

CGRFA 20 Highlights: Wednesday, 26 March 2025

A noticeably larger contingent of observers underscored the “real world” relevance of negotiations on pollinators and seeds, among other genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA). With informal consultations taking place in parallel to work out remaining sticking points on climate change and digital sequence information (DSI), delegates continued ploughing through a busy agenda at the halfway point of the twentieth session of the Commission on GRFA (CGRFA 20).

Outstanding Issues

In the morning, Chair Benoît Girard (Canada) outlined developments on unfinished agenda items, notably: contact group discussions on the role of GRFA in climate change mitigation and adaptation ([CGRFA-20/25/2](#)); and informal consultations to clean text on DSI ([CGRFA/20/25/4](#)), and access and benefit-sharing (ABS) ([CGRFA/25/3.2/Inf.1](#)).

Microorganism and Invertebrate Genetic Resources (MIGR)

Follow-up on Other Functional Groups of MIGR: The Secretariat presented document [CGRFA-20/25/8.4](#) as well as two progress reports ([CGRFA-20/25/8.4/Inf.1](#) and [CGRFA-20/25/8.4/Inf.2](#)) on international initiatives for the conservation and sustainable use of pollinators and soil biodiversity, respectively. They outlined prior work undertaken in four functional groups on: pollinators; biological control agents (BCAs) and biostimulants; soil microorganisms and invertebrates; and microorganisms of relevance to ruminant digestion. In terms of guidance sought, they highlighted, among others: next steps for establishing a global pollinator platform; a potential review by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) of policy, legal, and institutional frameworks related to the use of microbial BCAs and invertebrate and microbial biostimulants; and amending the terms of reference of national focal points (NFPs) to include MIGR.

In ensuing debate, various delegates welcomed steps undertaken towards establishing a global pollinator platform. AFRICA cautioned that without a clear financial, legal, and institutional framework, “this commitment remains theoretical,” and with MEXICO, urged members to ensure the platform receives sufficient resources. PERU proposed the platform

involve Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) alongside other key stakeholders. GRULAC, with MEXICO and the Secretariat of the CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD), highlighted the important role played by the CBD International Pollinator Initiative established in 2000, and stressed potential synergies between the Initiative and the global pollinator platform.

EUROPE lamented gaps in information systems and *ex situ* collections of MIGR and called for strengthening national policies in this regard. With PERU, they highlighted the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group (ITWG) on MIGR to continue its work and move beyond a functional group approach to consider cross-cutting issues.

ARGENTINA underlined an imbalance in the follow-up across the various functional groups and called on the Secretariat to prepare new draft terms of reference for NFPs. BRAZIL highlighted national legislation on bioinputs in agriculture and proposed that FAO develop a technical document on *ex situ* conservation of pollinators, whereas PERU requested a study examining the environmental risks involved.

NORTH AMERICA proposed amendments, supported by REPUBLIC OF KOREA, though opposed by ECUADOR, including: premising further steps towards establishing the global pollinator platform on resource availability; explicitly mentioning organizations to be involved in the review of frameworks related to the use of BCAs and biostimulants; and adding two provisions on nutrient cycling organisms and bioremediation, and on the need for open exchange of genetic sequence information for specimen identification of MIGR in the development of ABS regulation.

AFRICA stressed that developing countries must benefit from fair and equitable benefit sharing in relation to MIGR and proposed strengthening national monitoring programmes.

The GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION FACILITY (GBIF) called on the Commission to make use of and create linkages with GBIF’s biodiversity databases.

Chair Girard said revised text would be prepared and circulated.

DSI

Chair Girard invited the Commission to consider compromise text on two guidance elements reflected in a non-paper, which broadens the list of stakeholders in the conservation and

sustainable use of GRFA, and amends language on a proposed multi-stakeholder workshop on the implications of [CBD Decision 16/2](#) for research and development in the food and agriculture sector, including considerations on capacity building.

EUROPE highlighted that proposed language from informal consultations held with Brazil and Canada was not reflected in the revised text. They noted their preference for including foresters in the expanded list of GRFA custodians that mentions “farmers including smallholder farmers, fishers including small-scale fishers, pastoralists, plant and animal breeders, IPLCs, and collection managers.” Supported by CHILE, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, and NORWAY, they further suggested splitting the guidance sought, to recognize that breeders and collection managers play a different role from smallholder custodians of GRFA. Opposing this split, CANADA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, and MOROCCO stressed that collection managers are important GRFA custodians.

