



CGRFA-10 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 8 NOVEMBER 2004

The tenth regular session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA-10) opened on Monday, 8 November, at the headquarters of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in Rome, Italy. An opening ceremony was held to mark the Commission's twentieth anniversary. Delegates elected the meeting's officers, adopted the agenda and timetable, and addressed issues relating to plant genetic resources.

CELEBRATION OF THE COMMISSION'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

Opening the celebration of the Commission's twentieth anniversary, David Harcharik, Deputy Director General of the FAO, highlighted the Commission's achievements, including: the International Undertaking (IU) on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA); the Code of Conduct for Plant Germplasm Collection and Transfer; the Global Plan of Action (GPA) for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of PGRFA; and the International Treaty on PGRFA (ITPGR). He drew attention to the Commission's ongoing work and future challenges regarding key policy questions on biodiversity conservation and agro-ecosystem management for sustainable development.

Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), highlighted examples of interaction between the CBD and the CGRFA. He stressed their mutually supportive roles in the creation of a comprehensive international framework for biodiversity conservation. He noted the ITPGR's contribution to the CBD's work on access and benefit-sharing, and the scope for future collaboration on biodiversity for food security and nutrition, and the initiatives on pollinators and soil biodiversity.

Emile Frison, Director General of the International Plant Genetic Resource Institute (IPGRI), on behalf of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), highlighted the establishment of the Global Crop Diversity Trust. He noted the CGIAR's ongoing collaboration with the Commission on information exchange and animal genetic resources, and the need for future collaboration on forestry and fishery genetic resources, public awareness and the promotion of underutilized crops.

Panama, on behalf of G-77, and the Netherlands, on behalf of European Community and its Member States (EU), highlighted the Commission's achievements, including the Global Plan of Action (GPA) and the ITPGR. The EU called for prioritizing

discussions on: the ITPGR's implementation; the Commission's future work; cooperation with the CBD; and creation of global partnerships to achieve food security and genetic resource conservation.

The ETC group noted that many of the civil society's goals have been achieved due to government cooperation, including the CGRFA's creation in 1983, and the establishment of international gene banks and the Global Crop Biodiversity Trust. He highlighted unexpected successes regarding the adoption of the GPA and the ITPGR, and work on the draft code of conduct on biotechnology. He called for a treaty on livestock and livestock keepers' rights.

The SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY (SADC) outlined its regional programme for conservation of plant genetic resources, and expressed hope to provide assistance in implementing the ITPGR and the GPA.

CGRFA-10 OPENING SESSION

Louise Fresco, FAO's Assistant Director General for Agriculture, highlighted the need to lay the foundations for CGRFA's future work, particularly regarding: animal genetic resources; further cooperation with the CBD; implications of the ITPGR's entry into force; and public awareness.

CGRFA-9 Chair Robert Bertram (US) stressed that animal genetic resources require urgent and strategic attention. He underscored the Commission's role in voicing the needs and interests of the agricultural sector regarding the protection and sustainable use of genetic resources, and highlighted the role of genetic resources for food security and income generation for farmers.

Delegates then elected the meeting's Bureau. Upon a proposal by the G-77, Eng-Siang Lim (Malaysia) was elected as CGRFA-10 Chair, while the nomination of three Vice-Chairs is still pending. Portugal, on behalf of the OECD group comprising the regions of Europe, North America and South West Pacific, nominated Kristianne Herrmann (Australia), Campbell Davidson (Canada) and Elzbieta Martyniuk (Poland) as Vice-Chairs, and Grethe Evjen (Norway) as the meeting rapporteur. Delegates adopted the agenda and timetable (CGRFA-10/04/1 and 2), with a minor amendment, and noted the need to address overlaps between agenda items.

PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

FAO GLOBAL SYSTEM AND ITPGR: CGRFA-10 Chair Lim opened discussions on the FAO Global System on PGRFA and its potential contribution to the implementation of the ITPGR (CGRFA-10/04/3). He stressed that evaluating the Global System's contribution is essential to facilitate collaboration with



the ITPGR's Governing Body. Many supported his view, stressing the need for building synergies and avoiding duplications. As suggested by the EU, AUSTRALIA, the US and BRAZIL, delegates agreed to address interactions between the CGRFA and the Governing Body under each element of the Global System separately. CANADA proposed that the Secretariats of the CGRFA and the Governing Body provide views on collaboration. SOUTH AFRICA stressed capacity building and infrastructural investment, and ANGOLA the Code of Conduct on Plant Germplasm Collection and Transfer, as useful tools for the ITPGR implementation.

PROGRESS SINCE CGRFA-9: Chair Lim drew attention to the report of the second session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on PGRFA (ITWG-PGR) (CGRFA-10/04/4), the note on the follow-up to recommendations on certain elements of the Global System (CGRFA-10/04/05) and the progress report on preparation of the second report on the State of the World's PGRFA (CGRFA-10/04/05 Add. 1).

