



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**



The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda

SEVENTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Kigali, Rwanda, 30 October – 3 November 2017

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Role of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Executive Summary

At its Sixth Session, the Governing Body took note of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Targets 2.5 and 15.6 related to the conservation, access and benefit-sharing of genetic resources, and agreed that the theme of the Seventh Session should be "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Role of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture." This document describes the relationship and linkages between the International Treaty and the 2030 Agenda, in particular in the global effort to conserve and sustainably use plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA), given that the International Treaty's ultimate objective is to contribute to sustainable agriculture and food security.

Guidance sought

The Governing Body is invited to take note of this report, and to consider and adopt a Resolution, taking into account the elements contained in the *Appendix* to this document, as guidance on the contribution of the International Treaty to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

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Other documents can be consulted at <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/888771/>*



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I. Introduction

1. Adopted in September 2015 by the 193 Member States of the United Nations, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), presents a set of new global objectives that shape national development plans and guide the actions of the international community until 2030. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and SDGs are relevant to all countries and apply to each and every one of them.
2. In launching the 2030 Agenda, as a guiding principle, countries pledged that no one would be left behind in the collective effort to achieve it. There is a particularly strong focus on rural poor people who, despite being the most vulnerable who need to be prioritized in sustainable development, are also seen as critical agents of change and important contributors to its achievement.
3. From ending poverty and hunger to responding to climate change and sustaining natural resources, food and agriculture lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, significant importance is placed on the role played by agricultural biodiversity, since this is critical to the sustainable production of nutritious and abundant food and to adapting agriculture to global challenges, such as climate change and growing populations.
4. At its Sixth Session held in October 2015, the Governing Body took note of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, in particular Targets 2.5 and 15.6 related to the conservation, access and benefit-sharing of genetic resources.¹ It also requested the Secretary to continue collaboration with other relevant conventions and international organizations for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular the SDGs and targets that interface with the International Treaty's provision.² As a result, the Governing Body agreed that the theme of the Seventh Session should be *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Role of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.³
5. This document describes the relationship and linkages between the International Treaty and the 2030 Agenda, in particular in the global effort to conserve and sustainably use plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA), given that the Treaty's ultimate objective is to contribute to sustainable agriculture and food security.

II. 2030 Agenda and Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

6. In adopting the SDGs, Members of the United Nations have set out a highly ambitious and transformational vision, which envisages a world free of poverty and hunger by 2030, and one in which all life can thrive. This will require countries to develop sustainable food systems and new ways of managing natural resources, including genetic diversity, in order to build a viable future for humankind. Crop diversity, food security and climate change will be closely linked in diverse ways. Today, the global community is facing a triple challenge – that of countering the loss of crop diversity and using it more effectively to achieve food security, while adapting to climate change.
7. Agricultural biodiversity will be instrumental to coping with the challenges to be addressed in the coming decades. The sustainable management of agricultural biodiversity contributes to the diversification of agricultural systems, and to making national food and agriculture sectors more sustainable, including through economic growth, environmental protection and improved rural livelihoods.

¹ GB Resolution 10/2015 Cooperation with Other International Bodies and Organizations

² Ibid

³ GB Resolution 13/2015 Multi-Year Programme of Work of the International Treaty (2016-2025)

8. Plant products account for more than 80 percent of the human diet, so plant genetic resources for food and agriculture are key building blocks for global food security. Farmers and breeders have always adapted crops to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions by selecting and breeding crop varieties. Crop improvement accounts for a major part of the world's increase in agricultural productivity in the past decades. The use of genetic diversity also enables farmers to produce crops that are adapted to biotic and abiotic stresses, and which are more nutritious and have better qualities.

9. Crops have experienced climate change before, but never on the scale and magnitude that is anticipated in the coming decades, at a time when it is imperative to end hunger and rural poverty by 2030. Fundamental changes will be needed in the strategies to safeguard, breed and exchange PGRFA in order to meet the SDGs. A wide range of crop genetic material will need to be mobilized and made available within and throughout countries, and farmers and breeders will require the means and support to adapt crops to new and radically different conditions.

10. The crops that feed the world have been domesticated for millennia and PGRFA will require continued human intervention in their development. The degree of countries' dependence on crop genetic diversity originating from outside their borders is around 70 percent as a global average, and the trend is that interdependence will increase throughout the twenty-first century. Increased and continuous exchange of crop genetic material will be crucial for agricultural research and the breeding of adapted crop varieties. PGRFA are therefore a common concern for all countries.

