Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

The International Treaty ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Item 14 of the Provisional Agenda
SEVENTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY
Kigali, Rwanda, 30 October – 3 November 2017
Toolbox for Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

I.　　BACKGROUND

1.　　　The development of the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA) (the Toolbox) is one of two programmes of the Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of PGRFA and its Supporting Initiatives for 2016–2019 (PoW).[1] The Toolbox contributes to the five goals of the Programme of Work, particularly regarding the provision of technical support to Contracting Parties and stakeholders to implement the provisions of the International Treaty relevant to sustainable use (Goal 1). It also contributes to strengthening collaboration and partnerships between stakeholders participating in projects and programmes relevant to sustainable use (Goal 4). The Toolbox may also support countries in implementation of the Priority Activities of the Second Global Plan of Action for PGRFA (Second GPA).[2]

2.　　　The purpose of the Toolbox is to provide Contracting Parties and other stakeholders with information to guide activities promoting sustainable use of PGRFA, and to help 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 and second meetings in 2012 and 2015 respectively.

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[1] Resolution 04/2015 – Implementation of Article 6, Sustainable Use of PGRFA

[2] Second Meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of PGRFA – Report

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

II.   STAKEHOLDER AND EXPERT INPUT

A.   Online stakeholder consultation

3.   Following the endorsement by the ACSU at its second meeting, the International Treaty Secretariat carried out an online consultation to gather information on stakeholder needs to inform the development of the Toolbox. Document IT/GB-6/15/Inf.3 details the design, execution and results of the Stakeholder Consultation on the Development of a Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA (the Stakeholder Consultation), which was conducted from April to June 2015. The results were also presented at the side event during the Sixth Session of the Governing Body in October 2015. 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 needed. These resources can be broadly classified into those relating to:

1)   Sustainable use policy;
2)   Characterization and evaluation;
3)   PGRFA conservation techniques;
4)   Adding value to and sustaining the use of landraces/farmers' varieties;
5)   Crop improvement;
6)   Access to PGRFA material and associated information;
7)   Seed systems;
8)   Collaboration/partnerships;
9)   Communication and awareness.

4.   Based on the results of the consultation and earlier deliberations on 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. It was proposed that the Toolbox should be a simple and user-friendly online platform, which caters for the full range of stakeholders and their roles and/or interests in PGRFA.

B.   Expert Meeting

5.   In response to Resolution 4/2015 which requested 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 resources for the Toolbox, the Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA (the Expert Meeting) was convened in Volterra, Italy, 19–21 July 2016[4] with the objectives of defining the required functioning and contents of the Toolbox according to different user groups, and identifying specific resources for inclusion.

6.   The meeting involved 17 invited experts, selected according to their specific expertise in various aspects of sustainable use of PGRFA, and representing a broad range of stakeholder groups. Participation in the Stakeholder Consultation and the International Treaty's Benefit-sharing Fund projects were also taken into account, as well as regional and gender balance. The meeting involved working group and plenary sessions in which user defined functions were elaborated, and a pool of resources was amassed to meet users' needs.[5]

7.   Some notable issues raised during the Expert Meeting plenary discussions included:

a)   Concerns regarding 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.

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[4] Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA – Report

[5] Expert Meeting on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA – Working Group Outputs

b) The scope of the Toolbox in the context of the definition of the term 'sustainable use'. It was noted that at its second meeting,[6] the ACSU agreed to adopt a broad definition of 'sustainable use', and that the elements of the PGRFA use system were clearly defined in document IT/GB-6/15/Inf.3 presented to the Sixth Session of the Governing Body.

c) The relationship between the Toolbox and the International Treaty's Global Information System on PGRFA (GLIS). The Toolbox is specifically being created to provide support to countries to implement the sustainable use provisions of Article 6, 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. Thus, the two will be linked, but will remain distinct entities.

d) The issue of what to include in the Toolbox, considering the broad range of topics that could be covered. The ACSU agreed at its second meeting that the initial phase of development would focus on a limited number of topics, and that the Toolbox would then be expanded over time.

e) 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.

