

CGRFA 16 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 30 JANUARY 2017

The sixteenth session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA 16) opened on Monday, 30 January 2017, at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) in Rome, Italy. Delegates met in plenary to address cross-sectoral matters under the Commission's Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW), including the preparation of the report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SOW-BFA); the role of genetic resources for food security; and access and benefit-sharing (ABS) for genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA).

OPENING

CGRFA 16 Chair Cho Chang Yeon (Republic of Korea) opened the meeting. FAO Deputy Director-General Dan Gustafson highlighted, among other matters: the establishment of a new FAO department on climate, biodiversity, land and water; the completion of the CGRFA's first MYPOW cycle; and FAO's role regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Stressing the role of genetic resources for adaptation, René Castro Salazar, Assistant Director-General, Climate, Biodiversity, Land and Water Department, FAO, said that while agriculture is often considered the "culprit" for contributing to climate change, it is also an important part of the solution. Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) drew attention to, *inter alia*: mainstreaming biodiversity in different sectors; the voluntary guidelines to facilitate domestic implementation of ABS provisions; and ongoing work on pollinators, pollination and food production.

Noting that biodiversity for food and agriculture is included in the SDGs, Irene Hoffmann, CGRFA Secretary, highlighted that some countries are prioritizing SDG target 2.5 (GRFA conservation) in their national implementation plans.

Chair Cho Chang Yeon reported on the special event on 'The Contribution of Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture to Resilience' held on Saturday 28 January, which highlighted the link between biodiversity for food and agriculture, ecosystem services and resilience, and how they all contribute to strengthening emergency responses.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates adopted the meeting agenda (CGRFA-16/17/1 and 2 Rev.1). They discussed whether to establish an open-ended committee to address the Commission's MYPOW and Strategic Plan (2018-2027), with many requesting clarification of its terms of reference (TOR). In the afternoon, delegates agreed to TOR proposed by the Bureau instructing the Committee to review and revise, as appropriate,

the draft strategic plan and MYPOW 2018-2027 (CGRFA-16/17/22), and to consider major outputs and milestones to be included.

CROSS-SECTORAL MATTERS

PREPARATION OF THE SOW-BFA: Delegates considered CGRFA-16/17/3, 4, and Inf.9-11, including the draft SOW-BFA report. The Secretariat recalled relevant deadlines, including for submitting country reports by 31 March 2017 and commenting on a revised draft by February 2018.

Many requested extending the timeline for submitting country reports, citing the small number of reports submitted to date, challenges in data collection, data gaps and variations among countries, and time needed to conduct extensive stakeholder consultations. AFRICA suggested requiring submission of at least 65% of country reports before moving to the next stage. The NEAR EAST urged support for country report submission and funding for implementation. CANADA suggested presenting another draft report in 2018, and publishing the final report in 2019.

On the report's content, YEMEN called for a liaison mechanism for submitting and reviewing country reports. PERU requested the Secretariat to seek input from the International Potato Center (CIP). ECUADOR requested including more information on gender and family farming in the context of building resilience to climate change. SRI LANKA requested covering not only wild foods, but also traditional varieties and landraces.

On needs and actions to be identified in the report, AFRICA called for existing capacity development efforts to include projects with tangible, ground-level impact. ASIA suggested prioritizing the most urgent needs. The NEAR EAST highlighted incentives to develop crop varieties for climate change adaptation. SENEGAL stressed the need for "rational and profitable" use of biodiversity that will increase the profitability of agriculture. ARGENTINA requested mentioning the need for multi-stakeholder, intersectoral and international cooperation

BRAZIL recommended a balanced approach to considering the contributions and challenges of different production systems. CANADA suggested assisting countries to better manage biodiversity for food and agriculture, and said that the proposed plan of action should not duplicate other work under the Commission. He suggested clarifying the level of implementation of suggested actions and the terms "biodiversity for food and agriculture" and "associated biodiversity." SUDAN stressed collaboration and synergy to include biodiversity in concrete plans, and called for financial, capacity-building and technical support.

The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (IPC) called for effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in negotiating ABS arrangements and other frameworks. The INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS (IFOAM) proposed taxes as disincentives for using pesticides that damage the environment. BIOVERSITY INTERNATIONAL highlighted its programme on under-utilized crops which generates food composition data and organizes nutrition self-help groups to promote locally available but under-utilized species.

On synergies, MEXICO recommended that the Commission take decisions of other international agreements into account in its own decisions, MYPOW and Strategic Plan. The EU, with SWITZERLAND: requested timely dissemination of related reports and studies; and encouraged further collaboration with the CBD. CANADA and SWITZERLAND proposed taking relevant SDGs into account. NORWAY, with the NEAR EAST, suggested the FAO Council adopt a resolution to increase awareness of the Commission's work and attract additional funds taking advantage of the international SDG momentum.

Delegates agreed to establish a contact group to develop a schedule for finalizing the SOW-BFA and identifying further needs and possible actions.

