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The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**Views, Experiences and Best Practices as an example of possible options for
the national implementation of Article 9 of the International Treaty**

Note by the Secretary

At its [second meeting](#) of the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (AHTEG), the Expert Group agreed on a revised version of the [template](#) for collecting information on examples of national measures, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights

This document presents the updated information on best practices and measures of implementing Article 9 of the International Treaty submitted by Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE) on 1 August 2019.

The submission is presented in the form and language in which it was received.



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Basic information

- Title of measure/practice

Building on Community Traditional Knowledge and Practices for Food Security

- Date of submission

July 31, 2019

- Name(s) of country/countries in which the measure/practice is taking place

Vietnam

- Responsible institution/organization (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s) and contact person)

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- Type of institution/organization (categories)

Non-Government Organization

- Collaborating/supporting institutions/organizations/actors, if applicable (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s))

Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (Hanoi, Vietnam)
Plant Protection Department (PPD) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)
Field Crops Research Institute (FCRI) of the Vietnamese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS)
Oxfam International

Description of the examples

Mandatory information:¹

- Short summary to be put in the inventory (max. 200 words) including:
 - Implementing entity and partners

¹ This mandatory information is required in order for the measure/practice to be included in the Inventory.



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- Start year
- Objective(s)
- Summary of core components
- Key outcomes
- Lessons learned (if applicable)

Southeast Asia Regional Initiatives for Community Empowerment (SEARICE) implemented ‘Putting Lessons into Practice: Scaling up Peoples’ Biodiversity Management for Food Security’ (2012-2015), in collaboration with partners from government, non-government and research institutions. Objectives were to develop adaptation strategies for food security by bridging traditional knowledge and science; to influence policies on food and agriculture from local to international level toward realizing the right to food of indigenous and smallholder farmers; and to strengthen their adaptive capacities in plant genetic resources conservation, including access to and sustainable use of PGRFA, by scaling up successful and/or innovative models. Components include capacity-building through collaborative strategies, e.g. Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) and community seed management, and policy support by providing venue for farmers to articulate their concerns and issues to government leaders. The Farmer Field School approach was used as a learning and empowering methodology, while the system of rice intensification and PPB were introduced as climate-change mitigation measures. The initiative targeted 75,000 low-income farming households from several regions of Vietnam. Farm productivity and yield increased by 10%, while periods of food scarcity were reduced from a maximum of 17 weeks to a maximum of 7 weeks across all regions by its conclusion.

(199 words)

- Brief history (including starting year), as appropriate

The initiative Putting Lessons into Practice: Scaling up Peoples Biodiversity Management for Food Security was implemented in Vietnam from 2012 to 2015. The project recognizes that the knowledge and experiences of the farming communities of indigenous peoples and smallholder farmers (IPSHF) are integral elements and actors in the ‘global responses’ to climate change. For one, the participants’ prior knowledge of ecosystems and their resilience are keys in identifying the challenges posed by climate change and in building appropriate responses. The initiative thus anchored and capitalized on these knowledge and experiences by building on them and at the same time enhancing them by introducing new adaptation mechanisms whose adoption or not was decided by the participants themselves based on their contexts.

This project builds on past similar SEARICE projects in Vietnam, i.e. the Community Biodiversity Development and Conservation (CBDC) implemented in 1994 to 2005, Biodiversity Use and Conservation in Asia Program (BUCAP) implemented in 2000 to 2005 and the merged program (CBDC-BUCAP) implemented from 2006 to 2011.

- Core components of the measure/practice (max 200 words)

The measure has two components: 1) capacity enhancement using collaborative strategies involving other stakeholders in agriculture and 2) policy support by providing venue for the farmers to articulate their concerns, needs and issues to government leaders.

Technical skills and topics discussed and subsequently applied included participatory plant breeding and community seed management. The principle of rice intensification (SRI), a known ecological farming method that is also touted as a climate change adaptation and mitigation measure for agricultural systems, was also implemented. The inclusion of SRI was important as it was new to the participants and it made



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them re-think their already established IPSHF farming practices such as continuous standing water, dense transplanting of seedlings, overuse of nitrogen fertilizer, and spraying of pesticide, among others.

