

# Executive Summary

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## *Background and objectives of the Forum*

In 2002, FAO initiated a wide programme for the conservation and adaptive management of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS). During the preparatory phase, several meetings were convened to formulate and give guidance to an umbrella project supported by UNDP/GEF in close collaboration with UNESCO, UNU, IPGRI, ICCROM, interested governments and other partners. As part of this project, pilot systems were identified in Chile, China, Peru, Philippines, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia and baseline information and case studies were conducted in these pilot areas.

The International Forum on GIAHS was convened to take stock of the findings of the preparatory phase and give direction for the full scale global GIAHS initiative to be implemented over a 5 to 7 -year period. The objectives were to elaborate further the overall conceptual approach and scientific underpinning of the programme; to examine its requirements for an enabling policy and legal environment; to outline its management structures at local, national and global levels and to mobilize further partnerships and resources.

The Forum was attended by 12 delegates from the pilot countries (GEF Operational Focal Points and National Facilitators), 15 representatives of UN system and other partner institutions, 18 experts from universities and research institutes, 8 members of embassies and country representations to FAO and 21 FAO staff members, consultants and volunteers.

## *Progress in the development of the GIAHS conceptual framework and its scientific underpinning*

The Forum further elaborated the concept of the GIAHS recognizing that GIAHS are complex “social-ecological systems” where the traditional values, beliefs and social relations of local communities and their traditional knowledge, technologies and practices are an integral part of the biodiversity and agricultural heritage to be preserved. The close interaction and co-evolution of the biological and cultural compo-

nents of these systems over centuries gave them a considerable resilience and adaptive capacity to changing circumstances. Their preservation should therefore follow a “dynamic conservation approach of bio-cultural diversity” based on the inherent skills of the local communities in the adaptive management of their environmental and cultural heritage. The complexity of this concept and the difficulty of the task were recognized, however, as these systems are under multiple influences and threats by endogenous and exogenous forces. While the GIAHS contributions to a new sustainable development paradigm are promising, further research and practical experience - as should be provided by the GIAHS pilot projects- are needed to test the guiding principles discussed by the Forum participants. Among these, the following were highlighted: research workers and farmers should study together how certain intuitive/empirical practices of traditional agriculture systems could be explained with the help of modern science, quantum physics in particular, and, there from, a post-modern agriculture may develop using both old and new agricultural knowledge and practices.

The traditional knowledge and innovative technologies of local farmers in the GIAHS should be investigated and agro-ecologists should engage in an active “dialogue of wisdom” with them to understand their rationale and potential for transfer and wider application. The reduction of poverty is the essential prerequisite to the dynamic conservation of GIAHS. The local and external causes of poverty should be investigated through the empowerment of the GIAHS communities and a multi-stakeholder participatory process. The use of the wider, internationally recognized criteria of the DAC-OECD methodological framework was proposed for this analysis (covering the human, economic, socio-cultural, political and protective/resilience dimensions in combating poverty) rather than the 5 capitals of the DFID Sustainable Livelihoods framework (human, natural, physical, financial and social capitals) which focuses mainly on local conditions. The agro-biological and cultural diversity of the GIAHS should be preserved also because it permits the diversity of their activities, products, sources of income and other benefits and therefore facilitates the resilience and adaptive capacity of the system. This diversification should be maintained for sustainable poverty alleviation.

## *Development of the GIAHS mandate and legal framework*

Elements of a GIAHS conservation framework can be found in existing international instruments such as the World Heritage Convention, the UNCBD and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. None, however, covers all the aspects of the GIAHS initiative and places a sufficient emphasis on agricultural heritage, agro-biodiversity, dynamic conservation, local empowerment and multi-stakeholder processes. GIAHS, therefore, should seek special international recognition with its own mandate and legal framework.

The scope, objectives, definitions, criteria and other components of an international instrument on the conservation of GIAHS were discussed and identified. The instrument could take different forms: a set of internationally accepted principles and guidelines, a non-binding agreement or undertaking or an international convention or treaty. A step-by-step consensus building process should be initiated capable of averting possible conflicts of interests and influencing national legislations related to the GIAHS. Special attention should be given to the requirements to be met for the international designation of a GIAHS site and for its inclusion and listing in a "World Agricultural Heritage Category" (and for its de-listing).

The experience of the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) was found particularly relevant, especially the process by which an international undertaking on plant genetic resources was negotiated and then became an international treaty, with the addition of protocols (e.g. farmers' rights) and a funding facility. This treaty, however, gives limited attention to in situ conservation and does not cover animal genetic resources and other elements of agro-bio-diversity. An international instrument on GIAHS could therefore fill an important gap and a submission on GIAHS to the CGRFA and FAO Council was proposed to this effect.

Other useful elements for the development of an international instrument on GIAHS should be found in the work of the WIPO Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge (TK) and Folklore. The general principles and guidelines on TK protection, now under negotiation, were presented and further cooperation between WIPO and the FAO and CBD Secretariats was recommended.

