



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



The International Treaty
**ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

Item 15.1 of the Provisional Agenda

EIGHTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Rome, 11 – 16 November 2019

**Cooperation with the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and
Agriculture**

Executive Summary

This document, prepared jointly by the Secretariats of the International Treaty and the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Commission), provides a brief update on the cooperation between the Secretariats of the International Treaty and the Commission.

Guidance Sought

The Governing Body is invited to take note of the information contained in this document and to provide further guidance regarding cooperation with the Commission, taking into account the elements for a possible Resolution provided in the Appendix to this document.

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Table of Contents

		Paragraphs
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	BACKGROUND	2 – 4
III.	COLLABORATION SINCE THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY	5 – 27
	<i>(a) Preparation of The Third Report on the State of the World’s Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture</i>	<i>5 – 6</i>
	<i>(b) Implementation and monitoring of the Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture</i>	<i>7 – 11</i>
	<i>(c) Access and Benefit-sharing</i>	<i>12 – 15</i>
	<i>(d) Global Information System of the Treaty and the World Information and Early Warning System on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (WIEWS) ..</i>	<i>16 – 23</i>
	<i>(e) Global targets and indicators</i>	<i>24 – 25</i>
	<i>(f) Digital sequence information</i>	<i>26 – 27</i>
IV.	GUIDANCE SOUGHT.....	28
<i>Appendix:</i>	Draft Resolution **/2019: Cooperation with the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture	

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Governing Body and the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Commission) have regularly stressed the importance of their close cooperation. This document, prepared jointly by the Secretariats of the International Treaty and the Commission, provides a brief update on the status of cooperation between the two Secretariats in response to the requests of their governing bodies. In addition, the document updates the Governing Body on outcomes of the Commission's last session relevant to the cooperation between the Treaty and the Commission. The document, *Report from the Secretariat of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, including on activities related to the Supporting Components of the International Treaty* (IT/GB-8/19/15.1/Inf.1) provides more detailed information on relevant work of the Commission.

II. BACKGROUND

2. At its Seventh Session, the Governing Body adopted Resolution 11/2017 on cooperation with the Commission. It welcomed the establishment of the new FAO Department on Climate, Biodiversity, Land and Water that hosts the Secretariats of the Commission and the International Treaty and noted that this would strengthen collaboration between the International Treaty and the Commission and allow for greater coordination and coherence between them. The Governing Body requested the Secretary to continue collaborating with the Secretary of the Commission in multiple areas that are addressed in this document. The Governing Body also agreed to keep the matter of the functional division of tasks and activities between the Governing Body and the Commission under review and requested the Secretary to regularly report any relevant developments in the cooperation with the Commission.

3. The Commission, at its Seventeenth Regular Session held from 18 to 22 February 2019, welcomed Resolution 11/2017 of the Governing Body and the joint activities of the Secretariats of the Commission and the International Treaty. It echoed the Governing Body's requests for collaboration in multiple areas and requested, in addition, collaboration between the Secretaries with regard to other initiatives and activities, including:

- (i) the implementation of the Genebank Standards for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture¹, including through capacity-building;²
- (ii) the development of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;³
- (iii) the organization of international symposia on *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives and wild food plants and on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces;^{4,5}
- (iv) the dissemination of the Commission's report on *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture*;⁶

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3704e.pdf>

² CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 103(d)

³ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 103(g)

⁴ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 62.

⁵ Although the Commission originally requested that two separate symposia be held, they have been merged in the meanwhile in view of the thematic synergies and the need to optimize the use of resources and time and to sustain interest and momentum. The international symposium on *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of PGRFA is expected to take place during the first half of 2020.

⁶ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 40. The report on *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture* is available on the Commission's Web site at: <http://www.fao.org/cgrfa/topics/biodiversity/en/>

- (v) the support of countries to strengthen their crop improvement capacity;⁷
- (vi) the preparation of in-depth case studies on the effects of seed policies, laws and regulations on
 - (a) on-farm diversity of PGRFA, (b) smallholders' access to sufficient, affordable, diversified and locally adapted PGRFA, including farmers' varieties/landraces and (c) food security and nutrition under the different seed systems.⁸

III. COLLABORATION SINCE THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

(a) Preparation of The Third Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

4. The Secretariat of the International Treaty attended an expert consultation convened by FAO from 29 November to 1 December 2017 on *Reporting on the State of Plant Genetic Resources*. The objective of the workshop was to identify ways for enhancing quality and coverage of data reporting on the state of PGRFA under the ongoing monitoring frameworks for the implementation of the Second Global Plan of Action (GPA) and for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 2.5. During the reporting period, FAO also presented WIEWS, including the online reporting tool, at regional workshops of the International Treaty (see paragraph 10 below).

