

Mainstreaming biodiversity to create sustainable agriculture

According to FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo, maintaining biological diversity is important for producing food and conserving the very foundation of life and rural livelihoods. "Biodiversity is essential for food security and nutrition," Semedo said at the opening High-Level Segment of the 13th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).



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"It is needed to sustainably produce nutritious and abundant food and to adapt agriculture, forestry, and fisheries to global challenges such as climate change and growing populations," she said. "Reducing the ecological footprint of agricultural sectors through sustainable practices will contribute to the conservation of biodiversity."

She added "maintaining biological diversity in agricultural sectors is important for producing nutritious food, improving rural livelihoods and enhancing the resilience of people and communities."

"If we want to transform the world, end poverty, reach zero hunger and ensure the lasting protection of biodiversity that humanity and its food systems depend on, then we have to respond through an all-inclusive effort that cuts across sectors and ministries," she added. Semedo cited agroecology as "an example of the transformation we need."

"Agroecology, combining scientific research and local and traditional knowledge, allows the development of sustainable practices and improved knowledge about agricultural ecosystems," she added.

Mainstreaming biodiversity

The Deputy Director General of FAO expressed "the need to build bridges between the sectors, identify synergies, align goals and develop integrated cross-sectoral approaches to mainstreaming biodiversity into agricultural sectors" and proposed "through the creation of a platform for mainstreaming biodiversity, to support its members to commit to concrete and measurable transformative steps towards sustainable crop and livestock agriculture, and fisheries and forestry practices."

Some 10,000 participants are gathered for a two-week meeting in Cancun to discuss ongoing implementation of the CBD, which since coming into force in 1993 has adopted 367 decisions.

The COP13 will focus on mainstreaming biodiversity across relevant sectors, especially agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and tourism, to contribute to the sustainable development goals, climate action, food security and other human development goals. Among the themes to be discussed are how biodiversity can be linked to climate and business initiatives, supply chains, sustainable production and consumption, and how effective partnerships and financing arrangements can be organised.

Agriculture's double role

Agriculture is by nature a major user of biodiversity, but it also has the potential to contribute to its protection as well. While acknowledging that there are "interactions, competition and sometimes even conflicts" between biodiversity and agriculture, Semedo also pointed to growing scientific awareness of how farming techniques can contribute to vital ecosystem functions such as maintaining water quality, controlling erosion and fostering pollination, all of which are building blocks for biodiversity.

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