



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



The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda

EIGHTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Italy, 11 – 16 November 2019

Report of the Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report provides a summary of intersessional processes and activities that the Secretary has overseen since the last Session of the Governing Body, as well as policy and operational developments of relevance to the preparation of the Eighth Session. It also contains a short update on the implementation of the communication strategy and provides information on the reference note prepared for the review of subsidiary bodies and intersessional processes. Additionally, the document provides information on other activities undertaken at the request of the Bureau of this Eighth Session of the Governing Body, as well as other recent developments related to its functions.

2. With regard to financial aspects, the report provides an overview of issues and trends in the finances of the International Treaty during the biennium, while the details of the current state of the finances are provided in the documents under Agenda Item 17.

II. MEMBERSHIP OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY

3. Since the Seventh Session of the Governing Body, the Secretary has intensified his efforts to increase the membership of the International Treaty, by encouraging and providing information to non-Contracting Parties on the importance of joining the Treaty. During the biennium, two additional countries have joined the International Treaty, Mongolia for whom it entered into force on 2 December 2018, and for Georgia on 7 August 2019.

4. The Secretary also facilitated the dispatch of customised letters by the FAO Director-General to several non-Contracting Parties, further encouraging them to join the International Treaty.

5. The Secretary worked closely with relevant government officials and departments in non-Contracting Parties to support national consultations workshops and awareness-raising events. He also collaborated with the FAO Country Offices to highlight the crucial role of the International Treaty through dedicated meetings and through the provision of technical advice and customized

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documentation. Among those countries are Botswana, China, Colombia, Mexico Nigeria, The Russian Federation and South Africa, to name a few.¹

III. UPDATE ON INTERSESSIONAL MEETINGS, MAJOR PROCESSES AND RELEVANT ACTIVITIES

Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing

6. Following the guidance of the Governing Body, the Secretary continued prioritising the support to the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group to Enhance the Functioning of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (Working Group). The support of the process included the facilitation of a number of informal consultations in various regions.

7. The Secretary also continued supporting the daily operations of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing and considers it of utmost importance to continue maintaining the Multilateral System as an ongoing operational mechanism. The need to guarantee essential maintenance functions for the Multilateral System, is reflected in document, IT/GB-8/19/17, *Draft Work Programme and Budget for the 2020-2021 Biennium*.

8. The Secretary has strengthened the support to collections held under Article 15 of the International Treaty, including the coconut collections in Papua New Guinea and Ivory Coast, and by addressing developments with the collection hosted by the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE). Document, IT/GB-8/19/15.4/2, *Reports from Institutions that have Concluded Agreements with the Governing Body under Article 15 of the International Treaty*, contains information on the initiatives that the Secretary has taken in the exercise of his responsibilities under the agreements under Article 15.

9. The Secretary wishes to highlight the collaboration of the Government of Costa Rica, which has committed to provide short-term support to CATIE so that the collection could continue being available to the global community, while a range of options are being explored for the orderly maintenance of the collection in accordance with the terms and conditions of the International Treaty.

Funding Strategy

10. During the biennium, there has also been considerable progress in updating the Funding Strategy. The *Ad Hoc* Advisory Committee on the Funding Strategy was reconvened and held two meetings during the biennium. The Secretary supported the work of the Co-Chairs of the Committee during these two meetings and also enabled the liaison between the Committee and the Working Group on the Enhancement of the Multilateral System, including by holding one of their meetings back-to-back in March 2018 and organizing a special event on the Funding Strategy at that time.

Global Information System

11. The Secretary has also given priority to implementation of the Programme of Work on the Global Information System (GLIS), including through the facilitation of a meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee. In parallel with the maintenance of the Multilateral System, the Secretary wishes to underscore the need to continue implementing the GLIS in accordance with the guidance by the Governing Body as expressed in the GLIS Vision and Programme of Work, so to maintain and further develop the GLIS as another operational mechanism of the International Treaty.

12. With generous support from the Government of Germany, the Secretary launched the implementation of a three-year project involving a package of activities on capacity strengthening for developing countries, focused on the GLIS, particularly in the Near East and the Africa Regions.

¹ Information and customized reports have also been prepared during the biennium for Belarus, Brunei, Singapore, Ukraine, Bahamas, Uzbekistan, Bahrain, Thailand and Somalia, among others.

Documentation

13. A large number of meetings were held during the biennium, for which the Secretariat produced and published over 180 meeting documents. Of those 180 documents, 120 were prepared for 18 formal meetings, comprising: 50 Working documents; 46 Information documents; 12 Reports; 12 other documents. The other documents were for preparatory meetings, including of the Friends of the Co-Chairs of the Working Group and the Standing Group of Legal Experts. For the current session of the Governing Body, 54 documents are submitted to the Governing Body for consideration, of which 32 are working documents that are translated in FAO's official languages.

IV. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

14. In the course of the biennium, the Secretary put forward a proposal to the Bureau for the initiation of a Capacity Development Strategy in order to introduce a programmatic approach. Based on feedback provided by the Bureau, the Secretary has prepared a draft framework for the possible development of the Strategy in the next biennium, as contained in document, IT/GB-8/19/6.2, *Draft Framework for a Capacity Development Strategy for the International Treaty towards a Programmatic Approach*. In developing such framework, the Secretary has integrated the relevant inputs received from the Compliance Committee and further reflected other elements and experiences derived from the training activities organized in 2018-19 in collaboration with FAO offices and other organizations.

