



The International Treaty

ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE



E

THIRD MEETING OF THE *AD HOC* TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE USE OF PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Vienna, Austria, 24 and 25 October 2016

Progress in Development of the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA

Context and concept of the Toolbox

1. At its Fourth Session, requested the Secretary to further explore the development of a toolbox on sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture in order to assist Contracting Parties in the implementation of Article 6 of the Treaty, thus recognizing that in many regions the implementation of Article 6, *Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources* is lagging behind in comparison with other elements of the Treaty. The development of the *Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA* is one of two programmes of the *Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of PGRFA and its Supporting Initiatives for 2016–2019* (PoW-SU).¹ The Toolbox will contribute to the five goals of the Programme of Work, particularly regarding the provision of technical support to implement the provisions of the Treaty relevant to sustainable use (Goal 1). The Toolbox will also to help strengthen collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders participating in projects and programmes relevant to sustainable use (Goal 4).

2. The Toolbox will provide Contracting Parties and stakeholders with technical information, policy options, regulatory guidelines, training opportunities, decision tools and others materials to guide activities promoting the sustainable use of PGRFA.² It will address constraints identified as negatively affecting the capacity of national and regional programmes.³ The concept of the Toolbox was discussed and supported by the *Ad Hoc* Technical Committee on Sustainable Use (ACSU) at its first meeting in 2012.⁴ At its second meeting (2015),⁵ the ACSU recommended that the Toolbox should initially focus on uses of PGRFA that may expand the genetic base of crops, while remaining adaptable and open-ended to future needs of users. In particular, it recommended that the Toolbox contain tools for:

- a) the promotion and availability of landraces/farmers' varieties (recognizing the traditional knowledge and customary rules associated with seeds and other propagation materials)—in particular, to achieve increased and sustainable production and higher resilience while increasing the diversity underpinning traditional production systems and livelihoods, as well as contributing to the goals of breeding programmes for crop improvement;

¹ Resolution 4/2015 – Sixth Session of the Governing Body – Implementation of Article 6, Sustainable Use of PGRFA

² Item 6 of the Draft Provisional Agenda – First Meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of PGRFA – Development of a toolbox on sustainable use of PGRFA

³ Item 10 of the Provisional Agenda – Fifth Session of the Governing Body – Implementation of Article 6, Sustainable Use of PGRFA

⁴ Report of the First Meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of PGRFA
<http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/397240/>

⁵ Report of the Second Meeting of the *Ad Hoc* Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of PGRFA
<http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/397268/>

- b) Pre-breeding and its increased relevance with respect to ongoing crop wild relative and landrace conservation and characterization activities, as well as progress in the application of novel characterization techniques, particularly due to recent advances in the development of ‘omics’ approaches (e.g., genomics, phenomics and transcriptomics);
 - c) Inter-linkages between PGRFA management and nutrition issues.
3. The ACSU also suggested that the Toolbox could generate synergies with the indicators of the Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Second GPA),⁶ as well as confirming its support for the launch of an electronic consultation to gather information on stakeholder needs.

Stakeholder consultation on the development of the Toolbox

4. Document IT/GB-6/15/Inf.3⁷ details the design, execution and results of the *Stakeholder Consultation on the Development of a Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA* which was conducted from April to June 2015. The results were also presented at the side event, *Implementation of the Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* of the Sixth Session of the Governing Body in October 2015.

5. Responses were received from 289 stakeholders in 109 countries and the European Union, of which 90 are Contracting Parties to the Treaty. All FAO sub-regions were represented. Results of the consultation highlighted the broad range of stakeholders involved in aspects of PGRFA sustainable use⁸ and enabled a better understanding of their specific roles and interests which need to be catered for in the Toolbox. It also allowed a clearer understanding of the ‘bottlenecks’ in the sustainable use system and a deeper comprehension of the constraints and needs regarding the implementation of the sustainable use provisions of the Treaty. In particular, it disclosed the critical need to address limitations regarding policy in support of sustainable use activities as well as capacity building needs in all areas of the PGRFA sustainable use spectrum. Furthermore, it highlighted that access to plant genetic material and associated information urgently needs to be addressed in order that countries can move ahead with the development of coordinated and comprehensive sustainable use strategies.

6. The consultation confirmed that a wide range of types of resources are important to support the activities of stakeholders and, critically, why specific types of resources are useful and practical, as well as which additional resources are needed. These resources can be broadly classified into those relating to:

- a) sustainable use policy;
- b) characterization and evaluation;
- c) PGRFA conservation techniques;
- d) adding value to and sustaining the use of landraces/farmers’ varieties;
- e) crop improvement;
- f) access to PGRFA material and associated information;
- g) seed systems;
- h) collaboration/partnerships;

⁶ Second Global Plan of Action for PGRFA <http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/thematic-sitemap/theme/seeds-pgr/gpa/en/>

⁷ Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda – Sixth Session of the Governing Body – Development of a toolbox for sustainable use of PGRFA <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bb352e.pdf>

⁸ Stakeholder groups: public research; government; public genebank; NGO; private plant breeding company/independent plant breeder; farmer/seed producer; farmers’ association; commercial seed/plant production industry; seed network; local/indigenous community; other. ‘Other’ includes universities/research/educational establishments, international bodies such as FAO, UNEP, UNESCO, the EC and the GEF, and international organizations, networks or services such as the CGIAR, ECPGR, Red Mesoamericana de Recursos Fitogenéticos, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC).

