

**UN Millennium Development Goals
Five years later**

Agricultural Biodiversity and Elimination of Hunger and Poverty

The Chennai
Platform for Action





FOREWORD

This booklet presents the 'Chennai Platform for Action' to enhance the contribution of plant genetic resources to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially to reducing hunger and poverty.

The action plan was developed by participants at an international consultation on 'The Role of Agricultural Biodiversity in Achieving the Millennium Development Goal of Freedom from Hunger and Poverty', held in Chennai, India, in April 2005. The Consultation, organized by the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), the Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilized Species (GFU) of the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), brought together some 100 policy-makers and experts with varied backgrounds from 25 countries around the world to formulate approaches to maximize the contribution of agricultural biodiversity to reducing hunger and poverty.

Participants underscored the unique contribution that agricultural biodiversity makes to improve livelihoods through providing a foundation for household food and nutritional security and offering opportunities for income generation. They also addressed policies, institutional constraints and other issues that challenge the full deployment of these natural resources and hence limit the achievement of the MDGs. They also conveyed concern at the rapid loss of these resources seriously threatening the food and nutritional security of future generations. The intention of the participants was to draw greater attention of policy-makers globally and the international community to the role of agricultural biodiversity in the fight against hunger, poverty and malnutrition and to seek greater international commitment to conservation and use of this natural resource for achieving the first of the MDGs.

The action plan described in this booklet is intended to help national governments and international agencies to achieve the goal of halving hunger and poverty by 2015. It promotes the principles of giving agricultural biodiversity greater importance in national and international development strategies and creating the required enabling policy conditions for the sustainable utilization of this treasure for the benefit of the poorest and marginalized members of our society. The action plan calls for increased international collaboration in the conservation and sustainable and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of agricultural biodiversity. It underlines the urgent need for action in nationally appropriate ways for meeting the MDGs.

The participants of the meeting were concerned about the fact that, five years after the adoption of the MDGs, little progress has been made towards eliminating hunger and poverty. In some countries, the situation has even worsened. The

meeting agreed to make all efforts to bring the recommendations made in this action plan to the attention of the Heads of States and Governments who will meet in September 2005 on the occasion of the United Nations General Assembly that will review the progress made towards achieving the MDGs. It is the sincere hope of the participants of the Chennai Consultation that the proposed action plan will be considered by the UN General Assembly when defining the next steps towards the achievement of the MDGs.

The Chennai Consultation and production of this booklet were sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Ford Foundation, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture. We wish to take this opportunity to thank these donors, without whose generosity the holding of this meeting and the development of this action plan would not have been possible.

Emile Frison
Director General, IPGRI

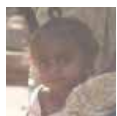
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The Chennai Platform for Action



P. Bordini/GFU



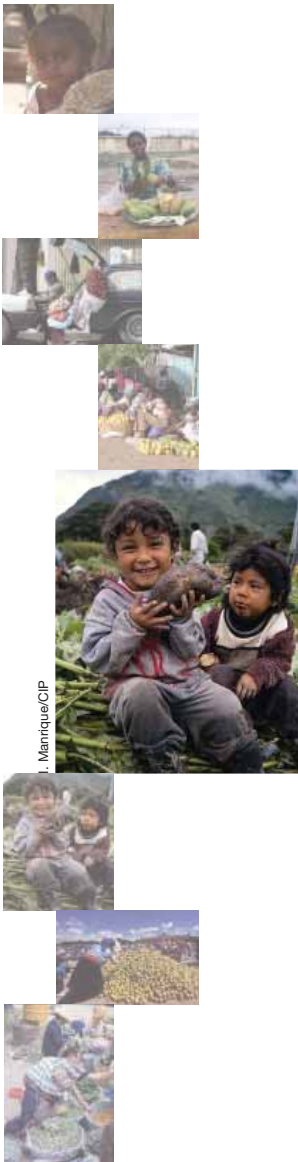
1. From the earliest days of domestication of plants for human use about 12 000 years ago, agricultural biodiversity has played a pivotal role in sustaining and strengthening food, nutrition, health and livelihood security all over the world. In spite of enormous progress made in enhancing crop productivity through Mendelian and more recently molecular breeding, more than 800 million children, women and men go to bed every day under-nourished. The majority of them are in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, areas of the globe that are rich in endemic agricultural biodiversity. Reducing hunger and poverty by half by the year 2015 is the first of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which represent a global common minimum programme for universal human security and well-being. An assessment made five years after the adoption of the MDGs indicates that progress in reducing hunger and poverty is inadequate. It is in this context that the conclusions of an international consultation on the role of agricultural biodiversity in achieving a sustainable end to hunger and poverty, recently held at Chennai, India, assume significance.