15. The consideration by the Governing Body of a participatory process for elaborating the capacity development strategy, would lead to the development of a strategy that promotes closer coordination and interactions with partner organizations, and help the National Focal Points and key partners participate more actively in, and benefit from, capacity development opportunities.

V. UPDATE ON INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

16. During the biennium, the Secretary has improved internal communication activities and expanded collaboration with external organizations and media outlets. The summary of the major activities undertaken during recent months is contained in document, IT/GB-8/19/6/Inf.1, *Implementation of the Communication Strategy of the International Treaty*.

17. The Secretary has regularly organized briefing sessions for permanent representatives based in Rome, the latest one on 23 October 2019, with a special focus on the outcomes of the intersessional processes and the preparations for the Eighth Session of the Governing Body.

18. This year, 29 June marked the 15th anniversary of the entry into force of the International Treaty, which the Governing Body will celebrate at this Session with dedicated discussion under Agenda Item 7. These celebrations help recall the progress so far made by the International Treaty and discuss what may be needed for the continued growth of the International Treaty in both its dimensions, i.e. the international forum where PGRFA issues are discussed and incorporated into global policy, as well as the instrument that provides concrete services to the PGRFA community.²

19. In various processes, the Secretary has emphasized the need to convey the benefits and functions of the International Treaty to a broader audience, in collaboration with other Biodiversity-related Conventions and relevant stakeholders in the context of the future Global Biodiversity Framework.

VI. ORGANIZATION OF FUTURE WORK

20. At its first meeting, the Bureau agreed that the Secretary prepare an information note on subsidiary bodies and intersessional processes of the Governing Body. The Bureau welcomed the note

² See document, IT/GB-8/19/7, *Celebrating the 15th Anniversary of the International Treaty*.

at its second meeting and requested the Secretary to update it as an information document for this Session. The updated note is contained in document, IT/GB-8/19/16.2/Inf.1, *Reference note on subsidiary bodies and intersessional processes*.

21. The document provides information on the subsidiary bodies and intersessional processes, established or instituted by the Governing Body since its First Session in 2006. It also reviews the general provisions on subsidiary bodies of the Governing Body and the Rules of Procedures of the Governing Body, as well as other relevant provisions establishing permanent or standing subsidiary bodies.

22. In section VI of the document, the Secretary has advanced a number of propositions for the possible review of subsidiary bodies and intersessional processes by the Governing Body, such as promoting coordination and non-duplication among subsidiary body functions, enhancing effectiveness and efficiency of subsidiary body processes and promoting certainty and consistency in membership and transparency regarding participation. The Secretary has also provided elements for the possible review, including the possible range of measures and the consideration that such a review could be gradual and in phases.

VII. FINANCIAL UPDATE

23. The Secretary has prepared the document, IT/GB-8/19/17.2 Add.1, *Financial Report of the Work Programme and Budget for the 2018-2019 Biennium*. It provides an overview of the status of the Treaty's finances as at 31 July 2019, together with information that may be pertinent when considering future needs resulting from growth of the Treaty. The Secretary remains committed to increasing transparency and accountability in the use of resources within the framework of the Financial Rules of the Treaty and the financial system of FAO. In the spirit of increased transparency and accountability, the document contains significantly more details than previous reports.

24. The document covers, amongst others, the following subjects:

- a. Funding of the Core Administrative Budget, from both the FAO contribution and voluntary contributions from Contracting Parties;
- b. Receipt of contributions from Contracting Parties;
- c. Treaty core revenue;
- d. Expenditures under the Core Administrative Budget;
- e. The Working Capital Reserve;
- f. The Third Party Beneficiary Operational Reserve.

25. The provisional sum made available to the Treaty from FAO for the 2018-19 budget was revised down to US\$1.97 million from the \$2 million originally envisaged. In accordance with Financial Rule 8.2, the Secretariat publishes the certified financial statement of expenditures online at the end of each financial year. These statements contain detailed information on the status of the Core Administrative Budget, including a comparative analysis with previous years.

26. As of 31 July 2019, Contracting Parties (including the European Commission) had contributed \$4.18 million, including contributions to the Working Capital Reserve. This figure represents approximately 72 per cent of the contributions expected from Contracting Parties.

27. At the Seventh Session of the Governing Body, the Secretary informed Contracting Parties of the significant depletion of resources in the Special Fund to Support the Participation of Developing Countries in Treaty meetings, and called for contributions. The generosity of very few Contracting Parties has enabled the participation of Developing Countries at the inter-sessional meetings during the current biennium and at this Eighth Session of the Governing Body. However, the situation is once more, that in the absence of additional contributions, the Fund will not be able to provide travel support to ensure the participation of developing countries in the subsidiary bodies of the Governing Body in the forthcoming 2020-2021 biennium.

VIII. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

28. The Governing Body is invited to take note of the information and updates provided, and to provide any guidance it considers appropriate on the range of relevant issues raised in this document.