

# Cultivating Biodiversity

## *Understanding, Analysing and Using Agricultural Diversity*

Edited by Harold Brookfield, Christine Padoch, Helen Parsons and Michael Stocking

- arresting the decline in biodiversity
- practical examples from expert farmers and scientists
- many case studies from Africa, Asia and South America
- key text for students of agriculture

It is estimated that three quarters of the genetic diversity of the world's agricultural crops has been lost in the past 100 years. Just three crops now provide 60% of the calories we derive from plants, a consequence of the mechanization and intensification of agricultural production. Despite conservation efforts, it is smallholder farmers, predominantly in the tropics, who have safeguarded and created more biological diversity and more economically important species than all protected areas combined. Skilled in using the natural diversity of the environment – for cultivating crops, managing the soil, water and vegetation, and maintaining their livelihoods in difficult circumstances – they have a wealth of knowledge and skills. Their systems of land use and practices are highly dynamic, drawing on local knowledge, extensive experience and experimentation.

Agricultural diversity is the subject of this book – the successful and sustainable conjunction of crop and animal biodiversity with natural biodiversity, all in the context of diverse biophysical conditions and farm organization. Part I analyses agricultural diversity and offers guidelines and approaches to biodiversity assessment. Part II focuses on people: the expert farmers whose deep and far-reaching knowledge can be almost invisible to the outside observer. In Part III eleven case studies from South America, Africa and Asia demonstrate how farmers have literally cultivated biodiversity. The book concludes with an examination of the implications for policy in agricultural development.

Based on work in 12 countries, with over 200 collaborating scientists and around 2500 collaborating farmers, this book is of interest to all concerned with sustainable development, global change issues and participatory approaches to conservation with rural people.

**Published in collaboration with the United Nations University.**

ISBN 1 85339 493 9; August 2002; £12.95, 304pp; pb



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