Farmer Field School (FFS) was used as a learning and empowering methodology. Through FFS, farmers got organized, supported each other, and were able to sustain the efforts beyond project implementation.

Policy support was in the form of provision of venue for farmers to air their concerns, issues and needs such as events like farmers field day, end-of-season assessment and planning and farmers' technical and policy conferences which were attended by local government officials.

- Description of the context and the history of the measure/practice is taking place (political, legal and economic framework conditions for the measure/practice) (max 200 words)

It is a given that farming communities are highly at risk and vulnerable to impacts of climate change. But while they are vulnerable, farmers also hold a crucial key in mitigating and adapting to the impacts of such. It is thus critical that farmers' potential to address their own vulnerabilities are strengthened by harnessing their traditional knowledge and skills and providing their capacity to adapt to climate change.

At the start of the project, it was found that farmers were nowhere near to being able to even just withstand the effects of climate change. Results of baseline studies showed a notable dwindling of agrobiodiversity in the communities. There were also food security issues, with reported hunger periods of up to 17 weeks annually.

The project sites were in mountainous and coastal plains. They have small arable lands and crop productivity is highly constrained by soil salinity and low soil fertility, which were further aggravated by adverse weather conditions. Since the arable lands in this province are affected by salinity and acidity, and since they have not yet found the most adaptable variety for these adverse conditions, the farmers continue to experience crop failures.

- To which provision(s) of Article 9 of the International Treaty does this measure relate

Art. 9.1

Art. 9.2a

Art. 9.2b

Art. 9.2c

Art. 9.3

Other information, if applicable

- Please indicate which category of the Inventory is most relevant for the proposed measure, and which other categories are also relevant (if any):



No.	Category	Most relevant ²	Also relevant ³
1	Recognition of local and indigenous communities', farmers' contributions to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, such as awards and recognition of custodian/guardian farmers		
2	Financial contributions to support farmers conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA such as contributions to benefit-sharing funds		
3	Approaches to encourage income-generating activities to support farmers' conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA		
4	Catalogues, registries and other forms of documentation of PGRFA and protection of traditional knowledge		
5	In-situ/on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA, such as social and cultural measures, community biodiversity management and conservation sites		
6	Facilitation of farmers' access to a diversity of PGRFA through community seed banks ⁴ , seed networks and other measures improving farmers' choices of a wider diversity of PGRFA.		
7	Participatory approaches to research on PGRFA, including characterization and evaluation, participatory plant breeding and variety selection		
8	Farmers' participation in decision-making at local, national and sub-regional, regional and international levels		
9	Training, capacity development and public awareness creation		
10	Legal measures for the implementation of Farmers' Rights, such as legislative measures related to PGRFA.		
11	Other measures / practices		

- In case you selected 'other measures', would you like to suggest a description of this measure, e.g. as a possible new category? _____

- Objective(s)

a) to develop locally appropriate adaptation strategies for food security by bridging traditional knowledge and science on plant genetic resources and incorporating local perceptions on climate change

² Please select only one category that is most relevant, under which the measure will be listed.

³ Please select one or several categories that may also be relevant (if applicable).

⁴ Including seed houses.



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b) to empower indigenous and smallholder farmers to influence local, national, regional and international food, agriculture, and climate change policies toward realizing the right to food

c) to strengthen the adaptive capacities of smallholder farmer communities and indigenous peoples in plant genetic resources conservation and access and sustainable use, by scaling up successful and/or innovative models

- Target group(s) and numbers of involved and affected farmers⁵

The project was able to reach 75,000 poor farming households from the upland areas of the northwest (Hoa Binh, Son La, and Lao Cai), northeast (Yen Bai) and northern central (Thanh Hoa) consisting of at least 20% ethnic groups engaged in rice and maize production and the central Mekong regions of the country.

- Location(s) and geographical outreach

The project was across five provinces in Vietnam: Son La, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Lao Cai and Yen Bai with counterpart implementation in 19 provinces in Mekong Delta

- Resources used for implementation of the measure/practice

The project cost was around USD420,000 for three years. In addition, institutional partners provided staff time, office spaces, and other supplies and materials as their counterpart.

- How has the measure/practice affected the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture?

