

## Reporte High Level Regional Dialogue on the Integration of Biodiversity in Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DRANIBA)



Kevin Farrera  
Director  
Desarrollo Alternativo e Investigación A.C.

I had the opportunity to participate in the High-level Dialogue on the Integration of Biodiversity in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DRANIBA) in Mexico City hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO) and the Government of Mexico. As the title of the event, the objective of the meeting was to discuss issues related to the integration of biodiversity in the public policy agenda of Latin America and the Caribbean countries. The FAO will subsequently issue voluntary guidelines to each member country of the United Nations organization, based on the discussion generated in these regional dialogues. The invitation to DAI to participate in this High-level Dialogue was a direct outcome of our side event #68 "Farming solutions with benefits for biodiversity and access to healthy, diverse and nutritious food" held during the meeting of the Committee on Food Security at FAO Headquarters in Rome from 15-19 of October.



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The dialogue was held for two days, with the first day dedicated to presentations and the second day devoted almost entirely to analyze the current recommendations that were a product of other meetings and events hosted by both FAO and the Government of Mexico.

On the first day, and since the inauguration of the event, the purpose of the meeting was noted as the goal to integrate biodiversity in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector. The FAO representative in Mexico, Crispim Moreira, mentioned the importance of thinking about a transformative change in the way our food is produced today. He also spoke of the importance of diversifying diets, recognizing traditional and local foods as a complement of a healthy diet; as well as using practices for the conservation of biodiversity. Subsequently, Dr. José Sarukhan, coordinator of the Comisión Nacional para el Uso y Manejo de la Biodiversidad (CONABIO), spoke about the importance of recovering the consumption of local species and how, in spite of the richness of edible species known, only 15 species are consumed by the majority of society.

After the inauguration there were presentations from different institutions and organizations showcasing how their countries are taking measures to include biodiversity within the national public policy agenda. For example, Costa Rica introduced scenic beauty in their forestry management law as an ecosystem service as a complement of carbon sequestration, biodiversity and hydric services. In addition, the country is looking for ways to reduce the costs of certifications of organic and agroecological production products; perhaps evaluating the possibility of the application of participatory guarantee systems.



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The discussion became interesting when topics such as the level of importance which biodiversity should take on international agendas were discussed. Perhaps one of the conclusions often is that we should think about a transformation in the economy of the nations to really establish a new interaction relationship with our environment, sustainable management of natural resources and the promotion of green entrepreneurship. While this solution was considered as one of the visions we should follow, in reality the practical application is extremely complicated due the complexity of the value chains, market agreements and trade policies between countries, just to name a few; although, setting the foundations and objectives with stakeholders for a transition towards a green economy can be a massive achievement.

Civil society organizations highlighted the fundamental role of indigenous peoples within the discussion: The biologically most diverse places are also culturally diverse. Indigenous peoples developed a different way of seeing, relating to and interacting with the world. We have a lot to learn from these traditional systems and the wisdom of these peoples. At the same time, delegates recognized that there must be an intercultural dialogue in which modern technology, innovation and traditional indigenous knowledge can help reformulate principles and develop production systems with a focus on agrobiodiversity.

One of the presentations particularly caught my attention: That of the FAO coordinating group of the “Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems” (GIAHS). According to the FAO’s definition GIAHS are *“the systems of land use and outstanding landscapes, which are rich in biological diversity of global importance, evolved from the co*



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*adaptation of a community with its environment and its needs and aspirations, for sustainable development ”(FAO, 2018).* It is interesting to see how these systems were developed largely by indigenous peoples, energy cycles within the system are balanced and are highly productive based on the resources limitations they often have. Mexico is currently working to certify the

Mayan milpa as a GIAHS and currently has a GIAHS in the Chinampas system. The GIAHS are an important tool for governments to recognize the importance of these systems and carry out dedicated research and development together with local actors.

One of the points that was also addressed is the issue of payments for ecosystem services, especially the "Payment for Environmental Services" used in Mexico that pays for the carbon sequestration in forested areas. Through an agreement, producers receive a certain amount of money in exchange for protecting and managing the forested area. The discussion focused around the payment for these services as they do not really remunerate the value generated by other types of forest services, as the case of scenic beauty presented by Costa Rica.

This discussion concerning the structuring of PES-programs resonates with our practical experiences. We at DAI have worked with maize producers in buffer zones of natural parks and in many cases these producers are affected by wild animals such as deer and peccaries feeding on their plots. In some communities, farmers plant extra spaces to prevent losses and effectively feed the animals that year after year eat from these plots. In such cases the traditional system supports the generation of food for wild animals and this is rarely taking into account in the discussions around payments. The question that arises for us is this: Could payment for ecosystem services generated by traditional agricultural systems and agroecological practices work as an incentive for small-scale producers to transition to agroecology?

On the second day, the recommendations that had been generated in other events were discussed so that FAO could receive the comments of the participants and could subsequently make the voluntary recommendations for the countries. Two working groups were established and one reviewed sectorial issues such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries; The second table dealt with cross-cutting issues such as governance. Although the group was divided in two for the discussion, the moderators moved and we were able to discuss all the issues.



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It was interesting to see the position of different countries based on the type of natural resource management they have. The promotion of agroecology, especially in small-scale production, was resonated with delegates. They also showed keen interest in developing instruments that can help to value ecosystem services in order to create stronger support programs. For the forestry sector, participants highlighted research and development of fast-growing tree species that are local or regional to promote the use of local genetic resources as a promising strategy. Other remarked that such an approach should go beyond forestry and be part of all productive systems we were discussing. Participants emphasized that exchange of knowledge between countries should be promoted in order to generate more information and resources to make decisions that have positive impacts on the integration of biodiversity.

Later, when cross-cutting issues such as governance and country recommendations were discussed, there was much talk about the importance of including the different actors of the production systems to make their voices heard. We also identified the challenge of changing ideas and concepts and creating a different perspective of the problems we face.; Participants warned about the use of substance-less buzz words or simply adding a “biodiversity” component to existing programs, but not changing the way in which we face these great challenges.

I personally enjoyed the presentations and discussions on the integration of biodiversity in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors; without a doubt the challenge we have is big, I think the best way to contribute is to continue our work from and participate in this type of events to help develop the type of policy that can help us achieve our goals. All things considered, our work as the initiatives part of the Solution Search: Farming for Biodiversity Program is impacting a great number of people. After the meeting I have a good feeling that we are contributing from different parts of the world with our activities, trying to address the critical issues that concern not only a certain part of the society but all of humanity.



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