

## **Food Security and Biodiversity - who has the power?**

**A conference to explore facts and opinions and discuss the ways ahead  
15 of October, 2004**

Biodiversity is the basis for human livelihoods and survival. We have lived as gatherers, hunters and fishing people during the largest part of our history. Later, agriculture and livestock keeping was based on a selection of the - for us - most useful species. Biodiversity is absolutely crucial for a sustainable food production to feed the growing population of the world.

There is an increasing number of examples showing how over-exploitation and non-sustainable management of biodiversity and agro-ecological ecosystems has led to biodiversity loss, degraded ecosystems and decreasing yields and productivity. Why is this so? What can we do to change this development? Who has the responsibility to break this negative trend - who has the power? With these questions in mind SwedBio/CBM, Cemus doctoral school, Collegium for Development Studies, Uppsala University and SLU-External Relations arranged a one-day conference with lecturers from Africa, Asia and Latin America with the purpose to show different perspectives of the role of biodiversity for food security and production in the future

The conference was held in conjunction with the annual FAO "World Food Day" arranged by the FAO on the 16 th of October every year. The theme for 2004 was "Food security and Biodiversity"

### ***Here is a small selection of what was said during the day:***

Urban Emanuelsson, director at the Swedish Biodiversity Centre opened with saying that conservationists and those working with poverty reduction issues seldom meet and that this is problematic since the issues are tightly connected. It is often stated in the debate on poverty and food insecurity that to reduce food poverty we have to sacrifice some of the biodiversity. Conservationists are often naive and prioritise the environment in front of human survival, while those who put humans over nature are considered by conservationists to be short-sighted and not applying sustainable solutions.

Göran Djurfeldt, Professor of Sociology at Lund University, said that he wasn't sure that biodiversity has to be compromised to ensure food security. But if we have to choose, then we have to choose humans over nature. One of Djurfeldt's main points was that we have to stop glorifying traditional farming methods. The technical development in farming that has reached the rest of the world also has to reach Africa. Only small amounts of artificial fertilizer, far below the levels we are using, can improve African agriculture dramatically.

Hans Herren, from the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) opposed Göran Djurfeldt and said that we very well can manage to increase food production with ecologically sound methods.

James Dargie Director joint FAO/IAEA Division responded to critique that FAO has received for the recently published report " THE STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE 2003-2004 Agricultural Biotechnology Meeting the needs of the poor?". The critique that FAO has received from several NGOs opposes what is perceived to be an overly positive picture of the possibilities of Biotechnology to solve food poverty. Dargie did not agree

with the critique and he stressed that FAO does not promote genetic engineering but rather promotes that all countries should have access to the new technique and the possibility to choose for themselves.

The Indian journalist Devinder Sharma discussed the uneven power relations in the world and identified this as one of the key problems that had to be dealt with to reach food security for all. As an example of this he discussed issues of biopiracy and the access to genetic materials.

Lennart Salomonsson from the Department of Rural Development at SLU also discussed power relations but focused on the unfair trade conditions. It is not possible to achieve a fair trade as long as we give goods and services in monetary value, he argued. Instead, he introduced the concept of "emergy", a type of ecological foot print measured in energy, where goods and services achieve their value according to how much energy they need in their production. If value is measured in energy, the value of a good or service will be the same, no matter where in the world it has been produced. If global trade should be able to help poor countries and be socially, ecologically and economically sustainable, the rules of the game have to be changed.

During the panel discussion the speakers could nevertheless agree on a few things. We need more funding for agricultural research. Technical development is needed but the speakers did not agree on where the focus of research and development should be. The panel agreed on that Africa's biggest problem is not that there isn't enough food, but rather a democracy problem. Who was responsible for this, and how Africa's political problems should be solved, it was not agreed upon. Göran Djurfeldt and James Dargie stated that Africa has to solve their problems on their own, while Devinder Sharma stated that this was also a question of uneven power relations and distribution of resources globally, and this is not something that Africa could be responsible for.

Other speakers during the day were Maria Berlekom, SwedBio/CBM, Sarala Gopalan, IFAP, Caroline Trapp, The Federation of Swedish Farmers, LRF, August Temu from the International Center for Research in AgroForestry (ICRAF) and Klaus Pontvik from Ecocafféet.