

ITPGR GB-2 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY 29 OCTOBER 2007

The second session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGR GB-2) opened on Monday, 29 October 2007, at the headquarters of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in Rome, Italy. In the morning, plenary heard opening speeches and addressed organizational matters. An afternoon plenary heard reports and regional statements, and considered the financial rules for the Governing Body and the funding strategy.

OPENING SPEECHES

In his opening remarks, ITPGR GB-2 Chair Godfrey Mwila (Zambia) said the Treaty was at a critical point in its implementation requiring all stakeholders to play their part. He invited stakeholders to share their perspectives on the Treaty's impact. Participants then watched a brief multimedia presentation on the key components of the Treaty.

Amb. José Antônio Marcondes de Carvalho, on behalf of Brazil's Vice Minister for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, highlighted the Treaty's role in overcoming limitations to agricultural production, particularly by supporting the development of locally adapted plant varieties, and stressed the need to agree on the funding strategy and international minimum standards for farmers' rights.

Dean Oestreich, Pioneer President and DuPont Vice-President and General Manager, called for the private and public sectors to collaborate to meet the needs of farmers, and for an increase in the number of crops in Annex I of the Treaty.

Sunda Ram Verma, an Indian farmer, and Professor Anil K. Gupta spoke for SRISTI, an Indian NGO that promotes grassroots-level conservation and sustainable farming. Verma described his lifetime of developing and sharing improved crop varieties, said farmers would benefit from access to resources for screening new varieties, and noted that he has received no benefits from commercialization of his own improved varieties. Gupta called for: a farmer-oriented crop tracking system; an international fund to finance data generation and facilitate negotiations for benefit-sharing; a system of global recognition for breeders and innovators among farmers that empowers communities; and gene bank descriptors that take into account farmers' knowledge.

Margaret Catley-Carlson, Chair of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, provided an overview of the Trust's programmes to support conservation of *ex situ* collections, including progress in the construction of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, and a grants scheme to support the evaluation of collections for important characteristics, with priority given to screening for traits of importance to the poor and in the context of climate change.

Guy Kastler, Via Campesina, distinguished between small- and large-scale plant breeders, and called for a dynamic Treaty that supports farmers' rights, such as the right to sell their seeds, an inventory system to support their breeding approaches and plant descriptions, and a fund to support farmers' consultations worldwide. He said the ITPGR subjects farmers to national laws, some of which undermine their rights.

Monkombu Sambasivan Swaminathan, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, described the historic roles of FAO, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the Treaty in conserving plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA), and outlined remaining challenges in achieving global food security. He stressed that plant breeders' and farmers' rights must be complementary, with farmers' rights addressing the roles of farmers as cultivators, conservers and breeders of plant varieties.

Manfred Bötsch, State Secretary and Director General, Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture, reported on the first International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (AnGR), highlighting the adoption of the Global Plan of Action for AnGR, and emphasizing the need for an ecosystem approach to agricultural and livestock production.

PLENARY

Chair Mwila called upon delegates to work cooperatively towards the successful implementation of the Treaty. José María Sumpsi Viñas, Assistant Director General, FAO Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection, said contracting parties should fund and adopt policies towards Treaty implementation, and called for increased focus on benefit-sharing to ensure a future source of funding. He expressed his hope that the Treaty would be a top priority for FAO over the next few years and that future regular budget allocations would reflect this.

Noting the Treaty's potential in addressing the current global challenges of climate change, food security and poverty reduction, and highlighting the Treaty's precarious financial situation, ITPGR Secretary Shakeel Bhatti stressed the need to prioritize and conclude the outstanding issues relating to the Multilateral System (MS) and the funding strategy.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates approved the list of observers (IT/GB-2/07/Inf.12). Regarding the annotated agenda and organization of work (IT/GB-2/07/2 Prov.), Chair Mwila suggested changing the order of items to discuss compliance on Tuesday and postpone consideration of the Global Crop Diversity Trust to Thursday. BRAZIL, URUGUAY and ECUADOR disagreed, noting that the Trust should be considered together with the funding strategy, and the agenda was adopted without amendment. Delegates also agreed that a budget committee would convene after initial consideration of the budget and work programme in plenary, and decided that the budget committee would be open-ended and consist of at least two representatives per region.

Campbell Davidson (Canada) was elected Rapporteur. Following regional nominations, Armenia, Côte d'Ivoire, Uruguay, Canada, Pakistan, Iran and Australia were appointed to the credentials committee.

REPORTS: Chair Mwila presented his report (IT/GB-2/07/4), highlighting intersessional developments and challenges to Treaty implementation, including: implementing the MS and the funding strategy in an effective and balanced manner; and ensuring the necessary financial contributions to the core administrative budget and the trust funds.

