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“Utilisation of diversity in land use systems:  
Sustainable and organic approaches to meet human needs”

## Underutilised Plants - Engine to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals

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### Abstract

The role of agricultural biodiversity and, in particular, the one played by many underutilised plant species as easily accessible assets of the poor to improve livelihoods, has not been fully recognised and capitalized upon by development organisations, policy- and decision-makers. Traditional plant species, today often fallen into disuse due to various reasons, offer solutions at hand and of key importance for resource-poor people to move out of hunger and poverty. Underutilised species represent an enormous range of different plants with different attributes and potential to contribute to poverty alleviation. While some are more important for food security, others will have a greater potential for income generation, environmental services and/or provide cultural benefits. Besides still being an essential part as food and fodder in rural communities, these species play a role as risk buffers for human and animal food security during times of environmental and social disasters. Their adaptation to varying environmental conditions and often marginal areas based on a long selection process by farmers, enables them to produce reliable yields when most introduced and modern crops fail. Often rich in vitamins and micronutrients, they provide resource-poor people with a balanced diet that is socially and culturally acceptable. If strategically marketed, they generate additional income and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity, thus expanding the options available for the poor farmers to respond to environmental and on climatic changes.

Making more use of underutilised traditional plant species will contribute towards the achievement of several MDG, namely MDG one (hunger and poverty), MDG three (gender equality and empowerment of women), MDG four (child mortality), MDG five (maternal health) and MDG seven (environmental sustainability).

The paper will provide examples on how enhanced uses of these species have contributed at local level to meet rural communities' needs.

**Keywords:** Environmental services, food security, income generation, non-material benefits, nutrition, underutilised species