



The International Treaty

ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE



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Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda

FOURTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Bali, Indonesia, 14 – 18 March 2011

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

1. This November it will be exactly 10 years since you adopted the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, at the FAO Conference in Rome in 2001. In these ten years, you have come a very long way with your Treaty and, as you begin this Fourth Session of the Governing Body, this might be an opportune moment to pause, take a step back and reflect on what progress has been made, where you are now and where you want to be going next with the implementation of this Treaty.
2. Looking back, you can be truly proud of your achievements. Within the history of FAO, you have achieved the fastest rate of ratification of any treaty and now the fastest implementation of the operational systems of any legal instrument housed in FAO. I wish to commend you on your commitment to this Treaty and to congratulate you on these extraordinary accomplishments. Just to illustrate the reality of what you have achieved, let me illustrate highlight this progress with a few simple facts and figures.
3. In the past year, there has been an encouraging and growing number of new notifications of incorporation of plant genetic material in the Multilateral System, that I have received, including from developing countries. To date, the following Contracting Parties have made such a notification: Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, Estonia, Germany, Jordan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Namibia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Zambia and, most recently, Kenya and Malawi.
4. Based on this and the reports submitted by the CGIAR Centers, the Multilateral System now practically comprises more than 1,5 million known accessions of Plant Genetic Resources, and in reality it is far more.
5. 600,000 accessions have been distributed by the CGIAR Centers, mostly to developing countries, in the last year.

6. In addition from CGIAR distribution data, over 2,000 SMTA reports were received and safely stored by the Treaty Secretariat.
7. With the real-time synchronization of the functioning of the CGIAR's SINGER System with the global information infrastructure for the Multilateral System, which we have created in this last biennium, simple and practical reporting interfaces for major genebanks, and a stand-alone SMTA preparation and reporting application, at the disposal of any person or institution, are being rolled out. Through the *Ad Hoc Committee on the Multilateral System*, many technical and legal questions from users of the Multilateral System have received practical answers. The Third Party Beneficiary Procedures are fully operational and, with the adoption of Mediation Rules at this Session, will be completed.
8. At this session, you will be working on compliance procedures that will make the Treaty's legal machinery even stronger and more predictable. All this has meant and is meaning, for Contracting Parties and, most importantly, for individual users of the System worldwide, increase in the exchange of germplasm, greater efficiency and reduced transaction costs, legal certainty and effective participation in the system through intergovernmental processes and through daily interactions with the various levels of governance and management of the system.
9. A real life example of the functioning of the System comes from the Center for Pacific Crops and Trees, which is managed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community under Article 15 of the Treaty. Having learned that taro leaf blight is a pest affecting not only the South Pacific but West Africa too, and having SPC led a regional research project that resulted in new resistant breeding lines, SPC has decided to share them with the West Africa region through the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture. As we speak, the material is travelling from SPC to the Institute, under the Standard Material Transfer Agreement. These and other facts bring us one message: the infrastructure of the system is in place, is solid and is adapting to new emerging needs. The Contracting Parties have progressively built such infrastructure, thus creating added value around the Treaty, and have made the Treaty's Multilateral System a reality outside of this room.
10. In terms of benefits of the system for those who have constantly conserved and improved the genetic resources that are in it, the Benefit-sharing Fund has produced many and will soon produce more. The first round of projects that were funded in 2009 are already producing concrete and encouraging results on the ground, as we will hear this week from recipients of funding. Resources are now being invested more strategically, thanks to the elements of a programmatic approach of the Fund, that connects it to the wider reality of crops in the field, a reality that is increasingly shaped by changing climatic conditions to which farmers need to adapt.
11. The Benefit-sharing Fund is growing at a tremendous pace, we all will appreciate it this week when a new set of at least 30 projects will be approved under the second call for proposals, thanks to considerable financial resources directly made available or mobilised with commitments ahead of the call for proposals. We all should thank the governments of Australia, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Norway for giving to the Fund and making the call for proposals 2010 a reality. But, the Fund is not growing only in its financial capacity, it is growing also in structure. Applicants have received formulation support, and inter-agency partnerships for project implementation have been created.

12. To secure the highest quality of outputs, top notch reporting, monitoring and evaluation, procedures will be set forth this week and fiduciary standards for partners in the Fund will build the kind of excellency that will make our Contracting Parties truly *leading the field*. In fact, they are already leading the field.

13. For example, one of the projects financed in 2009 by the Benefit-sharing Fund works on farmer-bred varieties of cassava in Kerala, India. The women who participated in self-help groups, established by the project, are producing high-yielding and drought-resistant local varieties of cassava, thanks to the identification of indigenous practices that the project made possible. With those varieties, the self-help group members have quadrupled their incomes through developing new products for the market such as cassava bread and cakes. And, they are sharing planting materials with other farmers, thus contributing to conserving their agricultural heritage.