C.   Recommendations of the ACSU at its Third Meeting

8.   At its third meeting,[6] the ACSU acknowledged the progress made in defining the functions and contents of the Toolbox, and suggested that in order to deliver something concrete as soon as possible, it should initially focus on a few priority areas and be developed further over time to address all elements of the PGRFA use system. To this end, the Committee identified specific priorities under the thematic areas 'adding value to and sustaining the use of landraces/farmers' varieties' and 'seed systems', as well as the topic 'participatory plant breeding', as indicated in Table 5, IT/GB-6/15/Inf.3.[7] The importance of providing support to countries in establishing collaborations and partnerships in these areas was underscored.

9.   The issue of responsibility for ongoing management and maintenance of the Toolbox was also raised. The ACSU proposed launching a joint programme of work involving multiple multilateral organizations with an interest in the Toolbox, to ensure its continued support and sustainability.

III.   TOOLBOX IMPLEMENTATION

A.   The Toolbox prototype

10.   In response to the advice of the ACSU, and informed by the outcomes of the Stakeholder Consultation and Expert Meeting, a Toolbox prototype has been created (Figure 1).[7] The prototype is currently hosted by the International Treaty Secretariat and has therefore been built in the framework of the FAO website.

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[6] Third Meeting of the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of PGRFA – Report (IT/GB-7/17/Inf. 9)

[7] www.fao.org/plant-treaty/tools/toolbox-for-sustainable-use/en/

11.   Figure 2 is a schema of the Toolbox prototype elements and structure. The home page provides an introduction (explaining the Toolbox context, purpose and scope, including which stakeholders may benefit from using it), as well as user instructions. The navigation menu provides links to the home (overview) page, the text of Article 6,[8] the sustainable use 'subject areas' (currently 'Policy for sustainable use' and 'Sustaining local crop diversity'), and the resources database search function. The subject area pages each provide a general overview of the subject, summaries of key strategies and activities that can be promoted and implemented, and a search function for users to find subject related resources.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the Toolbox prototype home page

(www.fao.org/plant-treaty/tools/toolbox-for-sustainable-use/en/)

12.   The page, 'Policy for sustainable use', is included in the prototype in response to the results of the online stakeholder consultation, which highlighted the critical need to address limitations regarding policy in support of sustainable use activities. Emphasis is placed on policies to support farmers, participatory approaches to crop improvement, local seed systems, *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation, and access to PGRFA. The importance of developing or adapting national policy in support of sustainable use, as well as financial and incentive mechanisms, is also highlighted.

13.   The page 'Sustaining local crop diversity' addresses the priority topics identified by the ACSU (see paragraph 8). It highlights the central role of farmers and other custodians of local crop

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[8] www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/sustainable-use/overview/en/

diversity, and focuses on the importance of strengthening local seed systems (e.g. through the establishment and sustainable management of community seed banks), approaches for enhancing crop diversity for local needs (e.g., through participatory plant breeding), and options for promoting local crop diversity (e.g., by developing the value chain).