III. Policy Contribution and Main Provisions of the International Treaty

11. Given the high level of interdependency on crop genetic resources and the importance of such resources for research and food security, governments agreed on a common set of exchange rules and mechanisms and included them in a treaty that was adopted by the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in November 2001.

12. **The objectives of the International Treaty**, as stipulated in its **Article 1**, are the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), for sustainable agriculture and food security. In order to achieve these objectives, the International Treaty provides a governance framework, operational mechanism and policy regarding the sustainable management of PGRFA. It also offers an intergovernmental and multistakeholder forum for policy dialogue on issues concerning PGRFA.

13. Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty provide guidance to countries regarding measures and activities to be undertaken to promote the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. An important component of **Article 5 – Conservation, Exploration, Collection, Characterization, Evaluation and Documentation of PGRFA** – is the characterization and evaluation of crops and their potentially useful traits that would be needed for the development of new crop varieties. The article also highlights the importance of adopting a complementary approach between in situ and ex situ conservation. **Article 6 – Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources** – particularly focuses on the importance of maintaining diverse farming systems and on implementing participatory approaches to plant breeding. It also promotes on-farm management of crop diversity, in order to reduce genetic erosion and increase food production in a sustainable manner.

14. Considered to be the core mechanism of the International Treaty, **the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (Multilateral System)** was established by **Articles 10 to 13**. The Multilateral System provides a transparent and reliable framework for the exchange of crop genetic resources listed in Annex I of the International Treaty, established according to the criteria of food security and interdependence. Under the Multilateral System, Contracting Parties grant each other

facilitated access to their PGRFA, while users of plant genetic material from the Multilateral System are encouraged to share their benefits with the Multilateral System. Such benefits should primarily flow to farmers in developing countries who promote the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. Within the International Treaty, several types of benefit-sharing are covered, including the sharing of monetary and other benefits from commercialization, the exchange of information, access to and transfer of technology and capacity-building.

15. In order to support the effort to conserve and sustainably use PGRFA, the International Treaty encourages international cooperation among its Contracting Parties, as appropriate, in addition to their national efforts, as provided in **Article 7 – National Commitments and International Cooperation**. In this regard, particular attention is paid by **Article 8 – Technical Assistance** – to the provision of technical assistance to developing countries, so as to facilitate their implementation of the International Treaty. In addition, **Article 18 – Financial Resources** – lays the foundations for a strategy to facilitate the mobilization of funds for implementation of the International Treaty and the realization of its objectives, supporting Contracting Parties in their effort to put relevant national measures into practice.

16. A distinctive feature of the International Treaty is that in **Article 9 – Farmers’ Rights** – it formally recognizes the enormous contribution of local and indigenous communities and farmers around the world in conserving, improving and making available crop genetic resources. Through this acknowledgement, the International Treaty aims to support farmers in managing and conserving crop diversity on their farms. It enjoins Contracting Parties to take measures to ensure that farmers who have been conserving and further developing PGRFA receive due recognition and financial support with which to continue their valuable work. These include measures for protecting traditional knowledge relevant to crop diversity, the right to participate in sharing benefits that may arise from using crop genetic material, and the right to participate in relevant national decision-making processes.

IV. Contributions of the International Treaty to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

17. The International Treaty, through its Preamble, recognizes that the PGRFA management is at the intersection between food security, agriculture and the environment, and that there should be synergies across sectors. The International Treaty hence provides an effective policy response to the global challenges of crop diversity loss, the need for sustainable food production and climate change adaptation. In this sense, the Treaty was conceived as a multilateral tool for sustainable development and through its implementation Contracting Parties and Treaty stakeholders are making contributions to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

18. Since it became operational in 2006, the Treaty’s Multilateral System has distributed over 4.2 million samples of the genetic material to public and private breeders, farmer organizations and other development actors across the world, who are working to develop and ensure the availability of the crop varieties needed to reduce the vulnerability of poor farmers, increase food security and enable crops adapt to climate change. In order to meet Agenda 2030, the germplasm within the global gene pool of the International Treaty will need to be further exploited,⁴ and the means and capacities of PGRFA users, especially in developing countries, will have to be strengthened to maximize the contributions of the Multilateral System to sustainable development. The provision of information about PGRFA facilitates the work of curators and users of genetic diversity. The further development of the Global Information System on PGRFA is therefore an essential supporting element to the

⁴ There are more than 1.8 million genetic samples currently available under the Multilateral System.

operation of the Multilateral System, as the value of plant genetic resources is in the information that is conveyed to breeders and farmers.