- i) communication and awareness.

7. Respondents highlighted the Internet as a vital means for stakeholders to access and share information, and the majority consider that a single online portal for access to information to aid the implementation of Article 6 is either vital or important. Based on the results of the consultation and earlier deliberations about the development of the Toolbox, a proposed outline of its structure, mode of delivery and contents was presented in document IT/GB-6/15/Inf.3.⁷ It was proposed that the Toolbox is a highly structured but simple and user-friendly online platform which caters for the full range of stakeholders and their roles and/or interests in PGRFA.

Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA

8. In response to Resolution 4/2015 of the Governing Body,¹ which requests the Secretary, in collaboration with other stakeholders and subject to the availability of financial resources, to invite further inputs from Contracting Parties, other governments, farmers' organizations, relevant stakeholders and experts to collect additional and prospective tools for the Toolbox, an *Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA* was convened in Volterra, Italy, 19–21 July 2016 with the objectives of:

- a) defining the required functioning and contents of the Toolbox according to different user groups; and
- b) identifying specific resources for inclusion in the Toolbox.⁹

9. The meeting involved 17 invited experts selected according to their specific expertise in aspects of sustainable use of PGRFA and to represent a broad range of stakeholder groups. Participation in the *Stakeholder Consultation on the Development of a Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA* and the Treaty's Benefit-Sharing Fund projects were also taken into account, as well as regional and gender balance. The meeting involved plenary and working group discussions, the experts working in three groups across two sessions – the first addressing the Toolbox functions and the second the contents of the Toolbox. Some of the key outcomes of the meeting are summarized below. A full report is available online.¹⁰

Key Outcomes of the Toolbox Expert Meeting

10. The objectives of the meeting were fully achieved through productive working group sessions addressing the functions and contents of the Toolbox. Its functions were defined by the experts in general terms by identifying and characterizing the needs of different potential users across the range of stakeholder groups and by defining a number of specific use cases. The experts also listed the essential contents required to meet users' needs. Thus, an initial large pool of resources was amassed and user-defined functions elaborated.¹¹ The discussion outputs will be combined with the results of the *Stakeholder Consultation on the Development of a Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA* to inform the design, construction and development of the Toolbox.

11. Some of the key issues raised during the plenary discussions were:

- a) The scope of the Toolbox in the context of the definition of the term 'sustainable use'. The Secretariat highlighted that the ACSU had agreed to adopt a broad definition of sustainable use and that the elements of the PGRFA sustainable use system were clearly defined in document IT/GB-6/15/Inf.3 presented to the Sixth Session of the Governing Body.⁷
- b) Concerns over the sustainability of the Toolbox. It was emphasized that long-term funding will be required to support its ongoing management and maintenance by a responsible entity. The Secretariat pointed out that the Toolbox is one of five

⁹ Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA: List of Experts

¹⁰ Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA: Report

¹¹ Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA: Working Group Outputs <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/414973/>

programmes of the PoW-SU 2016–2019, therefore the Governing Body has made a commitment to supporting its development. It will be essential that the Toolbox becomes an invaluable aid to countries in order to ensure continuing support.

- c) The relationship between the Toolbox and the Treaty’s Global Information System on PGRFA (GLIS). The Secretariat explained that the two are complementary but that each is being designed with a different purpose—the Toolbox is specifically being created to provide support to countries to implement the sustainable use provisions under Article 6 of the Treaty, while the GLIS will integrate and augment existing information systems to create a global entry point to facilitate the exchange of the information contained therein in accordance with Article 17 of the Treaty. Thus, the two will be linked and complementary but will remain distinct entities.
- d) The need for the Toolbox to provide a means of integrating the resources that it provides access to. It should not simply direct users to the resources but function as a queryable system to harvest the information relevant to the user’s specific needs.
- e) The requirement for the Toolbox to emphasize the roles of and links between all actors involved in the sustainable use of PGRFA. It was also noted that the Toolbox could serve the needs of other sectors (e.g., environment/nutrition/health), thus, a means of publicizing its availability outside of the PGRFA community could be explored.
- f) The issue of what to include in the Toolbox considering the broad range of topics that could be covered. The Secretariat noted that the initial phase of development would focus on a limited number of topics and that the Toolbox would then be expanded over time.
- g) It was suggested that the Toolbox could provide selected case studies of best practices to link to the sub-paragraphs of Article 6.2 of the Treaty. Participants agreed that it would be critical to ensure a balance in the choice of case studies to represent all stakeholders and sectors.
- h) The need to make use of open access tools and resources in the Toolbox.
- i) The possibility of involving the user community in populating the Toolbox and in its long-term maintenance. For example:
 - country focal points could be identified and invited to populate some elements of the Toolbox;
 - regional networks could be approached to help identify relevant Toolbox contents;
 - individuals could be invited to publish their experiences/case studies to make them visible via the Toolbox.

12. The experts who participated in the meeting agreed to act as an advisory body on the development of the Toolbox.