



Brussels Rural Development Briefings
A series of meetings on ACP-EU development issues

Briefing session n° 17

Biodiversity for ACP rural development

Wednesday 10 March 2010

Agricultural Biodiversity: a key ingredient to improve livelihoods
Emile Frison – Biodiversity international
Executive Summary

The presentation considers the impact of biodiversity, specifically agricultural biodiversity, on aspects of development. It is clear from a wide range of studies that improvements in agriculture offer higher returns on investment than almost anything else, especially in the least developed countries.

These studies have tended to focus on the improvement of crop varieties and livestock breeds based on the use of existing biodiversity in a programme of scientific breeding. This approach will clearly continue to be needed; however, there are other ways in which agricultural biodiversity can forestall future food crises and improve food security.

Dietary diversity is an essential component of better nutrition and could play a much more widespread role in alleviating the hidden hunger that currently afflicts more than 2 billion people worldwide, mostly women and young children. Addressing malnutrition with agricultural biodiversity will deliver considerable other benefits too.

Adapting to climate change will also require a much more nuanced use of agricultural biodiversity, combining informatics and gene bank accessions to deliver diversity preadapted to predicted climates. In addition a broader use of agricultural biodiversity in the production systems will provide the greater stability and resilience that will be essential to face the higher frequency of extreme climatic events which is a significant feature of climate change. It will also target scarce resources to the highest priority areas for the conservation of crop wild.