5. The Commission, at its last Session, endorsed a two-tiered approach for the preparation of *The Third Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (Third Report). National Focal Points for PGRFA (NFPs) should report through the WIEWS reporting tool between January and December 2020 on the implementation of the Second GPA for the period of July 2014 to December 2019. In addition, NFPs should provide for the preparation of the Third Report a summative narrative of the progress made (between January 2012 and December 2019) and the remaining gaps and constraints. Countries that provided information through the Online Reporting System of the Treaty should be able to cross-reference this information in the summative narrative to avoid duplicative reporting.⁹

(b) Implementation and monitoring of the Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Voluntary Guidelines for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Farmers' Varieties/Landraces

6. The Secretariat of the International Treaty provided inputs for the finalization of the draft voluntary guidelines for the conservation and sustainable use of farmers' varieties/landraces, which the Commission endorsed at its last session.¹⁰ The guidelines will be published before the end of 2019.

In situ conservation and on-farm management of PGRFA

7. The Secretariats continued to cooperate on *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of PGRFA. The Commission, at its last session, requested them to collaborate in the organization of international symposia on (i) *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives and wild food plants and (ii) on-farm management and development of farmers' varieties/landraces. The Secretariat of the Commission participated in the International Treaty's informal expert meeting on the implementation

⁷ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 60.

⁸ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 67.

⁹ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 69.

¹⁰ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 64.

of the sustainable use of PGRFA and the joint programme on biodiversity in agriculture held from 23 to 25 May 2018 in Valenzano, Italy.

8. The Secretariat of the International Treaty collaborated with FAO and Bioversity International in the informal dialogue *Building Linkages to Strengthen On-Farm Management of Farmer's Varieties/Landraces: Community Seed Banks*, which preceded the Ninth Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

*World Information and Early Warning System on Plant Genetic Resources
for Food and Agriculture*

9. The Commission and the Governing Body have stressed the need for the Global Information System of the International Treaty (GLIS) and WIEWS to collaborate.¹¹ The Treaty Secretariat made significant use of data collected through WIEWS from countries on their implementation of the Second GPA, including for the elaboration of options for setting targets for the overall Funding Strategy and the Benefit-sharing Fund.

10. The WIEWS reporting tool used by the Commission's National Focal Points for PGRFA to report online on the implementation of the Second GPA was presented at several regional workshops organized by the Treaty Secretariat. These workshops served the purpose (i) to enhance the capacity of Treaty National Focal Points to prepare and submit the national reports on the implementation of the International Treaty; (ii) to provide an overview on the major areas of work and a brief update on the status of intersessional processes; (iii) to facilitate discussion and coordination on ongoing policy and operational processes under the International Treaty. The organization of joint training events at regional level and the provision of assistance for the elaboration of national reports on PGRFA monitoring is one of the areas identified for further collaboration in the next biennia, subject to the availability of resources, also in view of the forthcoming preparation of the Third Report.

(c) Access and Benefit-sharing

11. The Secretariat of the Commission organized, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the International Treaty and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat, an *International Workshop on Access and Benefit-sharing for Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, which was held in Rome, Italy, from 10 to 12 January 2018. The Workshop provided outputs for subsequent elaboration into non-prescriptive explanatory notes describing, within the context of the *Elements to Facilitate Domestic Implementation of Access and Benefit-sharing for Different Subsectors of Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (ABS Elements), the distinctive features and specific practices of different subsectors of GRFA.¹² The outputs of the Workshop as well as the Proceedings are available on the Commission's Web site.¹³

12. The outputs of the Workshop and draft explanatory notes were shared with the Team of Technical and Legal Experts on Access and Benefit-sharing (ABS Expert Team), for its consideration. The Secretariat of the International Treaty participated, as an observer, in the Fourth Session of the ABS Expert Team, held in October 2018. The Secretariat of the International Treaty also participated in the Ninth Session of the Commission's Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which discussed, *inter alia*, explanatory notes to the ABS Elements related to PGRFA.

