

Montreal Declaration

On Small-Scale Women Farmers for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use

We, representatives of small-scale farmers belonging to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, global indigenous networks, national and international civil society and research organizations, and Community Foundations from Asia, Africa and South America, on the occasion of the 15th Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, declare:

Globally, approximately two-thirds of the developing world's three billion rural people live in about 475 million small farm households, according to the FAO, working on land plots smaller than two hectares. Asia is the continent with the largest population of small farmers, followed by Africa and South America. China is the world's biggest smallholder farming country with an estimated 260 million small-scale farmer households, averaging a farming area of less than 0.6 hectares. The great majority of these small-scale farmers are women, who play a critical role in conserving genetic diversity and biodiversity-rich farming landscapes for food, nutrition and climate resilience. However, small-scale women farmers often go unrecognized and typically lack rights to land, seeds and credit.

Small-scale women and men farmers belong to Indigenous Peoples and local communities whose Biocultural Heritage, particularly indigenous knowledge, innovations, practices and cultural values, are essential for designing and implementing solutions for biodiversity conservation and healthy ecosystems. Indigenous knowledge is embedded in a philosophy that considers nature as sacred and acknowledges that people are part of nature. The interlinked knowledge, cultural values, seeds and landscapes of small-scale women and men farmers are critical for the provisioning of food, water, fertile soil, housing and medicines and sustainable ecosystem management, contributing to climate adaptation and mitigation, and seed enhancement, exchange and co-evolution.

Small-scale farmers, particularly women, are unsung heroes in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiverse seed and food systems globally. The food and nutritional security of the world depends on them. They produce one third of the world's food and act as stewards for a rich diversity of plants, animals, forests and other ecosystems on and around their farms, including resilient traditional crop varieties, livestock breeds and crop wild relatives.

However, the resilient varieties, species and agroecological practices of small-scale farmers have been disappearing due to policies that promote corporate agribusiness, which has consolidated an unequal food system based on seed privatization, biopiracy, industrial agriculture and land grabbing of small farmers' land and Indigenous Peoples' territories. As a result, their diverse biocultural seed and food systems developed over 10,000 years have become critically vulnerable, threatening local and global food security, nutrition, human and ecosystem health, resilience and sustainability.

We, the undersigned, bring more than two decades of experience on community-based farmer seed and food systems initiatives in different regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America, illustrating the effectiveness of community-based conservation and farmer-led solutions to reverse the decline of genetic resources, biodiversity and ecosystems. We strongly call on Parties to the CBD at COP 15 negotiating and finalizing the Global Biodiversity Framework to:

1. Recognize small-scale women farmers, as well as men, youth and elders, as heroes for their role in sustaining diverse local seed and food systems, ensuring biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, and protecting wild and domesticated species, as well as for their critical contributions to climate change adaptation and mitigation through farmer-led solutions.
2. Ensure the full and effective participation of, and support for, small-scale women, men, youth and elderly farmers from Indigenous Peoples and local communities in achieving the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and targets; and effectively integrate the protection of farmers' biodiverse seed, food and landscape management systems in Targets 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 20, 21 and 22.
3. Meaningfully integrate support for agroecological approaches, safeguards to stop land grabs, effective land reform, and appropriate funding for sustainable rural development and smallholder women's organizations across the post-2020 biodiversity targets.
4. Establish a cross-border multi-stakeholder platform to support the scaling out and up of small-scale farmers' best practices for conserving agrobiodiversity and local seed systems and nurturing diversified agroecological systems, that are critical for Indigenous Peoples and local communities' food and nutrition security and for environmental, climate, social, cultural and economic resilience.
5. The multi-stakeholder platform should include representatives of smallholder women, men, youth and elderly farmers, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, research and social organizations and small farmer enterprises at local, country, regional and global levels. It should promote the sharing of good practices and knowledge, and jointly carry out exchanges and cooperation in supporting small farmers and Indigenous Peoples.

We believe that the above action points are critical for the success of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework targets, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

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Signatories:

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Asociacion de Comunidades del Parque Chalakuy (Peru)

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College of Plant Protection, Yunnan Agricultural University (China)

Community Cloud Forest Conservation (CCFC, International)

Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT, Zimbabwe)

Farmers' Seed Network (FSN, China)

Foodthink (China)

Guangdong Harmony Community Foundation (GHCF, China)

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED, UK)

International Network of Mountain Indigenous Peoples (INMIP)

Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI, Kenya)

Oxfam

Red de Mercados de Trueque Chalay (Peru)

SeedChange (Canada)

The United Nations Environment Programme – International Ecosystem Management Partnership
(UNEP-IEMP)

Third World Network (TWN, Malaysia)

Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden of Chinese Academy of Sciences (XTBG-CAS, China)

Further information for Press Release:

As a farmer said, “No healthy living seeds, no healthy food!”

The Montreal Declaration on Small-Scale Women Farmers for Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use builds on two decades of collaboration amongst different partners, including Indigenous Peoples from Asia, Africa and South America, and research and social organizations from both the South and North. We jointly organized COP15 side events in Kunming and in Montreal, to share our long-term collaboration results, achievements and community-based solutions in farmer seed systems enhancement, livelihood resilience, climate change and healthy food systems.

The side event in Kunming, “High Level Policy Forum and Dialogue: Collaboration and Cooperation: The Roles of Communities, Science and NGOs in Biodiversity Conservation and Utilization” brought together 200 participants in person, more than half were small farmers from 16 indigenous communities in SW China, in dialogue with policy makers, researchers and civil society representatives from different continents. They jointly called for more recognition and support for small-scale farmers, Indigenous Peoples and their farmer seeds system, traditional knowledge and biocultural heritage. This served as the basis for the side event at COP15 Montreal, “Small farmers, farmer seeds systems and sustainability: linking indigenous communities with science & multiple stakeholders via local NGOs platform for collaboration, innovation, and adaptation”.

The community-based conservation and sustainable use process includes community seed banks, participatory plant breeding, landscape management, traditional water management systems, and landscape-based biocultural products and services linking agroecology and healthy food systems. These community-led actions are crucial for confronting the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and food insecurity and for achieving food system transformation.

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