



Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Genetic resources: insurance policy for feeding the world

Side event at the 38th Session of the FAO Conference (20 June 2013)

Maintaining biodiversity is a global responsibility.

The genetic diversity of plants and animal genetic resources, including micro-organisms and invertebrates, is the foundation for food security. Genetic resources for food and agriculture are unique and irreplaceable resources that help production systems adapt to climate change, ensure healthy and diversified nutrition for all as well as secure livelihoods.

For 30 years, the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture has provided a unique intergovernmental forum to reach global consensus on policies relevant to biodiversity for food and agriculture. The Commission has overseen global assessments of the state of the world's plant, animal and forest genetic resources for food and agriculture as well as negotiated major international instruments, including Global Plans of Action and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

Within the global agenda where achieving food security is a major goal and threats to biodiversity for food and agriculture are increasing, the Commission is well positioned to further the dialogue and partnership on the development and implementation of policy instruments that strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for food and agriculture, and that promote access to genetic resources for food and agriculture as well as the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from their utilization.

About the side event

The side event was chaired by Árni Mathiesen, the FAO Assistant-Director-General of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Department and Officer-in-Charge of the Natural Resources Management and Environment Department. After a short video clip, in which 16 interviewees described the Commission in a few single words, FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva opened the meeting. He recognized that the Commission is now one of the largest FAO bodies and reflected on its history. The Director-General acknowledged that over the years, the Commission had delivered an impressive list of policy instruments to support efforts related to genetic resources and biodiversity for food and agriculture. Further he mentioned that through the Commission's work, countries have been working together with organizations, researchers and communities to recognize and support the efforts of those people who use and manage these precious resources every day.



In a video message M.S. Swaminathan, Chair of the Steering Committee of the High Level Panel of Experts of the Committee on World Food Security, expressed his views on the work of the Commission. An abstract of this video message can be found at www.fao.org/nr/cgrfa/cgrfa-media



Participants of the side event reflected on the importance of genetic resources for food and agriculture to food security, nutrition and livelihoods, as well as on the role of the Commission and on future challenges. During a panel discussion, different stakeholders presented their perspectives and described interventions at various levels.

The international stakeholder panel was composed of

- Ms Monica Martinez, Minister, Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the UN Geneva;
- Mr François Pythoud, Head of Unit International Sustainable Agriculture, Federal Office for Agriculture, Switzerland;
- Mr Shakeel Bhatti, Secretary, International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture;
- Mr Toby Hodgkin, Coordinator, Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research;
- Ms Laura Ciacci, Responsible of the Institutional Relations, Slow Food;
- Mr Patrick Mulvany, Adviser, Practical Action

The brief presentations by the panelists were followed by interesting questions from the floor, which were discussed and created a lot food for thought. There was general agreement that now and in the future, the Commission is even more important than in the past. In sum, the Commission's work and its impact were highly appreciated, and for its future work, participants highlighted, amongst others, the importance and challenges of a global assessment on the state of the world's biodiversity for food and agriculture.

