

# 1 Publishable executive summary

## DIVERSEEDS: Networking on conservation and use of plant genetic resources in Europe and Asia

By Markus Schmidt

The centres of origin of important food crops are considered to be crucial sources of genetic diversity for present and future crop-breeding programmes and thus for human food safety worldwide. Traditional crop varieties and crop wild relatives are often highly endemic, ecologically rare, and most of them still survive in vulnerable ecosystems in developing countries. These genetic resources, however, are at risk as never before. In agriculture, the widespread adoption of a few improved varieties has narrowed the genetic base of important food crops and led to the disappearance of hundreds of landraces. Conserving and using plant genetic diversity is vital in meeting the world's future development needs. Given the importance of genetic resources for food security, and the fact that centres of origin are mainly located in developing countries, it is absolutely necessary that European researchers cooperate with scientists from these world regions that otherwise do have little or no resources to exchange their research results. The European Commission (FP6) funded project DIVERSEEDS established a communication platform for European and Asian researchers to discuss current challenges for the conservation and use of plant genetic resources.

DIVERSEEDS is combined of 10 partners from three regional sub-groups, in Southeast Asia, China and Europe. Each subgroup held a first regional workshop to define and discuss relevant PGR-issues and ways to improve interaction between the regions. The European workshop was held in Ljubljana, Slovenia in October 2007 shortly after the two Asian DIVERSEEDS workshops took place in Beijing and Hanoi in September 2007. The workshops were a preparatory step towards the first international DIVERSEEDS meeting held beginning of December 2007 at the Bioversity<sup>1</sup> headquarter in Rome, in cooperation with the ECPGR Inter-Regional Cooperation Network (IRCN). The DIVERSEEDS team was also invited to the FAO Secretary of the International Treaty for Food and Agriculture to discuss opportunities to overcome current gaps in the implementation of the International Treaty<sup>2</sup>. At the meeting the international team searched for „common ground“, or in other words preselect priority issues for an inter-regional discussion. Close cooperation between DIVERSEEDS and the IRCN, and the integration of existing regional networks in Europe (ECPGR), South East Asia (RECSEA) and China (EAPGR) is important to further improve the dialogue on conservation and use of PGR between Europe and Asia. Also part of DIVERSEEDS was an open online-conference<sup>3</sup> held in March and April 2008 in order to discuss the pre-selected PGR-issues with a wider group of experts and other interested stakeholder, such as NGOs or farmer groups. Later in 2008 a second round of regional workshops in the three project regions took place to discuss the input from the e-conference and to suggest recommendations on the regional level. The final second international meeting was held in September 2008 in Kunming (Yunnan, China) where final recommendations and options for continuous cooperation between Asian and European colleagues were discussed.

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**Project website** [www.diverseeds.eu](http://www.diverseeds.eu)

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<sup>1</sup> A CGIAR centre dealing with plant genetic resources

<sup>2</sup> see: <http://www.planttreaty.org>

<sup>3</sup> see: [www.diverseeds.eu/forum](http://www.diverseeds.eu/forum)

**List of DIVERSEEDS project partners**

- International Dialogue and Conflict Management, Biosafety Working Group (Austria)
- University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna (Austria)
- University of Birmingham, School of Biosciences (United Kingdom)
- University of Kassel (Germany)
- Israeli Gene Bank for Agricultural Crops, Volcani Center (Israel)
- Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences (China)
- Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (China)
- Khon Kaen University (Thailand)
- Hanoi Agricultural University and CARES (Vietnam)
- Bioversity Internacional