2. Endemic hunger caused by protein-energy malnutrition, hidden hunger caused by deficiencies of iron, iodine, zinc, Vitamin A and other micro-nutrients in the diet, and transient hunger caused by drought, floods, and other natural disasters can be overcome through an integrated strategy for the conservation and sustainable and equitable use of agricultural biodiversity. Even during the titanic tsunami of 26 December 2004, land races of rice were found in coastal Tamil Nadu, India, which could survive seawater inundation. Many life-saving crops, like tubers and legumes, were cultivated in the past and we urgently need to rekindle such dying wisdom and take steps to save vanishing crops, which can help to heal the wounds inflicted by natural or man-made calamities. Women, in particular, are holders of such traditional knowledge and the critical role of women in the

conservation and sustainable management of agricultural biodiversity needs to be strengthened and revitalized. Tropical fruits, beta-carotene-rich sweet potato and other vegetable crops can help to fight Vitamin A deficiency in children. In other words, agricultural biodiversity provides uncommon opportunities for developing decentralized and locale-specific community food security systems involving field gene banks, seed banks and grain banks developed and managed by local women and men. This approach will further help to enlarge the food security basket by including nutrition-rich but under-utilized crops. This is the most sustainable and affordable pathway to achieving the MDG in relation to elimination of hunger and poverty.

3. Agricultural biodiversity offers the crucial raw material for improving in perpetuity the productivity and quality of crops, livestock and fish. Goals such as 'health for all' and 'fish for all' can be achieved only by conserving medicinal plants and genetic diversity in fish. Agricultural biodiversity also offers opportunities, especially to the landless poor, for entrepreneurial initiatives, which will generate employment and income from a range of value-added foods, medicines, nutraceuticals, bio-fuel and other products. Such opportunities are of particular value, since today inadequate income and purchasing power are the major causes of food insecurity at household level. The potential of agricultural biodiversity for coping with climate change is not well appreciated. In short, the flagship role played by agricultural biodiversity in overcoming hunger in an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable manner is yet to be widely realized and integrated with national and global strategies for achieving the MDGs. Better nutrition is also vital for fighting pandemics like HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, since a drug-based approach alone will not lead to the desired results. The health foods of tomorrow will be mostly the under-utilized crops of today.

4. Agricultural biodiversity and cultural diversity have feedback relationships. Local farming systems provide the feedstock for poems, songs, dance and drama. Community-led food security systems based on the conservation, cultivation and consumption of local foods thus help to preserve cultural and ethnic diversity in crop and culinary preferences. Thus, agricultural biodiversity confers multiple benefits—ecological, economic, nutritional and cultural.



5. Taking cognizance of these unique strengths of agricultural biodiversity, the participants¹ at the International Consultation held on 18-19 April 2005 adopted the following Chennai Platform for Action for a Hunger- and Poverty-Free World. The Platform for Action is designed to assist national governments and international agencies to achieve as soon as possible the UN MDG relating to halving hunger and poverty by 2015 which therefore should:



P. Bordon/GFU



I. Recognize that incorporation of agricultural biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in national development plans, such as Poverty Reduction Strategies, along with the creation of cross-sectoral linkages and coherence among concerned ministries at national level, is important for the delivery of this MDG.

