



Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity



Message from the Executive Secretary Ahmed Djoghlaif

on the occasion of the

High-Level Conference on World Food Security and The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy FAO, Rome, 3 June 2008

Seventy-five per cent of the food crop varieties we once grew have disappeared from our fields in the last 100 years. Today, we rely on just three – wheat, rice and maize – for over two thirds of our calories. According to FAO, around 20 per cent of domestic animal breeds are at risk of extinction, with an average of one breed lost each month. Of the 7,000 species of plants that have been domesticated over the 10,000-year history of agriculture, a mere 30 account for 90 per cent of all the food that we eat every day. However, as growing conditions change, due to climate change, the species required may also change. Thus, the reliance of so few plants makes human populations vulnerable to climatic changes and the current extinction rates exacerbate makes our position particularly perilous. Indeed, threats to biodiversity are also potential threats to food security.

The Fourth Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Report predicts that, as a result of climate change, up to 30 per cent of all known species are likely to be at increased risk of extinction before the end of this century. Currently, the “ecological footprint” of humankind extends 25 per cent beyond the biological capacity of the planet – and yet by 2050, the world population is expected to have increased by 50 per cent. The mathematics of meeting the needs of the world are clearly impossible if we continue with the status quo. Thus, the way we use the Earth’s natural resources, the way we satisfy our needs, the demands we make on the Earth, must be changed.

It is for this reason that the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has implemented programmes of work on agricultural biodiversity and climate change and biodiversity, as well as cross-cutting initiatives on food and nutrition. And it is for this reason that I send this message of support to the High-Level Conference on *World Food Security and the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy* convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

While not solely caused by decreases in the number of species the world cultivates, the current food crisis is an example of what lays ahead if we continue to allow the loss of diversity in agricultural seeds despite predicted global changes in growing conditions. Dramatic rises in crop prices could well become a symptom of the unprecedented loss of agricultural biodiversity and certainly a reflection of its far-reaching impacts on mankind.



ONE NATURE · ONE WORLD · OUR FUTURE
COP 9 MOP 4 Bonn Germany 2008



United Nations
Environment Programme

413 Saint-Jacques Street, Suite 800
Montreal, QC H2Y 1N9, Canada

Tel : +1 514 288 2220
Fax : +1 514 288 6588

<http://www.cbd.int>
secretariat@cbd.int

More than 1.3 billion people depend on fisheries, forest and agriculture for employment. In Africa, seven in ten people live in rural areas, most engaged in resource-dependent activities such as small-scale agriculture, which accounts for more than 90 per cent of Africa's agricultural production.

In fact, agriculture and agricultural biodiversity account for 20 to 60 per cent of national GDP in Africa with most of this production taking place in dry and sub-humid lands. However, almost half of African dry and sub-humid lands are vulnerable to desertification with climate change expected to further increase this vulnerability by expanding exposure to wind and water erosion, prolonged drought and wild fires. Thus, the link between conserving biodiversity and addressing climate change, hunger, poverty reduction and food security is clear.

In response to this, the thirteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice considered the integration of climate change impact and response activities within the programme of work on agricultural biodiversity. Other biodiversity-based adaptation activities for agricultural systems include: the conservation of agricultural genetic resources, the reduction of other threats to agricultural biodiversity, the restoration of degraded land with native species, integrated land and water management, disease control programmes for native livestock, and invasive species management planning.

With regards to mitigating climate change, sustainable land management in agricultural areas can increase carbon sequestration in the soil through techniques such as integrated pest management, conservation tillage, intercropping, and the planting of cover crops. In fact, when cover crops are used in combination with conservation tillage, soil carbon content can increase annually for a period of up to 50 years. The sustainable management of grazing land can provide similar co-benefits since such lands contain between 10 and 30 per cent of the world's soil carbon stocks. Additionally, enhancing agricultural biodiversity through activities such as changing varieties and agro-forestry can, however, avoid 10 to 15 per cent of the projected reductions in yield under changing climatic conditions.

Another emerging role of biodiversity in greenhouse gas mitigation in the use of bioenergy, which derived from renewable sources, are considered to be carbon-neutral, since in theory the carbon released during the combustion can be taken up by growing plants. However, this analysis fails to take into account the fact that we have limited land available. In general, a hectare devoted to biofuel production is a hectare taken from food production or converted from a natural ecosystem. Natural or restored forests or grasslands sequester far more greenhouse gases than that saved by substituting fossil fuels by biofuels. Thus, while proponents of biofuels point to the potential for cleaner fuels, greater economic opportunities for farmers and rural communities, and a renewable source of energy, detractors argue that biofuels risk damaging biodiversity, marginalizing indigenous and local communities and creating more greenhouse gas emissions than they prevent. This debate is complicated by the fact that numerous types of biomass (or feedstock) can be used in the production of biofuels. It is for this reason that last week in Bonn, the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted a decision on biofuels, which called for governments to develop sound policy frameworks and to promote the positive and minimize the negative impacts of biofuels on biodiversity that would affect socio-economic conditions and food and energy security.

In recognition of the important links between biodiversity, livelihoods and food security, the CBD celebrated this year's International Day for Biodiversity under the theme "Biodiversity and Agriculture". This is also why the Joint Liaison Group of the Rio Conventions has expanded its efforts to create synergy between our efforts so as to effect the greatest change possible. Finally, it is for this reason that the Secretary-General has responded to the call from the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to integrate the 2010 Biodiversity Target as part of the Millennium Development Goals. Indeed, we have less than two years to reach this goal of significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level, as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.

Meeting these unprecedented challenges requires enhanced and concerted efforts at all levels for the effective implementation of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. It calls on the international community to redouble its efforts to achieve by 2010, the International Year for Biodiversity, the target of substantially reducing the loss of biodiversity and adopting an international regime on access to genetic resources and the equitable sharing of the benefits from their utilization.

Since its establishment, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has led international efforts to defeat hunger. The mandate of FAO provides that “the ultimate objective of all the various activities of the Organization is to ensure freedom from hunger for all mankind”. The success of the mandate of FAO calls therefore for the effective implementation of the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. As a result, FAO has been an invaluable partner during the negotiation and, now, the implementation of the Convention. This has been shown most recently by the secondment of a full-time staff member to the Secretariat of the Convention as a Liaison Officer to FAO, in charge of the implementation of the programme of work on agricultural biodiversity.

Synergies and cooperation between all UN organizations are key, not only to the United Nations goals of “Delivering as One”, but also to achieving our individual goals. This high-Level conference is a chance to brainstorm, exchange ideas, and draw on each agency’s expertise and experiences to capture value-added and bring the world closer to achieving the goals of sustainable development.

Thus, I wish to reiterate the CBD’s commitment to working alongside the FAO. Together we can effectuate greater change.

I wish you success with your meetings and look forward to continued cooperation between our respective bodies.
