

ITPGRFA GB 10 Highlights: Thursday, 23 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) applauded the extension of the appointment of Secretary Kent Nnadozie by FAO. They considered items related to cooperation with other international bodies and organizations, the Multi-Year Programme of Work, and digital sequence information (DSI)/genetic sequence data (GSD); and reviewed draft resolutions on several agenda items. Consultations on farmers' rights continued throughout the day. An evening plenary continued review of draft resolutions.

Cooperation

Other Bodies and Organizations: Plenary continued Wednesday's discussion. TOGO, NIGER, and IRAN highlighted the importance of CGIAR centers in building capacity of researchers and on genebank management. Noting little progress in supporting genebanks since GB 9, INDIA called for developing a long-term financial support plan. PHILIPPINES, supported by CONGO, suggested calling for collaboration with international human rights bodies and related activities in the resolution. The EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP (ERG) commended the involvement of farmers' and civil society organizations, including in the Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights and the enhancement of the Multilateral System (MLS). URUGUAY noted their close collaboration with CGIAR, and the Svalbard Global Seed Vault for backing up several crop varieties. NEAR EAST called for increased support for the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics through training and technology transfer, and underlined the importance of expanding cooperation with the Vault to include all parties. ASIA stressed that all matters related to PGRFA must continue to be handled under the Treaty.

On the draft resolution, NORTH AMERICA suggested that some proposed activities be subject to available financial resources. The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (IPC) and CIVIL SOCIETY suggested including text from GB 9 Resolution 14/2022 (Cooperation with other international bodies and organizations) requesting reports on cooperation with the Human Rights Council and other relevant human rights bodies. They further requested such reporting include reference to integrating in Treaty implementation the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: Plenary approved a draft resolution (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 16.1/L1) with no amendments.

Global Crop Diversity Trust: Delegates approved a draft resolution (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 16.2/L1), as amended by ECUADOR and NIGERIA to strengthen references to the Treaty expanding and sustaining cooperation with the Crop Trust.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): On a draft resolution (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 16.3/L1), delegates debated whether the GB should "welcome" or "take note of" recent developments and ongoing processes under the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol. They agreed to a proposal by BRAZIL to "take note with appreciation" of such developments, and approved the draft resolution.

Appointment of the Secretary

All regions and IPC congratulated Secretary Kent Nnadozie on the extension of his appointment by FAO until the end of 2025. With no objection raised, plenary applauded the Secretary's reappointment.

Renewal and Term of Office of the Secretary

Plenary addressed a proposal ([IT/GB-10/23/19.2](https://bit.ly/IT/GB-10/23/19.2)) to amend the GB Rules of Procedure to mandate appointment of the Secretary by the FAO Director General for four years, with GB approval, with the possibility of renewal only once for another four years, subject to a performance assessment.

LEBANON, ASIA, and JAPAN supported the amendment as proposed. AFRICA expressed concern that the performance assessment could be politicized and asked that it be removed. ERG, supported by NORTH AMERICA and SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, suggested that the Bureau be involved in performance assessments.

CONGO sought clarification from the Treaty's legal counsel on the performance assessment process. The Secretariat indicated that performance assessments are carried out in consistency with standard FAO procedures, whereby all staff members must undergo annual assessment, noting that in the case of the Secretary's position any concerns could be communicated to the Bureau. CONGO asked that the clarification be reflected in the draft resolution.

The Role of PGRFA within the GBF

Delegates addressed a draft resolution on the role of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 7/L1). Debate focused on a paragraph recognizing that GBF implementation should follow a human rights-based approach, and that UNDROP is the most relevant human rights instrument for the Treaty. NORTH AMERICA, SWEDEN, and the UK opposed reference to UNDROP, and the draft resolution was approved without such reference.

MLS Implementation and Operations

Delegates approved a draft resolution (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 9.1/L1) with minor changes.

Funding Strategy

Delegates addressed a draft resolution on the implementation of the Funding Strategy (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 10/L1). They agreed that the FAO's support to the Treaty should focus on the

nexus between biodiversity and climate change, rather than the nexus between “genetic diversity of PGRFA and climate change,” as proposed by NORTH AMERICA. The draft resolution was approved with minor changes.

Global Information System (GLIS)

On a draft resolution on GLIS implementation (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item11/L1), delegates debated whether a request to the Secretariat to support parties in developing inventories of crop wild relatives should be “subject to the availability of resources.” CANADA, JAPAN, and ERG argued that, while these inventories are important, the request has budgetary implications.

GRULAC and AFRICA emphasized the importance of these inventories, noting that they provide the necessary data for the MLS. GRULAC emphasized that the text does not imply any obligation for funding from the Treaty. Delegates agreed to state that such efforts be supported through extra-budgetary resources.

In an invitation to parties and others to provide resources for implementation of the GLIS programme of work, ERG, JAPAN, and CANADA objected singling out developed countries. GRULAC said the language is consistent with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and Treaty Article 18 (Financial Resources). The US pointed out CBDR is not mentioned in the Treaty. A compromise was reached by removing the mention to developed countries but adding a reference to Article 18. The draft resolution was approved as amended.