II. Agree to incorporate agricultural biodiversity in the implementation of existing global policy tools, such as Food-Based Dietary Guidelines and the WHO/FAO Global Strategy for Diet, Physical Activity and Health.

III. Introduce legislative measures to use land and other natural production resources to enhance the ability of all to make use of agricultural biodiversity and its associated traditional knowledge for promoting off-farm employment and income generation in harmony with traditional rights, cultural identity, ecosystem integrity and gender equity.

IV. Strengthen the multilateral system of exchange provisions of the FAO International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture to expand its coverage of plant species important to food security and income generation for the poor, while ensuring fair and equitable benefit-sharing of commercial gains accrued

¹ About a hundred experts and policy makers with varied backgrounds from 25 countries took part in an International Consultation at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in Chennai, India, on 18 and 19 April 2005. Our task was to consider how agricultural biodiversity can help the world to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and in particular the goal of freedom from hunger and poverty. This was jointly organised by M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute and the Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilized Species in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Canadian International Development Agency, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, Ford Foundation and Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture.

from accessed genetic resources, and work towards a similar treaty on multilateral exchange of animal genetic resources relevant to food and agriculture.

V. Recognize and reward the invaluable contributions of rural and indigenous people, particularly women, in the conservation and enhancement of agricultural biodiversity and confer social prestige and economic benefit to its primary conservers.

VI. Promote local markets and facilitate access to international markets for the products of agricultural biodiversity, especially traditional and functional foods, ensuring equity and fairness amongst all participants.

VII. Advocate and strengthen national nutrition literacy through participatory knowledge management involving all societal segments, particularly women and young people, and train agricultural extension workers and health and nutrition professionals in the importance of dietary diversity and evidence-based beneficial effects of traditional foods to re-establish the relevance of regional agricultural biodiversity in fighting hunger and poverty.

VIII. Ensure that food and nutrition support safety net programmes, especially food aid and school feeding programmes as well as food banks, are fostering greater dietary diversity by broadening the food basket with more indigenous crops as part of national nutritional policy.

IX. Restructure research and development priorities to enhance productivity, profitability and value-chain development of a wider range of agricultural biodiversity, including hitherto neglected species, thereby generating an economic stake in their conservation.

X. Bring in change in mind-set to prevent the perennial loss of vanishing crops and dying wisdom through international initiatives to change the public image of under-utilized and orphan crops by steps such as re-designating 'coarse cereals', where appropriate, as 'nutritious cereals' and classifying a wide range of leafy vegetables, tubers, grain legumes and tropical



fruits as 'health foods'. Saving plants for saving lives and livelihoods should become everybody's business, thereby leading to a global 'agricultural biodiversity for human security' movement.

The global struggle against poverty and hunger cannot be won now or in the long run without increased international collaboration in the conservation and sustainable and equitable use of agricultural biodiversity. International commitment is imperative for actions on some of the recommendations listed above, while national initiatives can act upon others. We urge all to employ those approaches and practices that are most relevant in their individual situation and to put in place their own detailed plans to make better use of agricultural biodiversity to achieve the Millennium Development Goal on hunger and poverty. The fact that, five years after the adoption of the MDGs, most developing nations are unable to make proportionate progress in the elimination of hunger and poverty indicates that a 'business as usual' approach will not help us to achieve the goal of a hunger-free world. Equally concerning is the human population growth rate, which continues to exceed the growth rate in food production, aggravating poverty-induced endemic hunger. Where hunger rules, peace cannot prevail. Hence, the time has come to embrace the idea of a decentralized and community-managed sustainable nutrition security system based on expanded agricultural biodiversity.