The initiative was able to help address genetic erosion and limited access to locally adapted varieties of rice and corn. The IPSHF communities were able to learn concepts and skills to allow for the development and rehabilitation of local and traditional varieties. Subsequently, these were reintegrated and reintroduced into the farming systems. The initiative contributed in improving access to locally adapted seeds and lessened farmers' dependence on for-sale seed sources. The introduction and integration of new techniques likewise lessened the amount of seeds required for production, thus allowing for seeds to be saved.

From the capacity building, farmers also had the opportunity to select and develop varieties that provide high yields, adapted to local conditions, including saline tolerant varieties and which had the characteristics preferred by the IPSHF.

- Please describe the achievements of the measure/ practice so far (including quantification) (max 200 words)

Ethnic communities tend to be disconnected from the larger society missing economic and developmental opportunities. The programme connects them by involving government services and educating farmers to make use of science-based technologies and opportunities in the market. The culture of sharing is strong among ethnic groups, particularly women. Female FFS-graduates, widely recognized for their knowledge and capability to supply quality seeds, reach out to wider number of farms in the communities. This has tremendous impact on their self-consciousness and pride.

⁵ Any classification, e.g. of the types of farmer addressed, may be country-specific.



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Through the mobilization of the public sector, the programme's Participatory Plant Breeding took advantage of science and technology while decision-making and final selection were devolved to farmer groups. This resulted to locally adapted and commercially competitive varieties, diversity and farmers' empowerment. The merits and potentials of participatory methods that link farmer-groups to public sector institutions are solidly demonstrated.⁶

Improvement in capacity translated to improvement of farm productivity: at least a 10% jump from harvests prior to program implementation and hunger periods reduced from as high as 17 weeks annually to a maximum average of seven weeks across the provinces with some areas even claiming zero hunger periods, attributed to the improved access to and availability of appropriate seeds.

- Other national level instruments that are linked to the measure/practice
- Are you aware of any other international agreements or programs that are relevant for this measure/practice?
 - a) Convention of Biological Diversity
 - b) Nagoya Protocol
- Other issues you wish to address, that have not yet been covered, to describe the measure/practice

Lessons learned

- Describe lessons learned which may be relevant for others who wish to do the same or similar measures/practices (max 250 words).

The involvement and acceptance of local authorities in the program was crucial in the realization of program targets. This involvement also allowed us to tap the services and expertise of the various government agencies for the benefit of the IPSHF communities.

The program included indigenous peoples as partners and beneficiaries, but it lacks a clear development framework on IPs that would have allowed us to tailor-fit interventions, or for interventions to be IP-sensitive. Thus, interventions were geared more for farmers in general and the IP dimension was merely consequential as the farmers happened to also be IPs.

Creating venues and opportunities for women's participation was a plus point of the program. Future interventions, however, can contribute further to break the gender divide and social construct or viewpoints on men and women and the power relations that go along with it.

The timeframe of the program is short in consideration of the time required for varietal crosses to become fully stable. A longer timeframe would allow for full development of new varieties within the program period. A longer timeframe would likewise allow a more extensive experiential learning for the farmers.

⁶ Trygve Berg. 2016. Putting Lessons into Practice: Scaling Up People's Biodiversity Management for Food Security. External Evaluation Report (unpublished)



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The role of local institutions cannot be discounted. It cannot be denied that these institutions contributed to the realization and implementation of the program. Direct engagements with community formations like unions (e.g., women, youth, and farmers) and people's committees can be explored in the future for better chances of institutionalization of program.

- What challenges encountered along the way (if applicable) (max 200 words)
- What would you consider conditions for success, if others should seek to carry out such a measure or organize such an activity? (max 100 words)

Supportive policies that allow farmers to continue their traditional practice of seed exchanges contribute to the diversity on-farm. Likewise, allowing farmers unrestricted access to plant genetic resources not only as planting materials but as raw materials for breeding enhances the capacities of farmers to adapt to the challenges brought about by climate change. Further, allowing farmers with the capacity to develop new varieties and produce good quality seeds, sell their seeds at least at the local level, not only contributes to their livelihood but also provides easy access to locally adapted seeds among the members of the community.

Further information

For further information on the project, you may visit:

searice.org.ph

searice.org.ph/putting-lessons-into-practice