



Webinar

Regional Consultation on Forgotten Foods in Asia-Pacific

Developing a Regional Manifesto

Date: 28 May 2021 from 14:00-16:50 ICT (Bangkok Time)

Registration link: <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJEtcO2hqDotHNomt1-fwvkOSmHvqHKINDoL>

Concept Note

Since many years in the past, the Asia-Pacific countries have been growing and consuming a wide variety of food crops, which had high nutrition value. However, over the past decades, the modern and industrialized agriculture has aimed to achieve immediate profit with consequent changes in policies and programme priorities, including in food habits. As result, many countries have moved away from those traditional foods, which have now become almost a forgotten food. These food crops are also referred to as neglected and underutilized species (NUS) by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The Asia-Pacific region has 386 million (14.1%) of the under-nourished population of the world¹. It is well known that the world is dependent on staple crops, such as rice, wheat, maize, soybean and potatoes, which make up major part of global food energy intake. Agricultural research and formal innovation systems tend to neglect many minor and local crops and the forgotten foods. From over 30,000 edible plant species, 6,000 have been used and 700 cultivated throughout human history. They have demonstrated multiple environmental, economic and social benefits, in particular to the local farming communities. For centuries, family farmers have been the custodians of these species and their biodiverse systems.

Greater diversity associated with sustainable management practices is needed in agricultural and food systems in order to feed 9.7 billion people in 2050² in a sustainable way. This needs to happen while protecting the neglected crops and diversity on farm, as well as the associated environment and farmer livelihoods. To make this possible, we need to value and use traditional knowledge systems on traditional agriculture as well as crops species and varieties.

It is definitely not easy to mainstream forgotten food and the minor crops in our agricultural and nutritional spectrum. However, a shift from the current 'yield-for-immediate-profit' paradigm towards multi-functional and diversified agri-food systems is needed to achieve zero hunger and provide nutritious, healthy and sustainable diets. This requires, among others, a transformation of agricultural innovation systems, valuing more local knowledge and ingenuity, as well as neglected genetic and species diversity.

¹<http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/CA9692EN.pdf>

²<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/world-population-prospects-2019.html>

The change we want is probably the holistic agriculture rather than specialized agriculture as envisaged in the primitive agriculture time, but with innovations in irrigation system, enhanced soil organic carbon nutrient availability, and enhanced soil micro-biota. The crop diversity within the piece of land that can ensure holistic food and fulfill diverse food options to enhance nutrition security. The whole exercise will require a very innovative approach involving a multi-disciplinary regional analysis and a regional multi-stakeholder consultation.

It is thus, envisioned to organize a regional consultation to seek information and set priorities from collective action to promote research, innovation, education, sustainable production, processing, marketing and consumption of forgotten food. The multiple objectives of the Consultation are as follows:

- Recognition by different stakeholders on the importance and value of this species and sustainable agricultural technologies such as agroecological approaches, participatory plant breeding, efficient seed systems, and new technologies (digital, genomics, etc.).
- Articulation and analysis of multi-level (institutional, organizational, individual) capacity development needs in the areas of research, extension, education and development across the value chain of such crops.
- Identification of strategic and effective ways to lobby and advocate for policy innovations to ensure use and conservation of Forgotten Food, such as incentives for Forgotten Food cultivation and conservation, incentives for farmers to innovate within a system.
- Identification of possible areas for collaborative research projects and partnership opportunities and discussion on ways to establish a Regional Knowledge Hub on Forgotten Foods.

Expected Outcome

The Regional Consultation is expected to build a consensus around a new vision of research and innovation systems needed for enhancing bio-cultural diversity. Hence, it aims to empower custodian farmers, particularly women and youth, in their practices to conserve, cultivate, use, save, exchange and sell forgotten crops and foods for nutrition, climate change resilience and identity conservation.

The consensus reached will be documented in the form of a Manifesto presenting the new vision of research and innovation systems to support custodian farm families and forgotten foods. The output of the consultation will be a comprehensible and actionable draft Manifesto on Forgotten Foods in Asia-Pacific region owned by major farmers organizations and research and development agencies, and to be considered by the wider community of stakeholders as a basis for global actions linked to local initiatives.

The draft Manifesto will provide a framework for shared values, operational principles and concrete strategies that will help smallholder farmers to localize actions and policies within their own communities and countries. In this way, the Manifesto will provide a public declaration of intentions to rapidly accelerate the wider adoption of more bio diverse food systems. The output of this Asia-Pacific consultation will feed into the manifestos developed by other regions of the world, which will be eventually facilitate in preparing a Global Manifesto.

Participants

Selected regional representative groups of various innovation systems, including APAARI members, institutions including national and international research and educational organizations, custodian farmers, farmers associations, value chain actors and the private sector, non-governmental organisations and civil society, as well as policy makers from Asia-Pacific.

Organisers

Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI) in partnership with Global Forum of Agricultural Research, Alliance Bioversity - CIAT, Asian Farmers Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA), M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Barli Development Institute for Rural Women (BDIRW) and International Crop Research Institute for Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