The EU proposed designating the ITWG-PGR as a technical subsidiary body of the ITPGR. TUNISIA emphasized the need for a clear national and regional structure for implementation of the ITWG-PGR's recommendations.

The Secretariat presented an overview of the guidance required by the Commission on PGRFA, regarding: progress in implementation, the facilitating mechanism for, and monitoring of implementation of the GPA; international plant genetic resources networks; the International Code of Conduct on Plant Germplasm Collecting and Transfer; strengthening seed systems and plant breeding; and the Global Crop Diversity Trust (CGRFA-10/04/05).

The EU expressed concern about regional differences in GPA implementation, and supported regional and international task-sharing, including collaboration with gene banks. He also supported preparing case studies on international plant genetic resources networks, and noted that efficient implementation of the interim Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) would facilitate conclusion of agreements between the Governing Body and IARCs.

Second State of the World Report: The RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted the need to reconsider the feasibility of the timeline currently set for 2006, and CHINA and ECUADOR highlighted the lack of capacity of many developing countries to contribute to the second State of the World report. The EU, the US and AUSTRALIA suggested extending the timeline for completion of the report to 2008. The EU prioritized thematic studies on the ITPGR implementation, while the US noted that priority be given to the revision of country reports and work on the standard MTA. Regarding thematic studies, AUSTRALIA cautioned against arduous reporting burdens and duplication with other organizations' work. ANGOLA expressed concern about diminishing support for agricultural research and declining capacities to utilize genetic resources for food security in poor countries, and prioritized thematic studies in this regard.

Monitoring of GPA Implementation: The EU, CANADA, NORWAY and AUSTRALIA supported the new monitoring approach proposed to CGRFA-9 and the ITWG-PGR. The EU and NORWAY expressed concern over increasing regional differences in GPA implementation, with NORWAY highlighting the inadequacy of efforts to restore genetic material lost during disasters. AUSTRALIA asserted the need to develop an effective on-ground monitoring approach. The EU supported the new, reduced list of indicators proposed, and suggested the application of the new monitoring approach to all countries.

Facilitating Mechanism: The EU supported the proposed framework for the GPA facilitating mechanism, but cautioned

against possible overlaps with other existing institutions. The US suggested that the objective of the mechanism be to facilitate the GPA implementation through technical and financial measures. AUSTRALIA expressed concern whether the proposed mechanism was different from other international funding mechanisms, in response to which the Secretariat clarified that it is not a funding mechanism. The Secretariat added that, while the mechanism would address all priority areas of the GPA, the Commission should prioritize its activities, and noted that the Global Forum on Agricultural Research expressed interest in being a partner. Regarding operational activities, the US stressed that assisting stakeholders to develop project and package proposals may be difficult. NORWAY noted that the mechanism could play a catalytic role in creating a meeting place for donors and countries requiring assistance for the GPA implementation. The US expressed concern regarding the required extra-budgetary funds. BRAZIL highlighted its national capacity regarding gene banks, which could be shared with other developing countries.

International Networks: The Secretariat introduced the report on the international networks of *ex situ* collections, including those held under the auspices of FAO (CGRFA-10/04/5 and 6). CANADA recommended continuation of the "shrink-wrap" approach of the MTAs currently in use by the IARCs. The ETC group expressed dissatisfaction that IPGRI's Genetic Resources Policy Committee did not make it possible for NGOs and farmers' organizations to attend a recently held meeting on genetic contamination of *ex situ* collections. IPGRI regretted lack of such participation and noted that the draft guidelines that the meeting prepared are available for comments.

International Code of Conduct on Plant Germplasm Collecting and Transfer: Supporting the ITWG-PGR's recommendation, the EU, CANADA and the US noted that updating the Code is not appropriate at this time.

Seed Systems and Plant Breeding: CANADA and the US suggested a gap analysis to avoid duplication of work with other organizations. The EU gave low priority to the item. ANGOLA highlighted the high priority of strengthening plant breeding for developing countries.

Global Crop Diversity Trust: Amb. Fernando Gerbasi, Chair of the Trust's Interim Panel of Eminent Experts, indicated that 17 regional and sub-regional funding strategies have been developed and will be implemented in late 2004-2005. Further discussions were postponed to the upcoming meeting of the Interim Committee.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Inspired by the celebration of the Commission's twentieth anniversary, and heartened by the entry into force of the International Treaty, CGRFA-10 delegates tackled issues relating to plant genetic resources by swift and easy steps, although some complained that the pace of discussions was "overwhelming."

More worrisome, according to other participants, was the low degree of participation of developing countries in the discussions, particularly since many issues of their concern, such as the strengthening of seed systems and plant breeding, the promotion of underutilized crops for food security and the updating of the Code of Conduct on Plant Germplasm featured in the agenda. While one accounted this to the lack of time for preparation and regional coordination, another pointed towards the dominating interest of some well-prepared developed countries to prioritize implementation of the International Treaty.

The long list of tasks depending on extra-budgetary resources was another major worry, and many desperately looked for innovative ideas to attract funding, either through donors' additional commitments or public-private partnerships.