants

2.4 Asia

Three countries were willing to host the regional conference-workshop: Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia. After a series of consultation, there was a consensus that the regional conference workshop should be held in Thailand from 30 October - 1 November 2001.

A total of 61 participants, representing individuals, NGOs, POs, national, regional and international networks from seven Asian countries namely: Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Cambodia, Philippines and Japan (plus observers from Brazil, Sweden and Australia) attended the Asian Regional Conference-Workshop. The GD-Asia consciously provided opportunities for NGOs and farmers who are new to the regional and international scene. Of the 61 participants at the Asian Regional Conference-Workshop, 64 % are first time attendees to regional or international meeting. For more than half (14) of the 21 farmers, fishermen and women, and indigenous people who attended the regional conference-workshop, this was the first time that they have been out of their villages.

A total of 15 case studies were presented. The number of case studies presented per country was as follows: one each from Japan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and India, three from Thailand and Cambodia and five from the Philippines, which was presented as panel presentation.

As part of the design of the regional conference-workshop, the participants came up with the post- regional conference-workshop " strategic action plan". The outputs were as follows:

- Conduct of re-echo seminar-workshops where experiences from the regional conference-workshop will be shared with local communities. (*Last 28 January 2002, Cambodia had their seminar workshop using local resources*).
- Implementation of the learnings from this conference (for NGOs and farmers)
- Post conference reporting, (reporting of follow-up activities)
- Conduct more farmer visits between each other
- Proposal preparation and sourcing of funds to accomplish the needs
- Capacity building and HRD for farmers and NGOs to effectively address at the local level the various issues identified in the regional conference-workshop
- Strengthen within regions joint research on various issues affecting biodiversity conservation and management
- Follow up meetings at the regional and national levels to address the issues. The participants were unanimous that they should engage national government policy makers in national meetings. (*The participants from Thailand, Philippines and Japan are very active in national activities along this line*).
- Establishment of a secretariat that would follow-up activities of the network and monitor activities of TNCs. (At this moment, the GD-Asia co-ordinator is doing this in a limited manner).
- Establishment of a regional farmer's network
- Translation of the outputs of the Asian regional conference-workshop into local languages (by country). (*Request for some counterpart funds to implement this activity had been received by the GD-Asia regional co-ordinator from Thailand and Cambodia*).
- More case studies of "success stories" at the grassroots level.

2.5 North Africa

The Maghrebian Workshop on Local Management of Agrobiodiversity was organised from 4–7 November 2001, in the oasis village of El Oued, Algeria. Twenty participants came to this meeting, including farmers and NGOs representatives from Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, and observers from Benin, Zimbabwe and Brazil. The programme included the

sharing of six experiences documented in the region and field visits to date farmers, an important species in the oasis ecosystem. After the presentations, participants met in sub-groups to discuss the challenges faced by traditional farmers in the region and proposals for follow up.

The main constraints identified by participants are as follow:

- Intensive drought in arid areas with the displacement of vegetation and increasing desertification
- Climate perturbations: strong raining periods resulting in flood and soil erosion
- Bad management of hydro-agricultural developments
- Competition for water between industrial & urban activities and agriculture
- Overgrazing and no sustainable harvest
- Genetic erosion of local varieties
- Low value of products from biodiversity
- Lack of organisation at community level
- Lack of commitment of policy makers on biodiversity conservation
- Lack of coherence of policies implemented by different governmental sectors with impact on biodiversity conservation
- Taxes imposed on farmers' associations in some countries
- No enforcement of environmental laws to protect natural resources
- Lack of coordination between scientific research and community innovations
- Lack of recognition and protection of community rights on genetic resources

The main conclusions that came up are as follows:

- Drought in Maghrebian countries is due to global warming and governments should accept their responsibilities, signing and enforcing the international agreements accepted during the RIO summit and in Kyoto.
- The fight against desertification and rational use of water should be a priority in the political development of Maghrebian region.
- Industrial development should respect agricultural environment and any pollution of agricultural or industrial origin affecting biodiversity has to be controlled and regulated
- Official institutions should value traditional knowledge and products, which help maintain biological diversity.
- Agricultural cooperatives and local communities in charge of biodiversity management have to be strengthened and a policy making should include them at all decision levels.
- Maghrebian legislation concerning rational and long-term management of natural resources has to be signed and enforced.
- Any innovation involving natural resources or agricultural genetic diversity has to be subject to an environmental impact assessment with the participation of local communities.
- Scientific research should support local communities in their effort to conserve biodiversity. Community rights on genetic resources should be recognised and protected through a legal system based on the OAU model legislation.
- Organisations involved in biodiversity management have governmental support, at least through taxes exemption.

4. INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

The "*International Workshop on Local Management and Agricultural Biodiversity*" is the highlight of the Growing Diversity Project. This Workshop will be organised in partnership

with GTA/Acre – Amazon Working Group, a network of grassroots organisations working in Brazilian Amazon Region. The programme will be comprised of two parts:

- a "first session" from 9-17 May 2002, exclusively for participants from the regions involved in the previous phases of the GD Project. The venue of this session will be a Hotel 100 km from Rio Branco City (State capital of Acre) and will include exhibits for sharing experiences, panel sessions, working groups and two days of field visits to local communities. In this session, we expect around 65 participants broken down as follows: 15 from Asia, 15 from Africa, 25 from Latin America (including 15 Brazilians members of the local organising committee), and 10 from Europe and North America (including GD Project Initiators, selected donors and resource persons). Decisions on who will be invited had been made based on a set of criteria defined at the Regional and Sub-regional Workshops.
- a "second session" from 18-19 May 2002 will be open to all the Brazilian participants and will be held in Rio Branco City itself. In this two-day session, more than 100 Brazilian participants invited by GTA/Acre will join international GD participants. This session will be organised by local Brazilian partners, and some participants from the first session will be requested to share their experiences and views on key issues. This will also be an opportunity to present the conclusions of the first session to a broader audience and to the press.

Since the start of the GD project, it was decided that local people should play a lead role in the International Workshop. It was therefore important that language differences should not stop participants from taking an active part in the workshop. Although translation facilities will be provided in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese (language spoken in Brazil), many local participants are not expected to understand these international languages. As a result, each region will include participants from NGOs that are able to translate any of these international languages to local dialects or languages.

During the year 2001, participants of the GD Project documented their experiences. Most of them were ready for the Regional Workshops. In some cases local organisations prepared documentation in local formats (video, posters, photos, slides, etc). As part of the preparatory process, an abstract of 65 experiences will be translated to English, French and Spanish. A web page presenting the abstracts and full documents will be launched by the end of March 2002. This page will be hosted at www.grain.org/gd/ and will provide updated information on the International Workshop. An illustrated poster presenting all the experiences involved in the GD Project will be printed to share this information among local groups and those that do not have access to the Internet.