19. The Treaty Contracting Parties are increasingly taking steps to enhance synergies across sectors in the national implementation of the International Treaty. PGRFA is being mainstreamed into national planning in a cross-cutting manner. A large number of Contracting Parties have, in recent years, integrated PGRFA considerations into National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans. Other countries recognize the need to strengthen breeding strategies in their national strategies to confront climate change. There is potential to improve funding opportunities for Treaty implementation if Treaty stakeholders make the case at the national level of the importance of PGRFA as well as the interlinkages with development challenges, such as climate change, agricultural development, environment and biodiversity, and nutrition. The current process to update the Funding Strategy, with its focus on strengthening interlinkages and synergies between different elements of the Funding Strategy, can further support the Contracting Parties efforts to integrate PGRFA in national strategies and actions for sustainable development.

20. The implementation of the Agenda 2030 focuses in particular on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind, and is people-centred, gender-sensitive, and respects human rights. There are specific contributions of the International Treaty to support the livelihoods of the most vulnerable. Managing and sustainably deploying plant genetic diversity is one of the key – and often the very few – options available to vulnerable farmers in their efforts to increase resilience and secure livelihoods. Increased attention and support are needed if farmers are to reap the full benefits of genetic diversity, and the key role of women in managing biodiversity needs to be further recognized and strengthened. The implementation of Farmers' Rights supports the efforts of many Contracting Parties to recognize the contributions of local and indigenous communities and farmers to sustainable development and their specific needs. The Multilateral System offers huge opportunities for introducing new diversity to respond to the needs of vulnerable farmers. The Benefit-sharing Fund has a strong focus in supporting vulnerable farming communities.

21. Given the above, the effective implementation of the International Treaty contributes to several SDGs, particularly Goals 2 and 15, but also indirectly to others such as 1, 12, 13, and 17.5 The 2030 Agenda is also closely related to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, to which the work of the International Treaty is directly relevant, and a number of Aichi Targets have been integrated within SDG 2, 14 and 15.

22. There are two Targets that directly address the three objectives of the International Treaty:

- Target 2.5: By 2020, maintain genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants, farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed;

⁵ Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and half biodiversity loss

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

- Target 15.6: Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to genetic resources, as internationally agreed.

23. The 2030 Agenda puts in place a global reporting and review mechanism that includes inputs at local, national and regional levels and culminates in the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), a new platform convened under the auspices of the President of Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for a global level review. The United Nations Secretary General submits its report on progress for the HLPF review, to which FAO provides relevant inputs.

24. A global indicator framework, comprising 230 indicators, was agreed at the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) in March 2016 as a “practical starting point” to monitor the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda. Each global SDG indicator has been assigned a “custodian” UN agency responsible for collecting data from national sources, providing the storyline for the annual global SDG progress report to the HLPF, providing and updating the indicator documentation, working on further methodological development, and contributing to statistical capacity building. In doing so, the custodian agency will cooperate with other relevant contributing agencies.

25. FAO is proposed as a custodian UN agency for 21 SDG indicators across SDGs 2, 5, 6, 12, 14 and 15, including those for SDG Target 2.5, and a contributing agency for six more. The indicator 2.5.1 refers to the “number of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in either medium or long-term conservation facilities”, and the data for plant genetic resources are based on the country reports submitted to FAO through monitoring the implementation of the Second Global Plan of Action for PGRFA, which is a Supporting Component of the Treaty.

26. In the case of SDG Target 15.6, the indicator is as follows:

- Indicator 15.6.1: Number of countries that have adopted legislative, administrative and policy frameworks to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

27. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is the custodian agency for this indicator, with the Secretariat of the International Treaty, through FAO, acting as a contributing agency. Since 2016, the Secretariat has been providing necessary information and data on this indicator related to the implementation of the International Treaty. The source of information for the data is the report submitted by each Contracting Party on the measures it has taken to implement its obligations under the International Treaty, pursuant to the Procedures and Operational Mechanisms to Promote Compliance and Address Issues of Non-Compliance.

