

CGRFA 13 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 18 JULY 2011

The thirteenth regular session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA 13) opened on Monday, 18 July 2011, at the headquarters of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, Italy. Delegates considered items relating to the Commission's Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW), namely the updated Global Plan of Action (GPA) for the conservation and sustainable use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA), the role of biotechnologies for the conservation and utilization of genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA), and climate change and GRFA. A contact group on the GPA met in the evening and into the night.

OPENING SESSION

CGRFA 13 Chair Javad Mozafari Hashjin (Iran) welcomed delegates. FAO Deputy Director-General for Knowledge Ann Tutwiler commended the CGRFA's work, and the role of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources (ITPGR) in addressing climate change challenges, pests and diseases. She highlighted the importance of: access and benefit-sharing (ABS); the updated GPA on PGRFA; the State of the World reports on forest and aquatic genetic resources; and communication.

In a video message, Professor M.S. Swaminathan, Chair of the FAO High-level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, emphasized CGRFA 13's role in relation to the Millennium Development Goals, especially in reducing hunger and poverty by half by 2015. He also highlighted "the four C's" of conservation, cultivation, consumption and commercialization.

Valerie Normand, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), on behalf of CBD Executive Secretary, Ahmed Djoghlaif, described the CBD's cooperation with the FAO, especially the revised joint work programme with the CGRFA for 2011-2020, consistent with the CBD Strategic Plan 2011-2020. She stressed that the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization gives priority to specialized regimes that are consistent with the CBD and recognizes the importance of GRFA for food security, poverty alleviation and climate change.

ITPGR Secretary Shakeel Bhatti addressed areas of collaboration with the CGRFA, including ABS for PGRFA, and supporting components of the ITPGR. He reported that the fourth session of the ITPGR Governing Body had requested a

paper on the legal, administrative and financial implications of transferring activities from CGRFA to ITPGR for a functional division of tasks.

Linda Collette, CGRFA Secretary, highlighted challenges to be undertaken by CGRFA 13, including crosscutting issues such as ABS, biotechnology and climate change. She underscored the relevance of developing and reinforcing the Commission's links beyond the international agriculture arena. She welcomed Lao PDR as the 173rd member state to the Commission.

CGRFA Chair Mozafari said that genetic resources are key to addressing many of the world's problems, in particular climate change. Reporting on the special information seminar on climate change and GRFA, he called for, *inter alia*: enhancing conservation and knowledge of genetic resources; further integrating traditional knowledge; and communicating the relevance of GRFA for coping with climate change to the international community.

Delegates confirmed Solita Sicat (the Philippines) as new bureau member for Asia, with other bureau members carrying on from the previous session, and adopted the agenda and timetable (CGRFA-13/11/1 and 2), with two amendments: moving forward agenda item 3.1 on updating the GPA for PGRFA to Monday afternoon and, deferring agenda item 4 on Aquatic Genetic Resources to Wednesday, as requested by GRULAC.

OPENING STATEMENTS: All regions stressed the importance of adopting the GPA for PGRFA at this session. The Dominican Republic, for the LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), called for appropriate funding for GPA implementation and making the connection to adaptation to climate change. The Czech Republic, for the EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP, except the Russian Federation (ERG), welcomed discussions on aquatic genetic resources, the funding strategy and a roadmap for work on climate change. Senegal, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for cooperation between developing and developed countries to address climate change and the food crisis. Yemen, for the NEAR EAST, stressed the importance of a mechanism for GPA implementation, and called for a working group on aquatic genetic resources.

MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK

PGRFA: Updated GPA for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA: The Secretariat introduced the relevant working document (CGRFA-13/11/6). CGRFA Secretary Collette urged the Commission to finalize it to enable the Council to approve it in November 2011.

Brad Fraleigh (Canada), Chair of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group (ITWG) on PGRFA, outlined the working group's recommendations (CGRFA-13/11/8), and

outstanding work. Delegates decided to establish a contact group comprising up to five speakers per region and co-chaired by Brad Fraleigh (Canada) and Embaye Kassahun (Ethiopia). After further discussion, delegates agreed that in the contact group, they would first make general comments on the draft GPA text, followed by negotiating text not yet addressed by the ITWG, after which the document could be revisited from the beginning.

CROSS-SECTORIAL MATTERS: Biotechnologies for GRFA Conservation and Utilization: The Secretariat presented relevant documentation (CGRFA-13/11/3 and Inf.8; and Background Study Paper No. 52). Cuba, for GRULAC, expressed concern about using the definition of biotechnology included in the scoping paper. Chair Mozafari noted the definition was taken from CBD Article 2 (Use of Terms). ECUADOR opposed reference to the “comparative advantages” of biotechnology over traditional technologies.

Lebanon, for the NEAR EAST, opposed by CANADA, suggested to consider biotechnology as a major component in the MYPOW; and proposed activities to be considered, including capacity building and conducting a comprehensive survey, particularly on molecular techniques. Tonga, for the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, highlighted the need to enhance capacities to evaluate germplasm at the molecular level.