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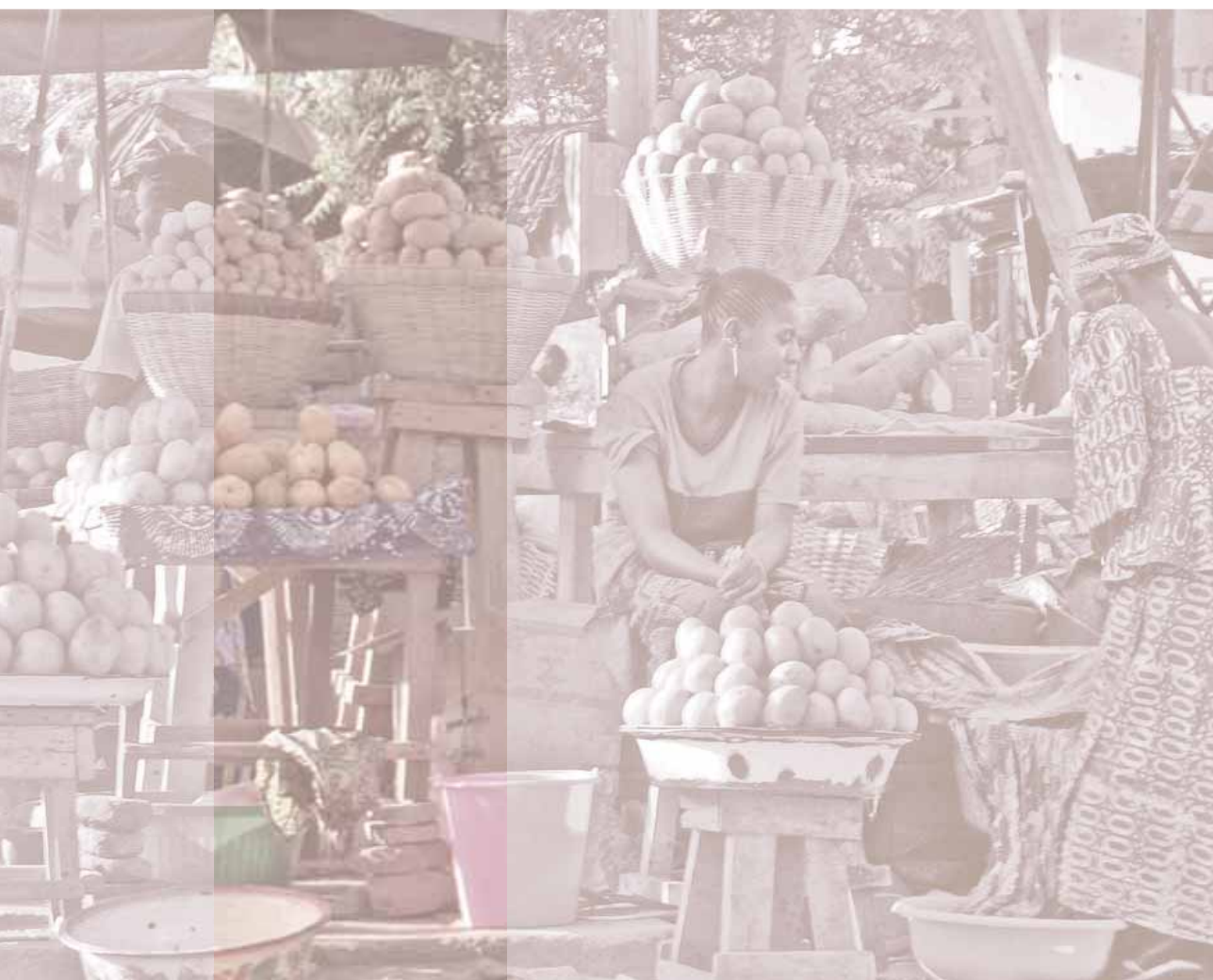




Photo: P. Bordoni/GFU