

## ITPGRFA GB 10 Highlights: Wednesday, 22 November 2023

Delegates to the tenth session of the Governing Body (GB 10) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resource for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) considered items related to the contribution of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) and cooperation with international instruments and organizations, including the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA), the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). A contact group addressed the draft resolution on farmers' rights.

An evening plenary discussed future steps of the revision process for the enhancement of the Multilateral System (MLS) of access and benefit-sharing, including scheduling of Working Group meetings, sequencing of items to be addressed, and coordination with the CBD Working Group on digital sequence information (DSI).

### FAO Contribution

Kaveh Zahedi, FAO Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment (OCB), presented the FAO report and the progress report on the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors ([IT/GB-10/23/15](#) and [15/Inf.1](#)).

Several delegates, including European Regional Group (ERG), ASIA, and NEAR EAST, urged FAO to reflect the crucial importance of the Treaty in future budgetary allocations. AFRICA requested an increase of financial allocation to the Treaty Secretariat. GRULAC urged inviting FAO to recognize the importance of implementation of the Treaty at the national level by supporting family farming in national plans. ERG encouraged FAO to continue playing an active role in supporting the Treaty as a key instrument to fulfil Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2 (zero hunger) and 15 (life on land), and the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). ASIA encouraged continued efforts of the OCB to enhance synergies and mutual support to contribute to the FAO Strategic Objectives. SOUTHWEST PACIFIC called on the FAO regional office to continue providing policy support for Pacific Island countries interested in joining the Treaty. The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (IPC) urged implementation of the UN Decade of Family Farming Global Action Plan, particularly the seventh pillar on enhancement of management of biodiversity and ecosystem services by family farmers, which could support realization of farmers' rights. Zahedi said the budgetary allocations for the Treaty are the domain of the

FAO Council, and advised use of language that does not infringe on the Council's mandate.

### Cooperation

**CGRFA:** The Secretariat introduced the document ([IT/GB-10/23/16.1](#)), which was jointly prepared by the Treaty and CGRFA Secretariats. Dan Leskien, CGRFA Acting Secretary, presented the CGRFA report and the draft third report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (SOW PGRFA) ([IT/GB-10/23/16.1/Inf.1](#) and [Inf.2](#)). ERG urged avoiding duplicating the work of CGRFA and called for inputs to the SOW report. NEAR EAST lauded the joint organization of the webinar on crop wild relatives, and the analysis on the impact of seed policies, laws, and regulations on seed access. AFRICA commended the organization of conferences on *in situ* conservation and workshops on DSI and PGRFA.

NORTH AMERICA highlighted needs for better coordination, including on clarification of the roles of the FAO World Information and Global Warning System on PGRFA and the Treaty's Global Information System, as well as of the reporting required for the second Global Plan of Action for PGRFA and for compliance. IPC called for focus on PGRFA on-farm management and for including farmer organizations' perspectives in upcoming studies.

**Crop Trust:** The Secretariat introduced the document on cooperation activities ([IT/GB-10/23/16.2](#)) and the Crop Trust introduced its report ([IT/GB-10/23/16.2.2](#)). Many supported ongoing cooperation between the two Secretariats and welcomed a key example of such cooperation, the Global Crop Diversity Summit (14 November 2023, Berlin, Germany), which raised political awareness of the need for strengthening crop diversity. ERG suggested noting the Summit's success in the draft resolution. GRULAC and NIGERIA noted the Summit shed a spotlight on the value of genebanks for sustainable and resilient food systems. KENYA said the Summit Communiqué should be brought to the attention of global policymakers to raise awareness and support for genebanks.

NEAR EAST, LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, and ASIA called for strengthened funding, including for the emergency reserve collection. ERG noted the importance of moving Ukraine's seed collection to a safer location in western Ukraine. THE NORDIC GENETIC RESOURCE CENTER (NORDGEN) remarked that the relocation of the Ukrainian collection, involving NordGen and the Novo Nordisk Foundation, is an example for the importance of emergency support during a crisis. She highlighted the importance of regional genebank networks, such as the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources, to support similar crises.

AFRICA commended the National Seed Collections for Climate-Resilient Agriculture in Africa (Seeds for Resilience), which builds capacity on national *ex situ* collections of PGRFA, and links genebanks and users. EGYPT acknowledged the support provided through the Biodiversity for Opportunities, Livelihoods and Development Project.

**CBD:** The Secretariat presented the report ([IT/GB-10/23/16.3](#)), highlighting cooperation under the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC), including on knowledge management, information systems, and indicators for the implementation of the GBF and SDGs. The CBD presented its report ([IT/GB-10/23/16.3/Inf.1](#)), noting that the MoC is under review for renewal.