MYPOW IMPLEMENTATION: Delegates exchanged initial views over implementation of the Commission's Strategic Plan and MYPOW 2018-2027 (CGRFA-16/17/22). SWITZERLAND, supported by MEXICO, NORWAY and BRAZIL, recommended reflecting major international commitments, such as the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the Paris Agreement on climate change and outcomes of CBD COP13, in the new MYPOW.

CANADA, with the US, suggested updating the strategic plan every other session, addressing elements related to biotechnologies at CGRFA 18, and merging health considerations with nutrition. NAMIBIA noted the importance of GRFA for the SDGs. Discussions will continue in the MYPOW Committee.

THE ROLE OF GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD SECURITY: Delegates considered options for raising awareness of the role of GRFA for food security (CGRFA-16/17/5).

BRAZIL suggested further integrating the work of the Commission into FAO's Strategic Framework and further promoting collaboration with FAO's technical committees, including the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The EU, with SWITZERLAND, supported integrating GRFA into national food security and nutrition policies, and preparing a background paper defining the contribution of GRFA to food security and the SDGs. SUDAN called for support for science-based awareness raising.

ECUADOR suggested reporting on the implementation of national policies on food sovereignty and security. CHILE, the US, ARGENTINA and GHANA preferred using the term "food security" and not "food sovereignty." AFRICA, opposed by the US, proposed adding "fair and equitable benefit-sharing" when referring to the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA. Delegates agreed to put the text in brackets. The US, supported by CANADA, stated that awareness raising needs to remain under FAO's mandate.

MOROCCO and TOGO highlighted the role of decision makers, with TOGO noting the participation of breeders and farmers. BHUTAN and KENYA recommended education programmes in schools and communities. PERU noted experiences in using native species, and SRI LANKA in promoting traditional food production systems.

Supported by NORWAY and BRAZIL, OXFAM NOVIB recommended close collaboration between governments, communities, breeding institutions and seed banks while testing

preparedness and providing emergency relief. IPC called for considering the specific contribution of GRFA in the context of the work of the CFS, noting implications for intellectual property rights and farmers' rights.

ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING: Delegates considered CGRFA 16/17/6 and 7, including the report of the third session of the Team of Technical and Legal Experts on Access and Benefit-Sharing (TTLE-ABS). Javad Mozafari Hashjin, Chair, TTLE-ABS, highlighted agricultural sector needs for special arrangements on ABS, and for subsector specific guidelines for implementing ABS at the national level. The Secretariat outlined options for further intersessional work, which could include requesting additional input from the Inter-Governmental Technical Working Groups (ITWGs), a joint workshop with the CBD Secretariat, and another meeting of the TTLE-ABS.

On the intersessional process, GRULAC said the ABS workshop should be co-organized with the CBD and International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGR) to discuss lessons learned. The EU said the workshop's outcomes should be discussed by the ITWGs, not only their bureaux, and that it should also consider microorganisms and invertebrates. She also suggested that the Secretariat provide the ITWGs with a clear set of questions. CANADA requested clarifying the type of activities to be performed by the Secretariat, and suggested that the draft subsector-specific elements be reviewed by the ITWGs prior to reconvening the TTLE-ABS.

GRULAC supported national dissemination of ABS elements that are already developed, stating that developing subsector elements is unnecessary. ASIA stressed the guidance should: be simple and easy to use; focus on utilization of genetic resources; and explain subsector specific characteristics. He also suggested developing comparative study methods and collaboration among subsector and ABS experts. INDIA shared experiences in operationalizing ABS commitments, including on benefits arising from the use of traditional genetic resources.

CANADA proposed that the Secretariat gather information on existing practices regarding utilization and related country experiences. SUDAN expressed the need for further studies on how to share benefits at the national level, and for international sharing of technologies. The EU supported: awareness-raising activities, including production of ABS-related material; information gathering from countries and IPLCs regarding obtaining and granting prior informed consent (PIC); and information gathering on experiences with existing ABS legislation.

On digital sequence data, GRULAC requested that CGRFA consider ABS-related issues and conduct a study. AFRICA said this issue should also be discussed for each subsector. The EU called for a scoping or exploratory study to be forwarded to the CBD. CANADA suggested the Commission prepare a submission of views and submit it to the CBD Secretariat to facilitate the relevant process. JAPAN said that although technologies to utilize genetic resources develop rapidly, digital sequence information is beyond the scope of the CBD.

IN THE CORRIDORS

A good share of Monday's discussions was dedicated to the report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture, which, once published, will mark the completion of the CGRFA's first ten-year cycle of work. Delegates grappled with the inevitable tension between wanting more time - in some cases, much more time - to complete in-country consultations and national reports, while also wanting to complete the process before too long. While many preferred quality over speed, others feared that the report which is already more than 250 pages could expand to "encyclopedic" proportions, if given more time.