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ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY BY CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF BIODIVERSITY IN SRI LANKA

W.L.G. Samarasinghe[1*], A.B. Sartaj[1], T.M.C.N. Tennakoon[1], K.D.R.R. Silva[2] and D. Hunter[3]

[1]Plant Genetic Resources Center, Gannoruwa, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.
[2]Wayamba University of Sri Lanka.
[3]Bioversity International, Rome.

bfnprojectsrilanka@gmail.com

Global Hunger Index (GHI) for Sri Lanka for the year 2015 is 25.5 thus the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) categorizes Sri Lanka under the food insecurity level: serious. This issue of hidden hunger has proven to be budding concern that needs to be addressed nationally; majorly comprises the household food insecurity amongst the low-income population. Food insecurity is a multi-dimensional commodity where multi-sectorial intervening is required to enable reliable access to sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Biodiversity for Food and Nutrition (BFN) Project; mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and sustainable use for improved human nutrition and well-being is actively involved in addressing the prevailing concerns on nutrition through sustainable management and utilization of agro-biodiversity. With regard to the food insecurity persisting amongst the low-income proportion inhabiting the rural areas in Sri Lanka, the project completed baseline study for determination of the status of agro-biodiversity, dietary diversity, food security status of the households and associated traditional knowledge in the Gampola, Giribawa site representing the tank-based system in Sri Lanka. The food security status in the pilot site revealed the prevalence of food secure, food insecure without hunger, food insecure with moderate hunger and food insecure with severe hunger to be 40.0%, 57.4%, 7.1% and 1.4% respectively. Dietary diversity score of households 7.15±1.11 out of 12. Prevalence of child under nutrition in food secure and food insecure households were 3.8% and 19.2% respectively. Collectively 40% of households were food secure and 60% of households were food insecure. Mother's and father's education level, household dietary diversity score and household income were seen to be positively associated with food insecurity. Insufficient knowledge and inappropriate practices related to agro-biodiversity use and household nutrition were identified from the baseline surveys. Loss of agro-biodiversity over time was evidently seen and traditional knowledge associated with local community is rapidly diminishing over generational lapses.

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The BFN project, thus embarked on carrying out awareness programs, best practices, trainings and workshops at selected sites and nationally with sustainable development goals which address; achieving food security, improved nutrition & health and promoting effective utilization of agro-biodiversity & sustainable agriculture. Major projects include, nutritional composition analysis of 58 varieties/land races of 28 species of priority/local agricultural species with a national nutrition database. Establishment of school home gardens, model urban home gardens, food & diversity fairs to promote utilization of agro-biodiversity for human nutrition and establish marketing strategies for nutrient rich, under-utilized, traditional crop varieties including local root & tuber crops; development of demonstration model plots; traditional knowledge documentation and dissemination; production and marketing of novel value added products using under-utilized crops. Other activities include; popularization of use of nutritious herbal food and beverages; festival of under-utilized fruits; increasing local fruit and vegetable consumption of Sri Lankans through "*Helabojun*" sales centers.