ECUADOR, BRAZIL and ARGENTINA opposed developing a draft code of conduct on biotechnology. BRAZIL, ARGENTINA and the US preferred developing voluntary guidelines instead. The ERG agreed to defer drafting a code of conduct, considering that standards and protocols will be overrun by the rapid pace of scientific and technological development.

The ERG requested adding text regarding “harnessing and sharing benefits” of genetic resources, and to delete text on: sector-specific standards and technical protocols for molecular characterization; and sector-specific analyses of investments, returns and socio-ecological impacts of biotechnologies for GRFA conservation.

INDIA called for awareness raising on health and environmental risks of biotechnology products. CANADA supported a science-based regulatory system for assessment of biotechnology products for agriculture. ANGOLA stressed national capacity building for biotechnology use. The US and CANADA suggested that FAO focus on technical capacity building, rather than policy formulation on biotechnology use.

The INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS (IFOAM) expressed concern regarding the emphasis on *ex situ* conservation and the focus on molecular biotechnology.

Climate Change and GRFA: The Secretariat introduced relevant documentation (CGRFA 13/11/4 and Inf.10 and Background Study Papers 53 to 57). Many parties highlighted the relevant role of GRFA in facing climate change impacts. The Cook Islands, for the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, highlighted the need for local solutions and capacity building to make adequate use of GRFA. THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO called for mechanisms that provide incentives to local people to conserve forests.

Cuba, for GRULAC, stressed the need to enhance GRFA’s role and visibility in the climate change process, while respecting the mandates of each process. ARGENTINA cautioned against duplication of work and, with CANADA, opposed text suggesting that commission members encourage national representatives to the UNFCCC to include agricultural considerations and the management of GRFA.

The ERG underscored the role of agroforestry systems and traditional knowledge in the context of adaptation strategies, and suggested: including reference to civil society and the private sector; strengthening existing partnerships and developing new

ones; and requesting the Secretariat to provide information on financial implications of a road map. CANADA preferred developing a work programme to a road map.

Senegal, for the AFRICAN GROUP, suggested further cooperation efforts with relevant institutions and the adoption of mechanisms to support the conservation of wild species by farmers. BRAZIL said that guidelines for the implementation of the ecosystem approach in agricultural systems should be adapted to countries’ circumstances. INDIA prioritized in-depth investigation of biodiversity hotspots in areas that are especially vulnerable to climate change, whereas IRAN prioritized capacity building in such areas.

PRACTICAL ACTION recommended that the Commission’s work be rooted in the views of small-scale food providers, and that it provide international leadership on GRFA and climate change. The PLATFORM FOR AGRO-BIODIVERSITY emphasized the importance of an ecosystem approach at farm, community and landscape scales, and community-led adaptation efforts.

The GLOBAL CROP DIVERSITY TRUST reported on its work on adaptation, including screening collections for crops adapted to climate change. IFOAM stressed the importance of having many small and medium-sized breeders and implementation of the ecosystem approach through low-input high-output farming.

ITPGR Secretary Bhatti commented that the ITPGR’s Multilateral System for ABS creates a global system of the world’s most important food crops and that its Benefit-sharing Fund invests in high impact projects to ensure global crop diversity and on-farm adaptation to climate change. BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL reported on a CGIAR research programme on adaptation, stressing the importance of dryland agriculture and use of native species for rehabilitation of degraded land.

CONTACT GROUP ON THE GPA

Delegates first heard regional statements. GRULAC expressed concern that a number of the region’s priorities regarding the funding strategy have not been reflected in the text. The ERG called for reflection of provisions of the ITPGR and references to climate change and noted that implementation should be subject to financial resources, as appropriate. Delegates then considered the provisions of the draft updated GPA that had not been addressed by the ITWG, paragraph by paragraph, starting in the section on sustainable use. Negotiations continued into the night.

IN THE CORRIDORS

At the outset of CGRFA 13, it was clear that the finalization of the Global Plan of Action (GPA) for Plant Genetic Resources was the number one priority for all regions, but how to get there in the fastest and most efficient way possible proved to be a point of contention. In addition some delegates indicated that they see the issue as being closely linked to the necessary funding commitment for implementing the GPA. Some delegates bemoaned the fact that they will likely spend their evenings and nights in contact group sessions rather than enjoying the pleasures Rome has to offer in the summertime.

The hot temperatures in Rome served as the perfect backdrop for a first round of discussions on climate change, where some lamented the lack of consideration of mitigation measures in agriculture and their impacts, as adaptation remained the main focus. After the seminar on climate change and GRFA held on Saturday, many agreed on the need for the Commission to take the initiative and spread to other fora the message on the key role that genetic resources have to play in adapting to climate change impacts. However, many were also cautious when considering how to achieve this without interfering with the mandates of other international processes.