Secretary Bhatti presented his report (IT/GB-2/07/5), highlighting the functioning and operational needs of the MS and funding strategy. He stressed that the MS is now a global regulatory system involving thousands of transfers of genetic material per day, and that increased human and financial resources are required to cope with the current workload and the next biennial work programme. Bhatti also: called for policy guidance to allow the Secretariat to maintain policy coherence within the MS; outlined options for the possible establishment of a permanent technical advisory committee; and sought endorsement of the work programme and budget for the 2008/09 biennium.

REGIONAL STATEMENTS: Armenia, for the EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP (ERG), said the ERG would respond to the Chair's report under the appropriate agenda items. Iran, for the NEAR EAST REGION, said while progress on access was evident, steps towards benefit-sharing were less developed. Canada, for the NORTH AMERICAN GROUP, commended the cooperation between the CGIAR, Global Crop Diversity Trust and FAO, and urged the Secretariat to explore the possibility of making the Svalbard Global Seed Vault a World Heritage Site. Indonesia, for the ASIAN REGION, called for enhanced cooperation among all regions. Australia, for the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, stressed their interest in developing the work programme and the funding strategy. Noting the success in implementing the MS and the Standard Material Transfer Agreement, Bioversity International, for the CGIAR, called for a focus on the sustainable use of PGRFA. Ecuador, for the LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), prioritized developing an effective funding strategy and a trust fund for the MS to realize benefit-sharing. Angola, for AFRICA, called for implementing the Treaty's articles on farmers' rights and supporting those who conserve and maintain PGRFA.

FINANCIAL RULES: Secretary Bhatti introduced the Financial Rules of the Governing Body (IT/GB-2/07/6), noting that the unresolved elements are linked to the issue of provision of funds for the Treaty (Rule V). The ERG suggested that, as the Treaty was adopted under Article 14 of the FAO Constitution (Conventions and Agreements), substantial funds should come from FAO, and special funds should be established with regard to activities under the mandate of the Treaty or Governing Body decisions, or come from bilateral project donors. NORWAY

supported voluntary contributions based on an indicative scale of assessment in addition to the FAO contributions, to enable the Secretariat to undertake long-term planning. The NORTH AMERICAN GROUP said indicative assessments neither increase nor enhance resource receipts, and called for voluntary contributions, with parties required to indicate their planned contributions by a particular date. AFRICA observed that the budget is small, comprised of donations and reliant on certain parties, and suggested spreading the burden by using the UN scale of assessment for all countries. Chile, for GRULAC, supported an indicative scale, with CUBA proposing to first agree on the use of a scale, and then agree on whether the UN or FAO scale would be used.

SWITZERLAND supported an indicative scale but suggested that no decision needs to be taken yet, and that work can continue with both options still on the table. BRAZIL agreed, but noting the shortfall in current funding, suggested that FAO provide a larger part of the core administrative budget over the next biennium. IRAN cautioned against leaving the options unresolved until the next GB meeting. The FAO Legal Counsel noted that a body with a budget funded by both FAO and its members tends to have greater management authority and autonomy than when funds are exclusively provided by FAO.

FUNDING STRATEGY: Bert Visser (the Netherlands), Chair of the *Ad Hoc* Advisory Committee on the funding strategy, presented the Committee's report (IT/GB-2/07/07), and highlighted the need for professional help in fundraising, and the importance of seeking funding from diverse sources and encouraging voluntary contributions. He outlined draft documents on priorities, eligibility criteria and operational procedures for the use of funds, emphasizing the need to select a limited number of priority areas under the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Utilization of PGRFA.

ERG, GRULAC and AFRICA supported the set of priorities identified, which GRULAC said should be revised periodically. EUROPE also called for close collaboration with the Global Crop Diversity Trust, while PAKISTAN cautioned against duplication between the Trust and the funding strategy. GRULAC and PAKISTAN said funding should be made available for activities regarding all crops, not only those within the MS. Expressing concern that greater resources were received by institutions other than the Secretariat, AFRICA stressed that resources must also come from contracting parties, and noted that future requests for access to the Region's genetic resources would receive little enthusiasm without a change in financial flows.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the meeting opened, delegates praised the Secretariat's "titanic" organizational efforts, but icebergs lie ahead – most delegates agree that difficult funding and compliance issues will dominate the coming days. Some even suggested that unless the financial shortfall is resolved, "this is a dying Treaty."

Several developing country delegates prioritized agreement on the budget and the outstanding matters of the funding strategy. They lamented that while the Standard Material Transfer Agreement is already in operation, provider countries are still awaiting funds to strengthen their conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources. Meanwhile, a developed country delegate said the budget, which provides funds for the Treaty's operation, should remain separate from the funding strategy, which aims to financially support Treaty implementation. Another developed country delegate hinted that agreement on compliance would be a sign of good faith, and could help melt the ice and start the flow of necessary funds.