

Background Note
A Heritage for the future

**International Forum on Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems
(GIAHS)**

Organized by FAO in collaboration with Wageningen International (WI)

Rome, 24-26 October 2006

1. Purpose of the Forum

The International Forum on **Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS)** aims primarily at facilitating the understanding of the significance of GIAHS dynamic conservation in the context of global sustainable development agenda and challenges, particularly human well being, poverty reduction, food security and rural development.

Specifically the Forum will focus on the following objectives:

- Increase public awareness and understanding of the GIAHSs among international development organisations and scientific institutions.
- Review and consolidate the scientific underwriting of GIAHS concept
- Identify policy challenges and new policy directions for GIAHS based on international and national sustainable development strategies
- Identify immediate and medium-term targets and plans for GIAHS initiative for the Full Scale Project implementation
- Establish management, institutional and organisational support structure for GIAHS at various levels
- Raise additional financial support for the full scale implementation of GIAHS initiative

The Forum will gather representatives from international organizations, university and scientific community, farmers and local communities' representatives, donors' community and FAO Senior Staff to discuss strategies for mainstreaming the 'Agriculture Heritage' concept at local, national and international levels.

The Forum will also provide the opportunity for sharing and disseminating GIAHS related information and documentation and the launching of the renewed GIAHS website.

2. Rational of the Forum

In many countries specific agricultural systems and landscapes have been created, shaped and maintained by generations of farmers and herders using locally adapted, distinctive and often ingenious combinations of management practices and techniques.

Building on dynamic local knowledge and experience, these ingenious agricultural systems reflect the evolution of humanity and its profound harmony with nature.

The patient work of generations of farmers around the world has also resulted in sites of outstanding aesthetic beauty, reservoirs of globally significant agricultural biodiversity and valuable cultural inheritance, and, above all, a magnificent source of goods and services, food and livelihood security and quality of life for some 2 billion people today.

Such agricultural and agro-silvo-pastoral systems can be found, in particular, in highly populated regions or in areas where the population has, for various reasons, had to establish complex and innovative resource use/ management practices, for example, due to geographic isolation, fragile ecosystems, political marginalisation, limited natural resources, and/or extreme climatic conditions.

The knowledge accumulated for thousand of years has been a guarantee for the survival of peoples, cultures and unique landscapes around the world. But it is also crucial to find answers to most current and future global development challenges, such as rural poverty, exodus towards megalopolis, exclusion of local economies from international markets, depletion of natural resources and the vertiginous loss of biodiversity.

Since 2002 FAO implements a wide programme on conservation and adaptive management of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage systems (GIAHS) aiming to identify and ensure global recognition of the importance of these unique traditional agricultural systems for food security and sustainable development.

During the past four years, the GIAHS initiative has consolidated its concept and frameworks and has created a data base on GIAHS and an extensive list of stakeholders. Next year, in 2007, the GIAHS project will enter in a Full Scale Implementation Phase. Seven pilot sites in Peru, Chile, China, Philippines, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, representing five different agricultural heritage systems, will be implement a seven-year project aimed at helping the national and local stakeholders to:

- Assist in Formulation and implementation of national policies aimed at preserving these agricultural heritages systems and the biodiversity, traditional knowledge and natural resources management systems;
- Empower local communities and indigenous people to sustain their livelihood that is based on these systems and explore options for improvement of these systems without jeopardizing their ecosystem and livelihood services
- Recognize 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.

Biodiversity, cultural and agricultural heritage can not rely on project funding available for their survival. One of the proposals for discussion in the agenda of the GIAHS meeting will be the creation of a World Agriculture Heritage category, under FAO mandate in collaboration with other institutions like UNESCO and World Heritage convention, to guarantee the sustainability of traditional agricultural systems and sites.

4. Expected Outputs of the Conference

1. Concrete proposals for mainstreaming the GIAHS initiative into the Global Sustainable Development Agenda, and at national and local levels.
2. Wider and deeper GIAHS support through an expanded list of partnerships and alliances at national and international levels
3. International and FAO Senior Management support for the creation of a globally recognized “World Agriculture Heritage” category
4. Additional funds identified (and committed) for the GIAHS Full Scale Project implementation
5. The GIAHS concept and frameworks revised, improved and consolidated
6. Immediate and medium-term targets and plans for GIAHS initiative identified
7. Creation of GIAHS institutional and support structure, specifically the technical and consultative groups.
8. Guidelines prepared for project organisation and implementation