Several countries expressed concern about the drafting process, pointing to multiple text versions and the exclusion of some regional groups from informal consultations. Chair Girard invited members to continue providing feedback to facilitate a new iteration of the text.

Questioning the feasibility of undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the implications of CBD Decision 16/2, REPUBLIC OF KOREA recommended narrowing the scope to specific areas of research and development relevant to GRFA. NIGER noted discrepancies between the document’s translated versions.

On the format and scope of the proposed multi-stakeholder workshop, several countries opposed the change from hybrid to virtual modalities, with a few stressing that only an in-person workshop can ensure meaningful participation of local stakeholders.

SOUTH AFRICA, supported by AFRICA, called for including original CBD language on operationalization of the DSI multilateral mechanism and Cali Fund, stressing that this omission would “render the decision moot.” KENYA, with GRULAC, underscored that the reference to ABS must include benefits from the utilization of GRFA and DSI.

EUROPE and US supported a focus on building expertise in DSI, though noted this should be narrowed down to “identifying priorities for capacity building.”

The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY expressed concern about the structural lack of funding for members, lamenting that “once again, we find ourselves discussing DSI issues without including peasants.” They opposed a narrowed focus on capacity building, stressing the growing negative impacts of patents on seed sovereignty for smallholder farmers, and Indigenous Peoples in particular.

NIGER and ALGERIA expressed their support for the active participation of peasant organizations.

Noting that parties are still processing the outcomes of the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the CBD, the US suggested the workshop focus on convening relevant

stakeholders to learn about Decision 16/2 and allow the GRFA community to seek further information.

Chair Girard said a non-paper would be prepared.

Plant Genetic Resources (PGR)

Report of the Twelfth Session of the ITWG on PGR: ITWG Chair William Wigmore (Cook Islands) introduced the report ([CGRFA-20/25/9.1](#)), outlining key issues discussed, such as finalization of the Third SOW on PGR (SOW-PGR), progress on the review of the Second GPA for PGR, and two newly developed practical guides for the application of genebank standards.

The Third SOW-PGR: Officially launched on Monday, the Secretariat introduced document [CGRFA-20/25/9.2](#), noting its focus on: *in situ* conservation and management; restoring cropping systems in the face of disaster and conflict; safeguarding PGR *ex situ*; building sustainable institutional and human capacities; and improving information systems and monitoring mechanisms.

Many delegates welcomed the launch of the report as an important milestone for the CGRFA.

ECUADOR, NEAR EAST, and others emphasized the importance of international cooperation, including for establishing national genebanks. ECUADOR, supported by PERU, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, CUBA, and TOGO, proposed establishing a “Red List” to enable countries to identify plant species at risk of extinction, and facilitate promoting strategies to use PGR for those species’ conservation and sustainable use.

NEAR EAST urged developing training programmes in the field of genetic resource management, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION. EUROPE and AFRICA requested the publication and dissemination of an in-brief version of the Report in all official UN languages. EUROPE also called for publishing the five thematic background studies of the Third SOW-PGR. While not opposing the publication, CANADA expressed reservation on the quality of the thematic studies, noting concerns with transparency in their finalization. PERU, CUBA, TOGO, and SOUTH AFRICA supported broadly disseminating the Third SOW-PGR to facilitate policy development, with KENYA suggesting additional guidance to request printing physical copies of the Report.

COLOMBIA underscored the value of native and indigenous seeds for food sovereignty and cultural identity, among others, and called for strengthened intersectoral collaboration for integrated PGR management.

CHINA pointed to the upcoming third International Agrobiodiversity Congress to be held in Kunming, China, in May 2025. CUBA requested designating a “group of action” to focus on the institutional and capacity-building needs of small island developing states. CAMEROON and TOGO called on countries to strengthen national and regional programmes to respond to the challenges identified in the Third SOW-PGR.

TOGO expressed concern at the state of development of *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives and of participatory plant breeding with farmers. Condemning the loss of their national genebank due to war, SUDAN stressed the need for urgent support and resources for its re-establishment. CÔTE D’IVOIRE

underscored the importance of local communities for conserving wild species and crop wild relatives, noting “most landraces are lost if they are not used.”

JAPAN sought clarification on the process for incorporating comments in the Report and requested further improvements to this process. The Secretariat of the INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GRFA (ITPGRFA) welcomed the invitation to present the Third SOW-PGR at relevant international meetings, including the 11th session of the ITPGRFA governing body to be held in Lima, Peru, in November 2025.