## *Review of the pilot country experience and development of the GIAHS management structure*

Progress reports were presented to the Forum by the national facilitators/focal points of the pilot systems on Andean Agriculture (Peru), Chiloe Agriculture (Chile), Rice-Fish Agriculture (China), Ifugao Rice Terraces (Philippines) and the Oases of the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia). All projects had adopted the GIAHS holistic, agri-cultural approach and its focus on the local community. The rich agro-biodiversity of the initial selected sites was confirmed and was found to be closely associated with specific environmental conditions, management practices and cultural traditions. Out-migration, the introduction of new technologies and external market influences were identified as major problems in all sites but, while some sites focussed essentially on a specific, discrete system, others took an aggregate/area-based, multiple land use approach. The use of a whole landscape approach - integration of both discrete and area-based approaches and upscaling of the systems was recommended to raise global awareness of GIAHS dynamic conservation.

Strong disparities were found to occur between the local community level and the higher levels in the GIAHS sites as regards the flow of information, organization, technology and management control. An overall management structure was outlined with several levels of multi-stakeholder participation in steering the programme and projects and providing the necessary technical and operational guidance, at local, national and global levels. Special emphasis was placed on the community as the imperative entry point for all the management processes and on the need for multiple cooperative linkages (bottom-up, top-down and horizontal) among the actors at all levels. The general outline of a management protocol was proposed with the primary objectives of enhancing the self-determination of the GIAHS communities and following the principles of subsidiarity and mutual accountability.

## *Partnership development and resources mobilization*

The Small Grant Programmes (SGP) of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) managed by UNDP was presented. The GEF-SGP premise is that community-based organizations and NGOs can produce global environmental benefits through small initiatives that

address local environmental management, livelihoods and local empowerment. The management structure of the programme is highly decentralized with national multi-stakeholder steering committees defining the country programme strategies and national coordinators ensuring the identification and implementation of country projects. Some 800 project are dealing with agro-biodiversity, with strong emphasis on certification and marketing of agro-biodiversity products. There is wide scope, therefore, for further SGP–GIAHS partnership, notably for joint programming and financing at national level and, at global level, for the promotion of common objectives.

The maintenance of worldwide diversity- both cultural and biological - through small grants and other activities is also the major objective of the Christensen Fund. It operates as a private institution supporting bio-cultural conservation through small grants. The Fund expressed interest in co-operating the GIAHS in view of the large coincidence of their objectives and approaches.

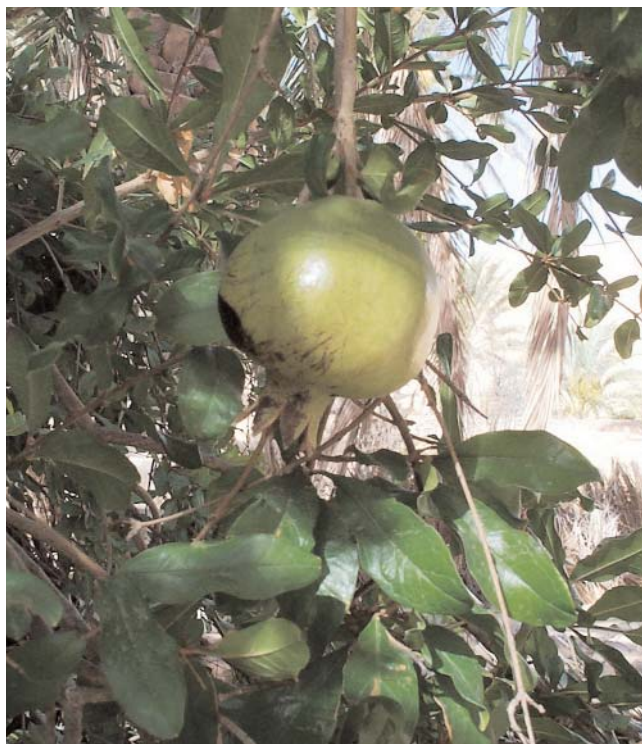
Another expression of strong interest and support was expressed by the Secretary General of the Roman Forum. He invited the GIAHS to be more ambitious in involving a wider range of partners and funding sources, in the private sector in particular, mobilizing local NGOs and making use of micro-credit facilities in support of village-level enterprises. He also recommended to strengthen the participation of policy-makers, NGOs and scientists in the GIAHS Forum so as to give it more influence in promoting innovative strategies of sustainable agricultural development.

The work of the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues was also presented. It could play a major advocacy role in support of the GIAHS. The International Decade for Indigenous People, its Action Plan and the ongoing negotiations of a UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People should provide a number of opportunities of cooperation with the GIAHS.

In addition to these expressions of support at international level, several national coordinators and focal points of pilot systems reported that they had developed mechanisms of governance, management and stakeholders' participation at national level to strengthen partnership and support for their pilot systems.

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<sup>1</sup>GIAHS were defined as “remarkable land use systems and landscapes which are rich in globally significant biological diversity evolving from the dynamic co-adaptation of a rural community/population with its environment and its needs and aspirations for sustainable development”.



*“Around the world agricultural systems are increasingly vulnerable to overuse, inappropriate practices, and altered weather patterns. The task force recommends increasing the use of sustainable agriculture techniques to preserve natural assets, restoring and managing desertified lands, and protecting surrounding natural habitat”*

*- MDG Task Force*