Fruit Tree Based Agroforestry Systems: A Way Forward for Nutritional Security?

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Today about 870 million people go hungry, every day around the world and the projections shows that the population would cross nine billion populations by 2050. For this burgeoning population, we need to produce enough affordable, quality food having rich energy and nutrition. When compared to all the interventions to meet the food and nutritional security, the horticulture sector especially the fruits having enormous possibility. The fruits with all the available minerals and vitamins are the potential candidates for achieving nutritional security. Therefore, sensitization of farmers about the potential benefits of the fruit trees is very much essential and also they need to be encouraged to practice fruit tree based system. If the research community develops suitable technologies, then the fruit trees can grow in almost all the farming systems.
There are many underutilized fruit trees in almost all the regions that can be grown under various abiotic stress conditions, if they are also introduced and some policy interventions like creation of marketing facilities and investment opportunities are made, there would be definitely diversification in the farms and we can be sure that there would be nutrient rich fruits available all round the year to the community from their farms. With the greater availability of the nutrient fruits all year round on the farm, new developments in the value chains and the good quantity of quality fruits and their products could be ensured across the domestic markets which would in turn ensure nutritional security of women and children.

In India, a UNEP/GEF Project on ‘Tropical Fruit Tree Diversity in India’ is being implemented at five sites with the 18 communities and is documenting the best practices and the identification of the available diversity with the farmers in mango, citrus and mangosteen. It is always mentioned that the we need to identify the agricultural pathways which improves the nutrition of women and children in the society. The marketing diversity research program at the Biodiversity International is also working for the development of ways to increase the livelihoods and marketing underused crop diversity, which have no market or value chain.

At the World Agroforestry Congress, I am expecting that from the deliberations on securing nutritional security through fruit tree based Agroforestry systems, I can learn about the feasibility of on-farm diversification with the fruit trees, interventions need to be made for increasing the availability of local fruits in domestic markets, understanding value chain, reduction in the post harvest losses.

I hope that during the congress, there would be more interactions, deliberations, opportunity to build teams which would definitely develop and formulate collaborative programs on agricultural biodiversity and conservation of fruit trees.

Photo: Nelson Mkwaila, a farmer in Malawi, uses fruit trees in his maize fields (The Agroforestry Food Security Programme in Malawi, supported by Irish Aid)

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Photo by Charlie Pye-Smith (World Agroforestry Centre)

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