

# 'Agro-biodiversity under threat'

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**Pune:** Strategies like conservation of agro-biodiversity-rich landscapes and sites by declaring them 'agro-biodiversity protected areas'; conservation and revival of threatened taxa of indigenous crops, livestock and pets; and mapping, monitoring, and valuation of agricultural biodiversity should be used to minimise threats to agro-biodiversity, said Ashish Kothari, an expert on biodiversity issues.

Founder member of Kalpavriksh environmental action group, Kothari was speaking at a seminar on agriculture biodiversity, organised by the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), UNDP small grants programme and the Richaria Campaign on Thursday. The seminar was part of the ongoing Vasundhara international film festival.

Agro-biodiversity was facing several threats from monocultural cropping for markets, replacement of tra-

ditional seeds and livestock by modern ones, loss of agricultural land to development (mining, dams, industries), growing government and corporate control of seeds, neglect of drylands, changing food and cultural habits, among others, Kothari said.

The result is rapid erosion of agro-diversity. Thousands of varieties, particularly millets and breeds, are no longer grown or maintained. In some green revolution areas, there is more than 95% loss. All 18 indigenous poultry breeds are threatened," he pointed out.

According to Kothari, the key strategies for reviving and sustaining agro-biodiversity includes mapping, monitoring, and valuation of agricultural biodiversity in the form of community biodiversity registers. Having a link between cultural and biological diversity, revival of agro-biodiversity in homogenised landscapes, revival or maintenance of home kitchen gardens and use of conservation of non-cultivated food will al-



Ashish Kothari

Due to a rapid erosion of agro-diversity, grain varieties like millets are not grown and indigenous poultry breeds are under threat

so help, he said.

Network of gene banks and breeding centres for domesticated biodiversity, sustainable use and livelihoods, community tenurial rights and responsibilities to land, water and biological resources also needed, Kothari said.

Sanskriti Menon, programme director, CEE, said that the seminar was held to look into protection and conservation of agro-biodiversi-

ty in farmers' interest. The way forward to look into these issues is setting up seed banks, strengthening farmers groups and setting up community public distribution systems.

There is also a need to link consumers and farmers, so that consumers' food habits went beyond wheat and rice options, she said.

Jacob Nellithanam, an agricultural scientist based in Chhattisgarh, said that the crops that were registered under the intellectual property rights did not serve farmers' interests.

Satish Awate, programme co-ordinator at CEE, said that some of the issues raised at the seminar will be taken up in the forthcoming XI conference of parties—Convention on biological diversity, to be held in Hyderabad this year.

The seminar was attended by agricultural experts, environmentalists and farmers representing Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Pondicherry, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka.