

Introducing Bioversity International

Despite great advances in recent decades, agriculture is not meeting humanity's most pressing challenges. In addition to the 925 million people the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization estimates are hungry, 195 million children under five years of age are stunted due to chronic malnourishment.

It is clear that we need more and better quality food. We need to help lift communities in developing countries out of poverty, and we need to do this without destroying the biodiversity on which life on Earth depends. To meet rapidly growing demands for food and other resources, humanity is destroying natural ecosystems and causing massive losses in diversity. Yet, efforts to tackle hunger and disease worldwide will be compromised while such environmental damage is taking place.

Improving smallholder agricultural livelihoods is essential for achieving large-scale poverty reduction and growth: of the one and half billion people who live in extreme poverty, three-quarters live in rural areas, and the vast majority depends on agriculture and forests for their livelihoods. Through ingenuity and hard work smallholder farmers are responsible for some 60% of total global agricultural production. Women make up a substantial part of the world's smallholder farming workforce and they are frequently the principal holders of agricultural knowledge.



Y. Wachira/Bioversity

New Approaches Can Change Lives

Agriculture will have to change faster during the next 40 years than it has over its entire history. It will need to use less land, cope with a changing climate, use less water, and produce more food for a larger urban population, all with reduced energy and fewer agrochemicals.

There is growing evidence that the use of agricultural biodiversity can contribute to nutritional health gains, and increase and sustain livelihoods and crop yields in smallholder farming systems. In addition, we know that rural communities, particularly women, play a vitally important role as the guardians of the world's remaining biodiversity. The time has come to ensure that agricultural biodiversity is adequately researched and deployed to deliver more sustainable, productive and resilient farming systems.

Bioversity International is rising to this challenge. A leading global research-for-development non-profit organization, we are working towards a world in which smallholder farming communities in developing countries are thriving and sustainable.

Realizing Agricultural Biodiversity's Potential

Bioversity International has set itself two ambitious goals to deliver long-lasting solutions in the next ten years:

- Demonstrate how the improved use of biodiversity can enhance smallholder farming communities' livelihoods and nutrition, and ensure more sustainable and resilient agricultural systems. This will have the potential to benefit millions of people.
- Develop a global programme of in situ conservation, which has been tested on and applied to useful plant species and their wild relatives. We will also improve the availability of plant genetic resources worldwide.

We are uniquely placed to bring our knowledge and considerable experience to bear on the challenges of hunger and malnutrition, rural poverty, and environmental degradation. During our 35-year history we have led important scientific efforts to improve and diversify farming systems, ensured the conservation of valuable plant genetic resources, shaped international policy in favour of agricultural biodiversity, and developed a world-class network of research partners. We are distinct in our ability to develop and deploy research to mobilise people from very different areas of expertise to tackle global challenges. We now work in more than 90 countries.

Over the coming decade we will create and share the knowledge and deliver innovative tools to support smallholder farmers in developing countries. We will ensure that we invest in women farmers. In so doing we will help empower farming communities to be the custodians of agricultural biodiversity for future generations.



B. Sthapit/Bioversity

Bioversity International – a snap shot

Tackling malnutrition – our ambitious nutrition research programme aims to show how agricultural biodiversity can increase dietary diversity to combat malnutrition in the world's poorest countries.

Conserving genetic diversity – from collecting new material for tropical fruits in the Philippines and supporting the world's largest collection of banana and plantain germplasm to organizing and funding the collection of 10% of the estimated 2 million unique accessions in the world's genebanks, our work is safeguarding the plant genetic resources that are vital to future food supplies.

'Seeds for Needs' – an innovative programme is equipping poor farmers to combat the effects of a changing climate, by helping them access and select crops that will perform well under future adverse conditions.

Neglected and underutilized species – a programme in India, Nepal and Bolivia is helping rural communities use and market neglected, but hugely important, local crops. It will create models of good practice that can be shared around the globe.