¹¹ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 66; Resolution 11/2017, paragraph 8(iv). The report on *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture* is available on the Commission's Web site at: <http://www.fao.org/cgrfa/topics/biodiversity/en/>

¹² CGRFA-16/17/Report, paragraph 94; Resolution 11/2017, paragraph 6.

¹³ See CGRFA-17/19/3.2/Inf.3; [Proceedings of the International Workshop on Access and Benefit-Sharing for Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture](#) (FAO, 2018).

13. During the reporting period, the Secretary of the International Treaty exchanged information with the Commission at regular intervals on the process of enhancing the Multilateral System, as requested by the Governing Body and the Commission.¹⁴ At the Seventeenth Session of the Commission, the Secretary of the International Treaty informed of major outcomes of the Governing Body's Seventh session, including the progress made by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group to Enhance the Functioning of the Multilateral System.¹⁵

14. The Commission, at its last session, welcomed the explanatory notes and encouraged Members to consider and, as appropriate, make use of them.¹⁶ In July 2019, the ABS Elements were re-issued with the explanatory notes,¹⁷ as requested by the Commission.¹⁸ The publication will be disseminated widely, including to the National Focal Points of the International Treaty.

(d) Global Information System of the Treaty and the World Information and Early Warning System on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (WIEWS)

15. The Commission and the Governing Body have stressed the need to promote coherence in the development and implementation of GLIS and WIEWS.

16. The Governing Body, at its last Session, requested the Secretary to intensify efforts to use the Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) system as a central element of the GLIS, linking existing information systems and, thereby, providing pointers from GLIS to PGRFA-related information and hence avoid duplication of existing systems.¹⁹ The Governing Body also requested the Secretary to develop a detailed Master Plan describing prioritized desired functionalities of the GLIS, and requested the Secretary to link the GLIS and provide pointers to the following existing systems:

- (i) PGRFA in *ex situ* collections documented in Genesys and FAO WIEWS;
- (ii) on-farm management of PGRFA in the monitoring system of the Second GPA;
- (iii) open research data from DivSeek contributions.²⁰

17. At its third meeting in 2018, the Scientific Advisory Committee on the Global Information System of Article 17 of the International Treaty recalled that the Vision for GLIS is that it integrates and augments existing information systems, and builds upon the work of existing networks, projects and initiatives. It advised the Secretary to articulate GLIS primarily as a system of pointers, to continue the collaboration with, *inter alia*, WIEWS and to facilitate the mutual exchange of information while avoiding duplication of efforts.²¹

18. At the same meeting, the Committee developed the Master Plan for the GLIS Portal. Moreover, the Committee took note of the progress in the development of WIEWS. The Committee advised the Secretary to complete the connection of WIEWS and GLIS in due time and underlined the value of the on-farm information contained in WIEWS. It also requested a joint assessment of possible

¹⁴ CGRFA-16/17/Report, paragraph 25(xvi); Resolution 11/2017, paragraph 5.

¹⁵ CGRFA-17/19/14/Inf.5, paragraphs 5–33.

¹⁶ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 16

¹⁷ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca5088en/ca5088en.pdf>

¹⁸ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 16.

¹⁹ Resolution 5/2017, paragraph 2.

²⁰ Resolution 5/2017, paragraph 8 (v); CGRFA-16/17/Report, paragraph 93

²¹ IT/GB-8/19/10/Inf.1, paragraph 9

overlaps with data available in other systems. It also advised the Secretary to explicitly articulate overlaps and uniqueness among accessions and data available in Genesys and WIEWS.²²

19. In the second semester of 2019, the Secretary of the International Treaty will be implementing the new project ‘*Development of a globally agreed list of descriptors for in situ Crop Wild Relatives documentation*’.²³ The one-year project presents an opportunity for further collaboration with FAO and WIEWS and contribute to the implementation of Articles 17 and 5 of the International Treaty.

20. The Commission, at its last Session, requested FAO to continue developing the WIEWS portal and strengthening cooperation with GLIS and Genesys to avoid duplication of efforts. In addition, it requested a report clarifying the specific roles of these databases for the next session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture to streamline country reporting to the Commission and the International Treaty.²⁴

(e) Global targets and indicators

21. During the reporting period, the Secretariats have collaborated to enable the monitoring of SDG Target 2.5 on the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA for which FAO is the United Nations custodian agency and the monitoring of SDG Target 15.6 on access and benefit-sharing for which the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity is the custodian.