14.   The search function provides options to undertake free-text or pre-defined subject category searches of the resources database. For each resource, the title, a summary of its content, publisher, publication date, primary geographic focus (if relevant), and a link to the resource online, are provided. Additional information provided includes the digital object identifier (DOI) (if relevant), the resource type, its format (e.g. PDF document, website) and language(s). Resource types are classified in eight categories – Article or presentation; Case study; Database or platform; Learning material; Method; Multimedia; Publication or report; and Tool – with corresponding icons designed specifically for the Toolbox to enhance the user's experience.
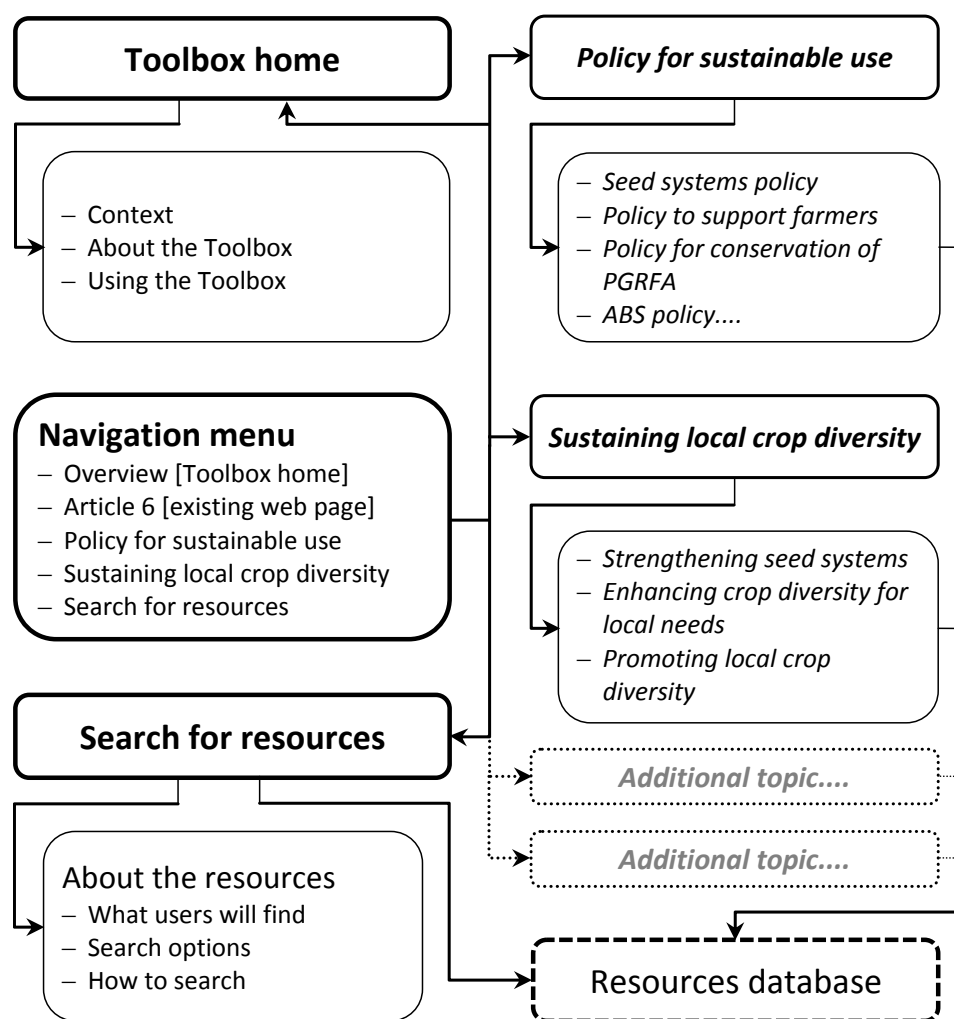

Figure 2. Toolbox prototype schema showing the main elements and structure

B.   Future development

15.   The Toolbox requires further development to include content and resources to meet the expectations of stakeholders – as detailed in Table 5 of IT/GB-6/15/Inf.3.7 and summarized under paragraph 3 of the current document – as well as those identified at the Expert Meeting. Subject to available resources, a more comprehensive and valuable service could be provided with the addition of dynamic functions such as news feeds, an information sharing platform, discussion fora, and a specific user-defined experience.

16.   The proposal to establish a Joint Programme for Biodiversity in Agriculture for Sustainable Use of PGRFA,[9] as detailed in the document, IT/GB-7/17/16, paragraphs 33–37, includes activities to ensure the long-term viability of the Toolbox through the development and ongoing management of additional modules and functions. Suitable management arrangements, along with a collaborative approach to the provision of Toolbox services, would provide for a sustainable and valuable system to support stakeholders in implementing the provisions of Article 6.

[9] http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/notifications/detail-events/en/c/1032828/