

CGRFA 17 Highlights:

Wednesday, 20 February 2019

On Wednesday, delegates continued their deliberations on plant, forest, animal, and micro-organism and invertebrate genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA).

Highlights of the day included:

- A debate on the implications of seed policies and regulations for on-farm conservation;
- A discussion on a proposed guide for the implementation of genebank standards for plant GRFA;
- A review of the implementation the Global Plan of Action on Forest Genetic Resources (GPA-FGR);
- An update on the preparation of the second report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources (SOW-AnGR);
- Discussions on guidelines for sustainable livestock value chains and methods for valuing ecosystem services provided by livestock; and
- An initial discussion on future work on micro-organisms and invertebrate GRFA.

In contact groups, delegates continued discussions on follow-up to the report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SOW-BFA), access and benefit-sharing (ABS) and "digital sequence information" on GRFA.

Plant Genetic Resources

Delegates continued discussing proposed follow-up activities contained in the document on the Global Plan of Action on Plan GRFA (CGRFA-17/19/9.2), including regarding *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of plant GRFA, *ex situ* conservation, sustainable use, and building sustainable institutions and human capacities.

On *in situ* conservation, CANADA welcomed holding two international symposia noting that knowledge about on-farm genetic diversity is lacking, and highlighted complementarity between *in situ*, on-farm and *ex situ* conservation. ZAMBIA said both symposia will allow developing cooperation mechanisms among countries. BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL suggested including an agenda item on funding approaches. INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (ITPGR) asked to ensure the symposia result in strategies for plant conservation and sustainable use.

ZIMBABWE called for increased cooperation with related processes to align efforts on national action plans on crop wild relatives. SENEGAL underscored the need to support developing countries in *in situ* conservation. ARAB CENTRE FOR THE STUDIES OF ARID ZONES AND DRY LANDS requested addressing ways of using genebank information to improve crop varieties. INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (IPC) urged including smallholder farmers in decisions on *in situ* conservation.

On *ex situ* conservation, CANADA stressed the need for close collaboration with the ITPGR and emphasized that monitoring of genebanks is a national responsibility. ZIMBABWE urged support for genebank collections and local seed systems in developing countries. KENYA emphasized that genebanks hold information that is crucial for climate change adaptation of agriculture.

On sustainable use, ARGENTINA called for synergies with the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and for capacity building on seed improvement.

Status and Trends of Seed Policies and Seed Legislation:

Delegates commented on document CGRFA-17/19/9.3, including a proposal to carry out in-depth case studies on the effects of policies, laws and regulations on on-farm diversity of plant GRFA in collaboration with the ITPGR, which would also clarify the term "farmers' seed system."

EUROPE suggested examining how factors beyond seed policies, such as rural development strategies, impact seed availability. NORTH AMERICA suggested also studying UPOV's role in promoting access to new and diverse genetic resources. NORWAY suggested addressing the impact of plant variety protection. JAPAN stressed the need to protect plant variety rights. Following discussion on involving the ITPGR and UPOV, the Secretariat proposed that the Commission with ITPGR "coordinate the study, in consultation" with UPOV.

The US supported clarifying the term "farmers' seed systems," noting that different terms may represent different parts of a continuum. SOLOMON ISLANDS called for a focus on accessibility and affordability, and investments in supporting smallholder seed systems in rural areas. ECUADOR expressed concern with the lack of policies promoting the use of native seeds.

UGANDA urged focusing on interactions between small-scale farmers' seeds and their livelihoods. AFRICA called for flexibility in seed policies to allow for seed exchange and commercialization. The NEAR EAST called for mechanisms to ensure adequate local seed distribution.

Preparations for the third SOW-PGR: The Secretariat presented on the process for preparing the third SOW-PGR (CGRFA-17/19/9.4 and 4/Inf.1), including a proposal to submit additional country information through summative narratives.

CANADA proposed a thematic study on the global flows of plant GRFA from and to genebanks. ECUADOR expressed reservations over Canada's proposal, noting the lack of financial resources. AFRICA and JAMAICA called for financial and technical assistance to developing countries to support reporting. EUROPE called for concise narratives to avoid low response rates.

Chair Wigmore noted general agreement on the proposed actions, with a few members requesting an adjustment of the timeline.

Genebank Standards: On the document on facilitating the implementation and monitoring of the Genebank Standards (CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.5), the Secretariat clarified that Members and small genebanks had requested such a guide. He proposed

developing an advanced draft for the next session of the ITWG-PGR. CANADA agreed, saying the document only requires fine-tuning and should not be further expanded.

Access and Benefit-sharing

Reporting back from the Friends of the Chair group on ABS, Co-Chair Elzbieta Martyniuk (Poland) said there was agreement to reconvene the Team of Technical and Legal Experts (TTLE) to survey legislation, administrative procedures and policy approaches by providing technical and legal reviews.

Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture

Contact Group Co-Chair Renata Negrelly Nogueira (Brazil) reported that a non-paper will be produced that reflects the debate on needs and possible actions in response to the report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SOW-BFA) and identifies the way forward. Delegates continued discussions in the contact group in the evening.

“Digital Sequence Information”

Delegates agreed to establish a contact group to further discuss the issue.

