Opening of Stakeholders Validation Workshop

on

The National Strategic Action Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Crop Wild Relatives

Thursday 11 August 2016 at 9:15 hrs

Conference Hall, BPML Tower 1, Ebene
Mr Gondeea, Permanent Secretary

Mrs Jhowry, Deputy Permanent Secretary

Mr Ehsan Dulloo, Component Leader of Biodiversity International

Prof Yasmina Jaufferally Fakim, University of Mauritius

Mr Bachraz, Acting Director National Parks and Conservation Service

Mr Tezoo, Conservator of Forests

Mr Luchmeea, Assistant Director

Mr Rajcoomar, Acting CEO, FAREI

Heads of Para Statal organisations of my Ministry

Representatives of private sector organisations
Representatives of NGOs

Distinguished guests

Dear participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

Today we are opening a new chapter in our history and programme of conservation of our native species.

As of yesterday we were not fully aware of crop wild relatives and their importance for food security and climate change adaptation.
Today we have a wealth of knowledge about crop wild relatives.

We know that Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) are the wild ‘cousins’ of our cultivated crops. In the same way that the wolf is related to the dog, CWR are closely related to our food crops.

CWR are important because they contain useful genetic diversity, some of which is not present in cultivated crops.
They are potential sources of traits beneficial to crops, such as pest or disease resistance, yield improvement or stability.

However, they have received relatively little systematic conservation attention.

Many CWR species and the breadth of genetic diversity they contain are under increasing threat from anthropogenic factors such as urbanization, habitat fragmentation and intensification of farming practices, but perhaps most importantly, climate change.
We have to make sure that the valuable genetic diversity of CWR is not lost forever.

In order to secure this vital resource for future crop improvement, there is now a need for step change in the \textit{in situ} conservation of CWR as well as ensuring there is adequate \textit{ex situ} backup of key population samples.

And this can be done \textit{in situ}, by protecting wild and semi-wild populations where they occur in the
natural environment and *ex situ*, in gene bank collections.

CWR’s unique character and importance require special care and attention. The development of a specific national strategy or action plan can provide a coherent approach for conservation and use of CWR.

I understand the project is a SADC driven project which is being carried out in three SADC countries, namely South Africa, Zambia and Mauritius including Rodrigues.
So, as part of the project, a National Strategic Action Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of CWR in Mauritius and Rodrigues has been prepared in consultation with all stakeholders.

We just had an overview of the Plan by Mr Rughoo, Consultant to the Project.

We learn that several crops of economic importance cultivated in Mauritius have ‘wild’ relatives occurring locally such as tomato, potato, eggplant, pigeon pea, ground nut, pineapple and banana.
For Rodrigues, ‘wild’ relatives of the cultivated eggplant and pineapple occur locally.

The checklist for Mauritius comprises 527 CWR species out of which 131 species are endemic to Mauritius.

Following a prioritization process, 13 CWR species have been identified for conservation, including wild coffee, olive and some species are in the critically endangered list of species with few individuals occurring in the wild.
The CWR checklist for Rodrigues constitutes 142 species, out of which 28 species are endemic to Rodrigues and 9 species have been prioritized.

The major threats to priority CWR in Mauritius are invasive alien species, habitat alteration, infrastructural development, soil erosion, pests and diseases.

In Rodrigues, the major threats are invasive alien species, grazing by livestock, soil erosion, and infrastructural development and also by collectors of plant parts for handicrafts and medicinal use.
We have also learnt that, most of the priority CWR species occurring \textit{in situ} in Mauritius and Rodrigues are located in protected areas.

This is good news as our protected areas are already protected and this will facilitate \textit{in situ} conservation efforts.

Furthermore there is potential for the ‘wild’ relatives of tomato and potato could be used as gene donor for improving the locally cultivated varieties. This is promising and more research will need to be carried in this regard.
The studies have shown that key potential traits for drought tolerance and low caffeine content have been attributed to the wild coffee species occurring locally. These could be of interest to coffee breeders worldwide.

This project would have not been successful without the partners involved. So we need to thank all the partners who are working on the project in Mauritius and in Rodrigues.

I wish here to mention the European Union which has co-funded the project, Bioversity International
which is leading the project, the University of Birmingham for technical support and the University of Mauritius which is implementing the project in Mauritius. And of course all other partners and stakeholders need to be thanked also for their valuable contribution.

Much progress has been achieved and today we are validating the National Strategic Action Plan for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Crop Wild Relatives.
A number of strategic objectives have been identified for the conservation and use of CWR in Mauritius and Rodrigues.

The participants today will have the task to examine all the strategies and objectives identified and come up with firm and realistic ones to safeguard those species for now and the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As you all know, both biodiversity conservation and food security are priority concerns for the
Government and the Ministry has worked out a Strategic Plan to enhance food crop production in Mauritius and also to protect our biodiversity.

In the Budget 2016/2017, a number of measures have been announced for the economic transition of the agri business sector. Various measures announced will boost up the crop sector.

I will ensure that the policies and actions proposed in the CWR National Strategic Action Plan are implemented by the Ministry.
CWR conservation and use is a cross-cutting issue amongst many institutions in Mauritius. The setting up of a CWR Inter-institutional Coordination Unit will be considered which would comprise key institutions including representatives of farmers’ associations.

Hence, we will need the support and collaboration of all stakeholders and partners in the process. So I rely on you all.

With these words I now have the pleasure to declare today’s stakeholders validation workshop open and I wish all participants fruitful deliberations.

I thank you all for your attention.