



Unity for Diversity

FIRST WINDOW OF THE GLASS HOUSE SHATTERED,

as committed people from the agrobiodiversity@knowledged programme¹ come together in the Wongsanit Ashram, Thailand, to work on their common future

Forty-three people from twenty-one countries from all over the world met in Thailand in July 2012 for a three-and-a-half day conference as part of the agrobiodiversity@knowledged programme. The gathering was designed and facilitated by the *Embassy of the Earth* using the search conference approach. After the meeting of this community in Thika, Kenya, in October 2011, this second meeting was meant to help consolidate the group and kickstart activities. According to M.P. Vasimalai, Dhan Foundation, one of the participants from India, “*the meeting in Thika was like the germination of a seed. This second meeting brought a kind of binding that will only strengthen in the future.*” The venue and the set-up of the meeting were special: the green, airy grounds of a Buddhist ashram, surrounded by water and only accessible by a rope raft, but it was the approach which impressed participants most. Quoting the same participant, “*the preparatory committee and the facilitator saw to it that the content came from the community, and therefore the ownership lies with the community*”. The head, but also the heart and the hands had to participate fully through the various exercises and workshops from making organic fertilisers to meditation exercises to cooking and singing and dancing in between the hard intellectual work.

The three-day discussions helped the group map out ideas and define a strategic direction. Maryleen Micheni, from PELUM Kenya, described the meeting as a “*kind of think-tank. Practitioners in agricultural biodiversity mapped out a short-term direction... and we will market our strategy to other sectors*”. The involvement of participants from so many different civil society organisations as well as a few farmers helped identify five strategic fields of action: *policy and government, market and trade, development of community-based biodiverse models of production, information and networking, and seeds and technology*. Draft plans to be implemented with research institutes, governments and the private sector have been developed. “*The message I take home is that it is very important to understand the interaction between land and resources, the local legislation, and the market forces.*” reflects Prosper Matondi from Ruzvizo Trust in Zimbabwe, while Mr Vasimalai added that the participants are determined to do and act: “*We will go for an agro-biodiversity network on seeds, and set up action programmes. It doesn't need a lot of money to do that. And I intend to target the universities we work with.*” Maryleen Micheni: “*Our intention is to make every aspect of biodiversity a part of our life.*”

¹ Agrobiodiversity@knowledged is a three knowledge programme on agricultural biodiversity initiated by Oxfam Novib and Hivos. More than 70 organisations are involved with a shared interest that small holder farmers, pastoralists, fisher folk, forest dwellers (men and women) are enabled to contribute to, and benefit from, biodiversity based and climate proof production systems.

From the meeting in Thika in October 2011 it was clear that there was need to break the glass house² in order to reach the desirable world with well preserved agricultural biodiversity. The Thailand conference was organized with the purpose of understanding and designing the world we would like to live in. By scanning the forces of the market, appreciating the shoulders on which we stand, mapping out the current situation in terms of knowledge, practice and experience we arrived at what the most desirable future should look like. Tangible goals and strategies turned the desirable into the attainable. Action plans were developed, necessary to reach the proper solutions. A logo was designed on the spot and embraced by all. A major output was the development of an on-line communication platform and community. Designed and build to suit by the community itself to facilitate communication and actions, and be visible to the rest of the world.

All plans are built on many of the lessons and ideas that came up. Back home, the challenge is now “*to test the plans we have formulated, interact with others, and further develop our strategies.*” The sense of success was summarised by Zimbabwe’s Prosper Matondi: “*I like the feeling that this is our business. We are in charge.*”

Come and join us on this continuing journey, meet the members and learn more at agriculturalbiodiversity.wordpress.com

² Glass House: the symbol of the limitations one runs into when struggling to get the well deserved seat in the global agri-food arena. For, the way of producing food as practiced and promoted by those present, proofs to be effective, delivering high yields, reducing costs and at the same time serving wellbeing for humanity and planet. The term was framed during the meeting in Thika, oct 2011.