ERG urged inclusion of PGRFA on the upcoming global assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and highlighted interlinkages between the GBF and Treaty resource mobilization strategies. AFRICA called for the Secretariat to explore measures that facilitate mainstreaming of PGRFA into national biodiversity strategies and action plans. NEAR EAST, ASIA, and GRULAC called for increased capacity building and technical assistance from developed countries through the GBF.

IPC called for reference to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and its precautionary principle in the MoC. CHILE and ACADEMIA, with NORTH AMERICA, suggested references to the CBD Gender Plan of Action in the draft resolution and called for a gender-responsive approach in the Treaty implementation.

**Other Bodies and Organizations:** The Secretariat presented the reports, including Norway's report on the Svalbard Global Seed Vault ([IT/GB-10/23/16.4](#) and [16.4.3](#)) noting earlier introduction of the report from institutions that have concluded agreements under Article 15 of the Treaty ([IT/GB-10/23/16.4.2](#)).

Stressing the need for a coordinated approach to clonal crops and cryopreservation, CGIAR noted the Crop Trust contributes significantly to its operations. The INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF VINE AND WINE highlighted work to protect vines from declining biodiversity and to boost cultivators' opportunities to access PGRFA. The INTERNATIONAL CROPS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR THE SEMI-ARID TROPICS noted support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and the Crop Trust for maintenance of their seed bank, and called for more funding to cover the full costs. The INTERNATIONAL COCONUT COMMUNITY urged parties to complement international research efforts into protecting the coconut population, including on pest management. AFRICA urged assistance for Côte d'Ivoire as a member of the International Coconut Genetic Resources Network for effective coconut germplasm conservation. PAPUA NEW GUINEA welcomed the ongoing efforts to secure the regional coconut population.

NORWAY highlighted that over 100 depositing genebanks have contributed nearly 1.3 million accessions for safe backup in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. NORDGEN noted there is no transfer of ownership when seeds are deposited with its genebank.

### Contact Group on Farmers' Rights

Co-chaired by Dinesh Kumar Agarwal (India) and Svanhild-Isabelle Batta Torheim (Norway), the group convened to hold text-based negotiations on a draft resolution (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 13/CRP1). Debate focused on the scope of, and terms of reference for, a potential intersessional group, with disagreements remaining on whether it should be a Working Group or an expert group.

Delegates agreed to an additional preamble reaffirming the important role of female farmers as guardians of crop diversity

and contributing to sustainable agricultural systems and food security. They agreed to welcome the publication of the Options for encouraging, guiding and promoting the realization of farmers' rights as set out in Article 9 (the Options); but differed on whether to mention that the Options under Category 10 (legal measures for the implementation of farmers' rights) are a Co-Chairs' proposal. The issue remained unresolved.

Delegates discussed the inventory of submissions, broadly designed to present a range of measures and practices for the realization of farmers' rights. Perspectives differed on whether views from stakeholders could be included in addition to examples of best practices, experiences, and lessons learned.

Parties expressed divergent opinions regarding establishing an intersessional group, its scope, and terms of reference, with one region opposing the proposal, and others opting for the creation of an open-ended working group or an expert group. Delegates discussed possible tasks for the group, including: finalizing the assessment of the state of implementation of Article 9; preparing an outline for voluntary guidelines and recommendations at regional and national levels for possible future work on farmers' rights; developing a draft programme of work on farmers' rights; and providing recommendation on further work on the Options.

Delegates reached agreement on text inviting South-South and triangular cooperation, including among different regions, with the participation of a broad range of stakeholders, including farmers' organizations, to assist with the implementation of Article 9. Parties discussed strengthening the text on cross-border cooperation, whether South-South or trilateral. Delegates added references to countries supporting each other on how to develop legal measures to strengthen implementation of farmers rights.

Delegates suggested that a request to the Secretariat to carry out an assessment of the impact of DSI on farmers' rights be aligned with text agreed upon at GB 9. One party called for consultations with farmers' organizations and Indigenous Peoples.

A lengthy debate ensued on whether to include text interpreting Article 9.3 as allowing parties to legislate on the scope of any rights of farmers to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seeds. The issue remained unresolved.

Discussions continued in the evening.

### In The Corridors

Mid-way through the session, delegates moved from the political and legal complexities of revising the Treaty's MLS to items related to implementation on the ground. Numerous organizations reported on challenges but also hopeful initiatives in support of PGRFA conservation, leading to a participant commenting that the session was like a "breath of fresh air." Aspects of cooperation between the Treaty and relevant international instruments also came into the spotlight, as participants pointed to efficient collaboration structures as representing a prerequisite for efficient policy action to achieve internationally agreed goals.

Afternoon contact group deliberations however marked a "return to the reality of international negotiations," as a participant put it, as delegates held lengthy debates, sometimes about a single word, and exchanged divergent interpretations of the provisions of Article 9 on farmers' rights.