The CGRFA Secretariat clarified the process for reflecting member and observer comments in the Report, and that an in-brief version would be made available in all UN languages in the coming weeks.

Implementation and Review of the Second GPA for PGR:

The Secretariat introduced document [CGRFA-20/25/9.3.1](#), on implementation, highlighting: the current state of implementation of the voluntary guidelines concerning *in situ* conservation; the preparation of two draft practical guides on species producing non-orthodox seeds and cryopreservation to assist countries in the application of the Genebank Standards for PGR; and the role of the World Information and Early Warning System (WIEWS) on PGR.

The PHILIPPINES requested considering [CBD Decision 16/20](#) on plant conservation in the review of the Second GPA for PGR and called for making genebanks more accessible to the public and to farmers.

EUROPE proposed textual edits to: urge national genebanks to consider using the Svalbard Global Seed Vault as a safety backup; finalize the draft practical guides and translate these into all UN languages, supported by AFRICA; add language from the ITWG recommendations regarding country support; specify instances of CGRFA and ITPGRFA collaboration; and separate consideration of *in situ* conservation of wild species and on-farm management.

ARGENTINA proposed better integration of WIEWS into the Commission’s work. CANADA expressed disappointment regarding the low survey response for informing the implementation review, and cautioned against duplication of efforts with the ITPGRFA. They further suggested strengthening country support to maintain germplasm *ex situ*.

IRAN, with VENEZUELA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, lamented difficulties in conserving and accessing PGR due to unilateral sanctions and geopolitical considerations.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for stepping up efforts in the conservation of crop wild relatives. MALI questioned how national genebanks will be linked to WIEWS and other tools, and requested technical assistance in this regard.

PERU called for involving the private sector in PGR conservation, while COLOMBIA highlighted the importance of promoting research and development. CÔTE D’IVOIRE said over 80% of their seeds for food crops hail from informal systems. PANAMA highlighted their efforts in developing community seed banks and in the repatriation of native seeds. ITPGRFA noted

the importance of implementing the Second GPA for PGR for achieving their objectives.

Chair Girard promised to incorporate suggestions made and circulate updated text.

The Secretariat subsequently presented [CGRFA-20/25/9.3.2](#), including its Appendix containing key issues for the review of the Second GPA for PGR, drawing on inputs from regional consultations on 18 priority activities. They proposed that FAO prepare a revised Second GPA for review by the ITWG.

EUROPE, BRAZIL, and SOUTH AFRICA stressed the importance of simplifying the reporting format for monitoring the revised Second GPA’s implementation, pointing to the unwieldiness of the current format. Following earlier support expressed, ECUADOR reiterated their suggestion for having a Red List for plant species at risk of extinction, seeking further opinions from members. EUROPEAN COORDINATION LET’S LIBERATE DIVERSITY! highlighted the need to develop a concise policy-oriented summary of the GPA to support uptake by policymakers. They also emphasized that community seedbanks are key players that need to be fully integrated in national action plans.

The Secretariat reminded members that textual revisions can still be proposed when a draft revised Second GPA is made available at the next ITWG and Commission sessions. They further noted the preparation of a Red List would require a significant amount of data which is not yet available to them.

ECUADOR pointed to their own development of a draft Red List methodology as a starting point for the ITWG. Delegates agreed to discuss proposals for the process to revise and simplify the reporting format at the next meeting of the ITWG.

In the Corridors

Halfway through the meeting, delegates were humming and buzzing with excitement as discussions landed on steps to establish a global pollinator platform. With a spoonful of honey, one observer nonetheless cautioned that “if we don’t put our money where our mouth is, this will be little more than a public relations stunt.”

Noticeably more observers attended and participated in Wednesday’s deliberations. One Indigenous Peoples representative credited the new CGRFA Secretary for reaching out, noting that this was their first time attending these meetings, despite having followed the CBD process for years. Another delegate wondered why it has taken this long to engage civil society in a process this important.

Concerns on identity and sovereignty over genetic resources resurfaced in discussions on PGR. One country lamented the loss of their national genebank to the ravages of war, while others stressed difficulties in developing their genebanks because of unilateral sanctions. A reminder that geopolitics can affect even the most technical and scientific processes, one observer shared their frustration with “some countries complaining about their lack of access to seeds, while it is their activities that threaten the genebanks of others.”



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