22. Targets and indicators for the conservation and sustainable use and for access and benefit-sharing for PGRFA might also be considered in the context of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that is expected to be adopted under the Convention of Biological Diversity in 2020.²⁵

(f) Digital sequence information

23. The Commission, at its Sixteenth Regular Session, established a new work stream on its Multi-Year Programme of Work on “digital sequence information”. The Commission Secretariat reported to the Eighth Meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group to Enhance the Functioning of the Multilateral System, held from 10 to 12 October 2018 on the newly established work stream on DSI.

24. The Commission, at its last session, considered “digital sequence information (DSI)” on genetic resources for food and agriculture²⁶ and agreed that there is a need for further review of the topic. It agreed to address, at its next session, the innovation opportunities “DSI” on GRFA offer, the challenges of capacity to access and make use of it and its implications for the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA and the sharing of benefits derived from GRFA. The Commission further noted the importance of coordination with the ongoing processes under the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol and the Treaty. The Governing Body may wish to consider collaborating with the Commission on these matters as they relate to PGRFA.

IV. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

25. The Governing Body is invited to take note of the information contained in this document and provide further guidance on the cooperation with the Commission, taking into account the elements for a possible Resolution provided in the *Appendix* to this document.

²² IT/GB-8/19/10/Inf.1, paragraph 29

²³ <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/notifications/detail-events/en/c/1200112/>

²⁴ CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 66.

²⁵ See [CBD/POST2020/WS/2019/8/2](https://www.cbd.int/post2020/ws/2019/8/2).

²⁶ See Background Study Paper No. 68.

DRAFT RESOLUTION **/2019**COOPERATION WITH THE COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE****THE GOVERNING BODY,**

Recalling Resolution 11/2017 and other previous Resolutions on the cooperation with the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Commission);

1. **Welcomes** the ongoing close cooperation between the Commission and the Governing Body and the joint activities undertaken by the Secretariats of the Governing Body and the Commission during the past intersessional period;
2. **Agrees** to keep the matter of the functional division of tasks and activities between the Governing Body and the Commission under review and **requests** the Secretary to regularly report any relevant developments in the cooperation with the Commission;
3. **Recalling** Article 17.3 of the International Treaty, **invites** Parties to cooperate with the Commission in the preparation of *The Third Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* in order to facilitate the updating of the Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture;
4. **Requests** the Secretary to cooperate in the organization of the international symposium on *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and **requests** that the outcomes of the symposium be made available to the Governing Body;
5. **Welcomes** the joint activities of the Secretariats of the Treaty and the Commission during the past intersessional period and **requests** the Secretary to continue strengthening collaboration and coordination with the Secretary of the Commission to promote coherence in the development and implementation of the respective programmes of work of the two bodies, and in particular with regard to:
 - (a) the preparation of *The Third Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* and of a draft Third Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, as appropriate;
 - (c) the implementation and monitoring of the Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture;
 - (d) the implementation of the Genebank Standards for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, including through capacity building;
 - (e) the support to countries to strengthen their crop improvement capacity;
 - (f) the preparation of in-depth case studies on the effects of seed policies, laws and regulations on (i) on-farm diversity of PGRFA, (ii) smallholders' access to sufficient, affordable, diversified and locally adapted PGRFA, including farmers' varieties/landraces; and (iii) food security and nutrition under the different seed systems;
 - (g) access and benefit-sharing;
 - (h) "digital sequence information";

- (i) the Global Information System (GLIS) and FAO World Information and Early Warning System on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (WIEWS), targets and indicators, as well as the development of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;
- (j) the joint training events at the regional level and the provision of assistance for the elaboration of national reports on PGRFA monitoring, subject to the availability of resources.

6. **Welcomes** the finalization of *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture* and **requests** the Secretary to collaborate with the Secretary of the Commission in promoting its wider dissemination and use;

7. **Encourages** Contracting Parties to participate in the open-ended meeting of the Commission's Group of National Focal Points for Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture, which has been mandated to develop a response to the report on *The State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture*, for consideration by the Commission at its Eighteenth Regular Session, with the motivation to have it adopted as a Global Plan of Action by the FAO Conference.