

1. Importance of Coconut

Coconut is the most important palm of the humid tropics with almost 12 million hectares planted with the crop in 86 countries. It withstands conditions considered to be marginal for many other crops, and its considerable hardiness contributes as a stabilising factor in the farming systems of marginal and fragile environments.

The production totals 10 million tons in copra equivalent, which is almost 6 million tons in oil equivalent. The Philippines, Indonesia and India produce around 70% of this total. The average yield is approximately 500 kg of oil /ha/year.

About 96% of the crop are grown by more than 10 million resource-poor smallholder and sharecropper families, on smallholdings under 4 ha.

In total, more than 80 million people depend directly on coconut and its processing for their livelihood. Copra is prepared in the farms, using simple techniques; it is then taken to oil mills through a complex and speculative marketing system.

One third of the production is consumed in fresh form in the production areas and 70% of the total production is for domestic consumption in most producing countries.

Two countries are exporting large amounts of coconut oil: Philippines (over 1 million tons) and Indonesia (over 0.5 million tons). Most imports of oil are by Europe (over 0.7 million tons) and the USA (over 0.6 million tons).

In addition to the traditional products of copra, coconut oil and copra meal, coconut has the advantage of producing a wide variety of food and environment friendly non-food products which are used both domestically and for the export market. In some countries, coconut is the main or only source of foreign exchange earnings.

The price of copra oil were slightly below 700 US\$/ton CAF Rotterdam in 1999 and went down dramatically in 2000, almost divided by two at the end of the year.

Some facts about Coconut

Production

Planted area	11.9 million hectares
Production	10 million tons copra equivalent 6 million tons oil equivalent
Average yield	850 kg copra/ha/year (US\$ 200 – 09/2000) or 500 kg oil /ha/year
95 % produced on smallholdings under 4 hectares	

Consumption

1/3 of production consumed fresh	
70 % for domestic consumption in producing countries	

Trade

Main oil exporters	Philippines	1.2 million tons
	Indonesia	0.6 “ “
Main oil importers	Europe	0.7 million tons
	USA	0.6 “ “

Prices

CAF Rotterdam (US\$/ton)	97: 657	98: 658	99: 738	00: 449
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Sources : Oil World; Coconut Statistical Yearbook - 1998

2. Stakeholders

NARS	Almost 20 producing countries have research facilities for coconut in Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America. Research is conducted either in specific coconut research institutes or in universities or other structures, most of the time government institutions.
ARIs	Several research institutes or universities in the North work on coconut, especially in Europe, USA and Australia.
IARCs	IPGRI, for genetic resources, and ICRAF, for the coconut-based sustainable farming systems, are the main CGIAR institutes involved in coconut research.
NGOs	Many NGOs work with other coconut stakeholders and collaborate in coconut development projects, but none is coconut specific, at least for coconut research.
Farmers	Many local farmers' associations, not necessarily coconut specific, but few powerful organisations at regional or international level.
Private sector	Private companies in producing countries manage coconut plantations (less than 5 % of the total) or/and process copra to produce oil, or produce oleo-chemicals or food products (desiccated coconut, etc.). In the consuming countries, private manufacturers process copra or (mostly) oil. They do not contribute to a large extent, at the moment, in research activities.
Donors	Apart from the "Coconut Support Group" of the CGIAR system, several donor agencies fund coconut development projects and some research activities (linked or not with the projects). Among them: CFC, World Bank, Europe, Asian Dev. Bank, IFAD, AFD, ODA, GTZ, ADAB, etc...

International & Regional Organisations

The following three organisations play a significant role in the coconut community, and are key players in the setting up of a global programme:

APCC - Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, an intergovernmental organisation, with the objectives of promoting, coordinating and harmonising all regional activities of the coconut industry,
BUROTROP - Bureau for the Development of Research on Tropical Perennial Oil Crops, an association supported by the E.U., the mandate of which is to assist, strengthen and further develop research on tropical perennial oil crops, and
COGENT - Coconut Genetic Resources Network, an international IPGRI project which aims to promote national, regional and global collaboration among coconut-producing countries and partner institutions in the conservation and use of coconut genetic resources.

3. Main Challenges

Despite the potential of coconut, farmers are suffering due to low prices, declining yields and decreasing farm productivity. These are caused by ageing palms that need to be replanted with better varieties, and by natural calamities such as pests and diseases, drought, and typhoons. There is also a need to develop improved varieties with high yields and adaptation capacities, and varieties that provide high-value products in order to increase the income of coconut farmers and promote sustainable coconut production.

The main challenges faced by the coconut sector are the following:

- Maintaining the copra sector by increasing its competitiveness and strengthening the profitability of coconut cultivation for growers;
- Preventing the risks of coconut plantations disappearance through lethal diseases;
- Improving the income of producers who depend on coconut cultivation, especially in coastal and insular areas , and
- Restructuring the coconut commodity to develop end-uses other than copra and oil, with local added-value

4. Emerging Agenda at a Global level

The coconut community is discussing the implementation of a Coconut Global Programme.

The objectives of such a programme would be:

- To foster the development of improved coconut varieties, the control of pests and diseases, the development of coconut-based ecosystems, the improvement of processing techniques, the production of value-added coconut products, and the study of socio-economic issues affecting the coconut sector;
- To strengthen and stimulate partnerships among stakeholders of the coconut community to increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of global coconut research efforts;
- To offer access to information and documentation and disseminate research findings;
- To provide training opportunities to researchers and technicians to improve their knowledge and skills.

The following subjects could be addressed in the programme:

- Germplasm collection, conservation, evaluation and improvement
- Control of diseases and pests especially the lethal diseases
- Productivity and sustainability of coconut-based agro-forestry systems
- Improvement of the efficiency and value-added benefits in post harvest processing and utilisation
- Socio-economic issues influencing the development of the coconut sector.

The coconut community commissioned the COGENT coordinator to facilitate the further steps in the implementation of their global programme.