

Syria takes part in regional meeting on agrobiodiversity

The 5th Regional Technical and Planning Meeting of the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dryland Agrobiodiversity was opened recently in Beirut.

In his address to the opening session, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, Nour Eddin Mouna assured his ministry's care for the issue of agrobiodiversity in implementation of the directives of President Bashar al-Assad to preserve biodiversity, botanical cover and increasing the number of pastures.

It is noteworthy that the agrobiodiversity project in Syria is carried out by the General Commission for Scientific and Agricultural Researches at Sweida and Lattakia. The two projects are supervised by the World Environment Program (WEP), while ICARDA plays the role of the regional coordinator of the project.

The project aims at preserving the wild origins of a group of important plants which Syria is considered their original homeland.

A national and comprehensive agricul-

tural strategic policy and plan will be unveiled within the next two months, according to Lebanese Agriculture Minister Ali Khalil.

"Our aim is to implement the latest international guidelines to boost the agricultural sector," Khalil said during the opening session of the 5th Regional Technical and Planning Meeting of the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Dryland Agrobiodiversity.

"Biodiversity will be one of the pillars of the proposed agricultural plan," he said.

According to Khalil, Lebanon cannot compete in terms of quantity with the world market due to its limited production capabilities. But by safeguarding its biodiversity, Lebanon would retain its competitive edge among the major players. "The key to sustainable biodiversity is the active participation of the local communities," said Syrian Agriculture Minister Nouredine Mona.

"Our region's rich pool of genetic resources must be protected," he added.

UN Development Program resident

representative Yves de San said that "biological diversity represents the very foundation of human existence."

"All our food, and many medicines and industrial products are derived from both wild and domesticated species," he said.

According to de San, biodiversity is currently threatened. Human activities are progressively eroding the earth's capacity to support life at the same time that growing numbers of people and increasing levels of consumption are making ever greater demands on the planet's resources.

Plans to conserve biodiversity need to focus on improving the knowledge base, correcting past failures in policy, and ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of the planet's resources. The equitable sharing of benefits must be an integral part of all socioeconomic devel-



opment, he said.

"The adoption of more ecologically based management systems promise a means to balance the human socioeconomic scale," de San said.

"Long term ecological considerations would be best served by taking into account the effects of biodiversity."

According to de San, agrobiodiversity is the result of the deliberate interactions between humans, natural ecosystems and the species they contain. Major modifications or transformations are the common results.

"Farmers at the local community level determine the series of social, cultural, ethical and spiritual variables in the results," he said.

"Thus the importance of local community involvement."

De San considered that the emergence of a new paradigm for agriculture recognizes that the great diversity of traditional farming systems make a major and essential contribution to the food security of hundreds of millions across the globe.

"The Levant and North Africa used to be the Roman Empire's food reservoir," said Mohan Saxena, assistant director general of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA).

"It is our duty to sustain the heritage for future generations," he said.

Sharif Khatib