V. Conclusion

28. Governments set the ambitious, transformative and multidimensional agenda to be achieved by 2030, and agreed on a global indicator framework for their own accountability towards achievement. In order to meet the targets and reach the agreed goals, relevant international commitments should be backed by the necessary national measures. Strong country ownership is one of the key features of the 2030 Agenda throughout its process, including implementation of relevant policies and programmes.

29. Given the relevant linkages identified between the International Treaty and the 2030 Agenda, Contracting Parties can advance towards the relevant Goals and Targets in the 2030 Agenda, and especially to achieve Targets 2.5 and 15.6 by fully implementing the International Treaty. Compliance with the relevant provisions of the International Treaty, including notification of material in the Multilateral System, providing necessary and adequate resources in financial as well as technical assistance, are among their general obligations as Contracting Parties.

30. The complex and interconnected nature of the SDGs also calls for an integrated and interlinked approach to achievement, and the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the importance of partnerships in this regard. Revitalized global partnership is the key means of implementation to meet the SDGs. In order to facilitate Contracting Parties' efforts to conserve and sustainably use PGRFA, the International Treaty provides the necessary framework and opportunities for international cooperation, so as to mobilize financial resources, develop and transfer technology and build capacities.

VI. Guidance Sought

31. The Governing Body is invited to take note of this report, and to consider and adopt a Resolution, taking into account the elements contained in the *Appendix* to this document, as guidance on the contribution of the International Treaty to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Appendix

DRAFT RESOLUTION XX/2017

CONTRIBUTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE TO THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

THE GOVERNING BODY,

Recognizing that plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) are essential for countries to ensure food security, promote sustainable agriculture and adapt to climate change;

Reaffirming the important role of the International Treaty in providing an effective governance framework for the management and exchange of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture,

Emphasizing that the effective implementation of the International Treaty contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG Targets 2.5 and 15.6, relating to conservation, and access and benefit-sharing of plant genetic resources,

- 1) **Calls upon** Contracting Parties to reaffirm their commitments and strengthen their efforts to fully implement the International Treaty in order to achieve sustainable agriculture and food security;
- 2) **Emphasizes** the need to focus in particular on the needs of the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind in the implementation of the International Treaty in order to contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda;
- 3) **Encourages** Contracting Parties to mainstream the implementation of the International Treaty into their national programmes related to the 2030 Agenda;
- 4) **Emphasizes** that the Contracting Parties' reports under the Compliance Procedures on the implementation of their obligations under the International Treaty provide a useful source of information to assess progress in the implementation of access and benefit-sharing for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA), and **encourages** Contracting Parties to submit such national reports to inform on their progress towards the achievement of Target 15.6;
- 5) **Urges** Contracting Parties to make all possible efforts to ensure the long-term conservation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture by 2020, as called for in SDG Target 2.5, and **emphasizes** that efforts to maintain plant genetic diversity, both *ex situ* and *in situ*, should continue to be a priority after 2020;
- 6) **Encourages** non-Contracting Party countries to become members of the International Treaty, so as to strengthen the efforts of the international community to achieve the SDG targets related to PGRFA;
- 7) **Requests** the Secretary to continue raising awareness in relevant international fora of the important contribution of the International Treaty to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and to support Contracting Parties, upon request and subject to the availability of resources, in their efforts to mainstream International Treaty implementation into national programmes and strategies relevant to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs;

- 8) **Requests** the Secretary to continue making available information provided by Contracting Parties and others to be used in the monitoring process on the achievement of Target 15.6, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is the lead UN agency for monitoring this target;
- 9) **Decides** to take stock, at its Ninth Session in 2021, of progress made in the achievement of SDGs 2 and 15, in particular targets related to PGRFA;
- 10) **Requests** the Secretary to keep Contracting Parties regularly informed of relevant developments within the International Treaty in support of the achievement of the SDGs, through updates to the Bureau and the relevant intersessional committees;
- 11) **Calls upon** relevant international organizations to provide support and contributions to implementation of the International Treaty, so as to achieve SDGs that are relevant to the management of PGRFA;
- 12) **Calls upon** other stakeholder in the International Treaty community, in particular civil society organizations, farmers and the seed industry, to further mobilize the means, and develop the partnerships necessary to achieve the SDG targets related to PGRFA;
- 13) **Calls upon** donors to support implementation of the Funding Strategy of the International Treaty as part of their commitments to mobilize the necessary financial resources to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.