

The pursuit of balance

Each and every environment is the expression of the interaction between its identity and its inhabitants who in time, contributed in enhancing it with customs, cultures and tradition.

The very existence of any place depends on man's deep knowledge of it.

There are places where man, owing to this knowledge, was able to establish a perfect balance between the natural world and production, ecology and economy, creating beautiful and harmonious landscapes.

Ancient crafts and rural skills, the adaption of cultivations to the configuration of the land are all elements that have created actual architectures that have become landscapes peculiarities. Efficient agricultural models that protect biodiversity with a minimum impact on the environment can become the ground for the development of local communities.

These are perfect examples of balance between tradition and innovation, the respect for environmental and industrial development, as well as man and nature.

Biodiversity

Plants are the base of all food chains and are the primary food source for humans. Over 80% of our diet comes from plants, and globally crops are grown on 1,5 billion hectares.

Humans began cultivating plants 12000 years ago and in the course of the millennia selected more than 7000 plant species as a source of food. But today just 30 crops supply 95% of human food energy needs. Given the importance of this relatively small group of crop species in human food security, it is vital that we conserve the diversity within them.

For example, rice (*Oryza sativa*) has more than 100000 distinct varieties.

The vast genetic diversity allows crops to be grown in a range of different regions and helps combat the effects of climate change.

The United Nations actively supports small farmers, women and men alike, who are among the chief custodians of agricultural biodiversity and who produce most of the food in developing countries. It is committed to ensuring world food security through international treaties and field projects that promote sustainable production and crop diversification to improve the livelihoods and the health and nutrition of all human beings.

Almost 40% of the earth's land surface is used for agriculture. Manual labour and food production mainly take place on land.

Smallholder farmers represent the vast majority of farmers in the world. However, many of them, particularly women, lack access to land, technology, education and financial services, all of which are fundamental to agricultural productivity.

The United Nations estimates that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30%. These production gains could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17%.

"Women are the world's frontline agricultural and nutrition workers, forming the backbone of the rural economy. We will only achieve Zero Hunger when women get the recognition, opportunities and backing they deserve." (Ertharin Cousin, WFP Executive Director)

Many United Nations agencies focus their activities on helping smallholders, gain access to land and other productive resources, services and infrastructure in rural areas.