Forest Genetic Resources

Delegates considered the report of the fifth meeting of the ITWG-FGR (CGRFA-17/19/10.1), a report on the implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Forest GRFA (GPA-FGR) and an update on the GPA-FGR, including suggested follow-up actions (CGRFA-17/19/10.2 and 10.2/Inf.1). Noting the low number of country reports submitted, the Secretariat observed that implementation was “relatively good” in countries that had submitted reports and that many identified continued challenges in reporting species-specific data.

EUROPE highlighted the importance of sustainable forest management (SFM), and the inclusion of climate change impacts in national forest genetic resources reports. AFRICA requested financial assistance to enable developing countries to fill data gaps. BRAZIL said GPA implementation depends on availability of funding. The US urged broader participation in the ITWG and requested FAO to encourage contributions from regional forest commissions. ASIA said regional forest commissions can assist countries in reporting.

ECUADOR lauded the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for including SFM in the Seventh Replenishment Cycle (GEF-7). ARGENTINA said some countries cannot access funding for SFM because eligibility is determined based on gross domestic product. ECUADOR and the US underlined the need for an agreed definition of “agroforestry” to eliminate differences among environmental processes.

Preparation of the second SOW-FGR: The Secretariat presented the scope, outline and the preparatory process for the second SOW-FGR (CGRFA-17/19/10.3).

ASIA, AFRICA, and YEMEN supported the proposed outline and timeline for preparing the second SOW-FGR, draft guidelines for preparing country reports and a request to FAO to begin developing a global information system for forest GRFA.

EUROPE said the new global information system should link to existing systems. The US, BRAZIL and NORWAY sought further information on the system, with BRAZIL suggesting modifications to World Information and Early Warning System on plant GRFA (WIEWS) to avoid duplications and reporting burden. The Secretariat responded that there is limited overlap between forest and plant GRFA and that different targets and indicators are used for the two groups of GRFA.

Animal Genetic Resources

ITWG-AnGR Report: ITWG-AnGR Chair Sipke Joost Hiemstra (the Netherlands) presented the report of the tenth session of the ITWG (CGRFA-17/19/11.1).

Implementation of the GPA on Animal Genetic Resources:

The Secretariat presented relevant documents including: a review of implementation of the GPA (CGRFA-17/19/11.2); a review of methods for identification and valuation of ecosystem services provided by livestock breeds (CGRFA-17/19/11.2/Inf.1); the funding strategy for implementation of the GPA (CGRFA-17/19/11.2/Inf.2); a report on the Domestic Animal Diversity Information System (DAD-IS) (CGRFA-17/19/11.2/Inf.3 Rev.1); a report on status and trends of animal genetic resources (CGRFA-17/19/11.2/Inf.4); the revised draft guidelines on developing sustainable value chains for small-scale livestock producers (CGRFA-17/19/11.2/Inf.5); and the status of preparation of guidelines on results-based incentive systems supporting the continued provision of ecosystem services (CGRFA-17/19/11.2/Inf.6).

EUROPE stressed the importance of DAD-IS and urged updating national data, including on domesticated honeybees. CANADA encouraged enabling DAD-IS to include species distribution and urged measures to reduce the number of unknown breeds recorded. AFRICA requested training on the use of this tool. The US said DAD-IS should be supported through regular programme funds. BURKINA FASO emphasized the importance of DAD-IS to identify threats to livestock.

On guidelines on developing sustainable value chains for small-scale livestock producers, MALAWI urged involving indigenous communities. AFRICA requested FAO to raise awareness of indigenous breeds and species, and to strengthen partnerships for implementation of the GPA. INDONESIA noted that breeding programmes can impact the livelihoods and nutrition of poor farmers.

On reviewing methods to identify and value ecosystem services provided by livestock breeds, THAILAND asked for more information about the methods used, and BRAZIL underlined the need for additional studies and scientific evidence. The US asked for refinements of the concepts and methods used. CANADA asked for more examples of ecosystem services provided by livestock breeds. The Secretariat clarified that the resulting document would be a review study and not a policy document.

Micro-organism and Invertebrate Genetic Resources

The Secretariat introduced relevant documents, including a draft work plan for the sustainable use and conservation of micro-organism and invertebrate GRFA (CGRFA-17/19/12.1 and 12.2, and 12.2/Inf.1.Rev.1 – Inf.3). Delegates supported the draft work plan, and suggested ways to speed up the work, further prioritizing work on pollinators and biological control agents. ASIA appealed to donors for technical and financial assistance. AFRICA called for attention to access and benefit-sharing implications.

Discussion will continue on Thursday.

In the Corridors

On Wednesday, delegates navigated towards what many considered the deeper waters of this process. Several participants expressed appreciation about the sheer amount and quality of information prepared to advance discussions on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. A veteran lauded the review on seed policies and laws, noting it may mark the beginning of a new era of deliberations on farmers' seed systems and their relationship with the formal seed sector. “We have focused long enough on the impact of intellectual property rights (IPRs) on farmers' varieties. It's about time we address the entire range of policies affecting farmers' practices and access to markets, from seed production to seed registration and certification,” she exclaimed. On the other hand, “IPRs clearly remain the elephant in the room,” as another observer noted pointing towards the disagreement on involving UPOV in a study on the effects of seed regulations on on-farm crop diversity.