Consideration of DSI/GSD on PGRFA

The Secretariat introduced documents reporting on developments on DSI in other international fora and compiling submissions on capacity-building needs for accessing and using DSI/GSD (IT/GB-10/23/17.2 and 17.2/Inf.1).

The ERG welcomed the decision of the CBD Conference of the Parties to establish a multilateral mechanism for benefit-sharing from the use of DSI on genetic resources, including a global fund, noting that it recognizes that tracking and tracing of all DSI is not practical. AFRICA proposed including in the draft resolution aspects associated with technology transfer related to access and use of DSI. NEAR EAST highlighted the importance of non-monetary benefit-sharing, including capacity building and technology transfer in cooperation with CGIAR.

Noting recognition of the usefulness of DSI for germplasm collection management and crop improvement in the report, NORTH AMERICA highlighted similar capacity-building needs among stakeholders and parties, including lack of database and data-analysis training, equipment, and human resources. ASIA said that there is no need to wait for the finalization of CBD discussions.

On the draft resolution, GRULAC suggested specifying that benefits from the use of DSI should be shared “in a fair and equitable manner.” ARGENTINA proposed: requesting the Working Group on enhancing the MLS to analyze the implications of DSI for the MLS, taking into account CBD developments; and, with AFRICA, calling on parties and others to promote provision of financial resources and technology transfer to reduce the capacity gap on DSI, and report on such activities. NORTH AMERICA cautioned against restricting the flexibility of the Working Group Co-Chairs.

BRAZIL proposed addressing the interconnections between DSI and farmers’ rights in consultation with farmers’ organizations. IPC suggested requesting the Secretariat to prepare an evaluation of: DSI developments in all relevant fora; DSI capacity-building needs; and potential DSI impacts on farmers’ rights.

CIVIL SOCIETY suggested reflecting the outcome of the CBD Working Group on DSI regarding capacity gaps on the ability to generate, access, use, analyze, and store DSI on PGRFA. He expressed concern that at least two CGIAR Centers’ databases provide anonymous downloads, a practice which compromises any accountability in DSI sharing.

Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA

Delegates considered a draft resolution (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 12/L1) and agreed to “take note of” the concept note of the joint programme on biodiversity in agriculture. ERG and NORTH AMERICA proposed, and delegates agreed, to request the Secretariat to “assemble information on” parties’ activities on conservation and sustainable use, rather than “monitor” them.

Plenary then considered the terms of reference for the Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use. ERG suggested, and delegates agreed, that recommendations on future strategies to support countries in the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 should be based on areas of action of the proposed joint programme. There was divergence of opinions on whether the Committee should “consider possibilities” for the development of voluntary guidelines, as supported by NORTH AMERICA, or develop the guidelines in collaboration with the Secretariat, as supported by URUGUAY, NORWAY, ARGENTINA, and ECUADOR. Following consultations, delegates agreed that the Committee “begin drafting voluntary guidelines” on possible approaches to address the bottlenecks on Article 5 and 6 implementation, in consultation with parties.

Enhancement of the functioning of the MLS

In the evening, Michael Ryan (Australia) and Sunil Archak (India), Co-Chairs of the Working Group on enhancing the MLS, reported on informal discussions held during the week, noting that a revised timeline for future work will be prepared. Ryan highlighted the need to explore issues surrounding but also interlinkages between the three “hotspots”: DSI/GSD; expansion of Annex I; and payment structure and rates. He advised that an information package will be made available, containing key reports and studies which had informed the June 2019 package that will be the starting point of negotiations.

Plenary then addressed elements for a resolution (IT/GB-10/23/RES-Item 9.2/CRP1). Delegates agreed to “take note of” the CBD Decision 15/9 on DSI on Genetic Resources, and to urge the Working Group to take this decision and related developments into account when addressing the issue of DSI/GSD in the context of the process to enhance the functioning of the MLS. They then discussed the modalities of the four meetings of the Working Group to be held during the next biennium in addition to informal consultations. Deliberations continued late into the evening.

In The Corridors

The day started on a celebratory note, owing to the reappointment of ITPGRFA Secretary Kent Nnadozie. Delegates expressed appreciation for his steadfast leadership through turbulent times, both amid the pandemic and during the post-COVID recovery period. While negotiations on farmers’ rights turned out to be contentious, there was quick agreement on many draft resolutions in the afternoon. The tempo of approval nearly came to a standstill, however, when it came time to consider text edits on the implementation of the GLIS. The disparity between developed and developing nations’ inventories of crop wild relatives drew significant attention, prompting calls for urgent bridging of the gap. Developing countries invoked the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, while some developed nations pointed to budgetary constraints. Concerns regarding capacity gaps also emerged during discussions on DSI/GSD. While some highlighted the opportunities for policy development arising from the first meeting of the CBD Working Group on DSI, many suggested that the Treaty needs to make strides in capacity development and technology transfer to reap the opportunities that digital technologies offer for genebank management and crop improvements.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of GB 10 will be available on Monday, 27 November 2023 at http://bit.ly/ITPGRFA_GB10