14. Efforts have also continued to further increase the synergies and collaboration with the Global Crop Diversity Trust, which is an essential element of the Funding Strategy of the Treaty. Given the close relationship between the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the Treaty, the success of the Trust is also the success of the Treaty.

15. All these and many others are the achievements that Contracting Parties made with the Treaty, a Treaty that is not operating in a self-contained micro cosmos, rather is connecting our PGRFA community to the most urgent realities with practical and concrete mechanisms. The world is experiencing interconnected crises of food, biodiversity and climate. Food security is becoming one of the main challenges of our time across different continents. 925 million people are presently undernourished. Agriculture biodiversity of crops is disappearing, as we have heard in the recent State of the World, food prices are soaring, as we have seen in recent months.

16. In 2010, in China, the food component of consumer's price index is up 10.1% from a year earlier. Climate change is increasingly impacting agriculture and will effect food security globally. In some countries, due to changing climatic conditions, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 percent by 2020. All this points to the increasing importance of PGRFA. Without access to the genetics of the world's key crops, and their continual exchange and improvement, we cannot hope to feed the nine billion people who will inhabit the planet at the middle of this century. The Treaty, within its scope and ambit, responds to such challenges with an organized collective effort to fund conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources, mechanisms of exchange that reduce transaction costs and a widely accessible genepool to find suitable agronomic traits and integrate them into modern, climate-ready varieties.

17. The Treaty works to secure a better present and the brightest future for plant genetic resources but, indeed, the whole world does care about genetic resources. Governments have just adopted a Protocol on access and benefit-sharing that marks a new era of international environmental law and on which one single government has already pledged 4 billion dollars. The International Treaty is now facing this new and evolving global policy environment and must be positioned in such an environment with strong policy responses coming from its Contracting Parties.

18. The International Treaty is recognised by the Protocol as one of the complementary instruments that constitute the International Regime. The special nature of agro-biodiversity, the importance of genetic resources for food security, the interdependence of all countries with regard to those resources and the fundamental role of the International Treaty in this regard are all embedded with the Protocol. Mutual supportiveness is enshrined in the Protocol's text, as in the Treaty text itself, where it is stated that

Due regard should be paid to useful and relevant ongoing work or practices under such international instruments and relevant international organizations, provided that they are supportive of and do not run counter to the objectives of the Convention and th[e] Protocol.

19. All these elements call for a sustainable and stable relationship between the Protocol and our Treaty. A major response is needed and, in fact, expected from the Treaty by the CBD community. I am delighted that Ahmed Djouglaf, the Executive Secretary of the CBD, is here with us today. There is an opportunity and there are already initiatives jointly promoted with the Treaty community going in the direction of synergies and collaboration. However, it is more urgent than ever for Treaty Contracting Parties to realise today that a major strategic realignment is needed to act effectively in the new policy environment and that making the whole International Treaty more advanced is the best response that we can give to pursue integration and cooperation, and to avoid any possible marginalization of the agricultural sector.

20. This is why, speaking in concrete terms, in the work programme and budget for the next biennium we are proposing to securely and predictably fund the Core Implementing Functions of the Treaty. That is, the substantive activities to be undertaken to implement the Treaty and its core systems during the biennium besides the pure maintenance functions. In a period of natural, rapid growth of your Treaty, this growth can only be sustained if it is at least minimally reflected in the work programme and budget. Resources are required to make and keep the Treaty's systems and processes functioning. The core implementing functions of the work programme and budget relate to permanent, continuing activities that arise directly out of the provisions of the Treaty, and the decisions of the Governing Body which have launched its operational mechanisms.

21. The elements of the Core Implementing Functions reflect the fact that the Treaty has grown and its systems have matured. A number of the major fields of activity that derive directly from the provisions of the Treaty are now taking substantive shape, and the overall level of activities is greatly increased, as the Treaty's systems come into full operation. The related budget component seeks to sustain the successes achieved in previous biennia, particularly in the practical operations of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing and the Standard Material Transfer Agreement, as well as its Benefit-sharing Fund. It provides for the full participation of the Treaty in the further development of international and national regimes for access and benefit-sharing, now at a critical moment. The Multilateral System now has many of its elements in place, but they need to be firmed up and if we want to keep the Treaty static or stable on its early achievements this is not an option but a must, at this crucial juncture.

22. I would like to thank all of you who have shown to Contracting Parties that this objective is within reach for the Treaty Community. We have to work closely with the Protocol mechanisms through systematic interfaces on both the side of access and that of

benefit-sharing and the best way to do this is to stabilise, reinforce and expand our Treaty systems and effectively make them the international benchmark when it comes to access and benefit-sharing for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

23. As the Treaty's early achievements demonstrate, our core values, which are food security and sustainable agriculture, remain at the heart of the Treaty and are translated into effective and concrete action. This week and in the next biennium, we have to breathe new life into our Treaty and, under your prudent guidance, open a new era for it, an era defined by continued commitment, integrity and cooperation.