

“Food Security and Genetic Diversity”

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The current status of genetic diversity and biodiversity considerations in the Sustainable Development Goals

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(Speaking points)

- I would like to start by providing a brief history of the Post-2015 Process and the identification of Sustainable Development Goals, which is one of the main outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012.
- The United Nations General Assembly then established, in January 2013, the Open Working Group with the task of submitting a report to the 68th session of the UNGA containing a proposal to succeed the MDGs.
- Agencies of the United Nations, FAO included, provided technical support to the work of the Open Working Group during the whole process.
- The Open Working Group report identified a set of 17 goals and 169 targets, covering the 3 dimensions of sustainable development. The Report was welcomed by the UN General Assembly in September 2014, which decided that it would be the main basis for negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.
- Three goals are closely related to the work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: Goal 2, on food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture; Goal 14 on marine resources and oceans; and Goal 15, on ecosystems, biodiversity, forests, land/soils and mountains.
- Goal 2, as proposed by the OWG in their Report, would commit countries to “*End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*”.
- With strong collaboration among the three UN Rome-based agencies, the final OWG formulation of Goal 2 and its proposed targets strongly reflects the common RBA integrated approach to food security, nutrition and sustainable

agriculture. It is also in line with FAO's vision and global goals on food security and nutrition, poverty, and sustainability.

- Target 2.5 , included under Goal 2, states that by 2020 we will need to “*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 ensure access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge as internationally agreed*”. The current formulation of the genetic biodiversity target is understandably utilitarian in line with the principle of sustainable development. But the limitations of human knowledge and the precautionary principle favour a more conservationist approach, as with the MDGs before.
- Target 2.4 also included under Goal 2, seeks to *ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters, and that progressively improve land and soil quality.*
- ‘Marrying the people and the planet’ has been FAO’s overarching message throughout the process, which now we see translated into a concrete goal and targets. In addition to the dedicated goal, FAO’s perspective on sustainable development, focussing on the centrality of sustainable natural resource use and management for rural livelihoods, on the critical role of small-scale food producers – as agents of change and as managers of natural resources – are fully reflected throughout the OWG Report.
- FAO has also co-led the technical contribution to Goal 14 (marine resources and oceans) and Goal 15 (ecosystems, biodiversity, forests, land/soils, mountains), and also contributed to Goals: 1 (poverty), 5 (gender), 6 (water), 11 (human settlements) and 12 (sustainable consumption and production).
- Overall, natural resources have received much more attention under the SDGs than in the MDGs, which only had one goal (7) related to natural resources and ecology, skewed in favour of conservation, and isolated from the rest of the MDG agenda.
- The importance of including a target addressing genetic diversity, an issue not mentioned in the MDGs, has been part of discussions of the SDGs since the

early stages. It was finally decided to include it in Goal 2 to reflect the need to conserve genetic resources because of their key role in addressing hunger and food security, linking conservation with use.

- Particularly since the Rio+20 Summit in mid-2014, FAO has strived to promote awareness that ecosystem services and natural resources are continuously used in different food production systems and that, therefore, not just conservation, but also sustainable use is fundamental. This idea has now been articulated in the OWG Report and included in two Goals - 14 and 15 - which deal exclusively with the management and use of natural resources.
- These positive results, especially acknowledgement of all the key issues around food security and natural resources, are not accidental. They are due in large part to FAO, as the UN leading agency on sustainable development, being able to deploy its knowledge and technical expertise to bring these issues to the attention of Member States.
- FAO's dynamic collaboration with the membership, other UN entities, the Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as with other non-state actors, fostered a deep sense of mutual trust, leading Member States to rely on FAO to provide clarification and technical explanation on a number of important issues.
- There are many dimensions of sustainability for which only limited data exists, or for which data collection is likely to prove prohibitively expensive. This will require continued collaboration with all stakeholders to improve data systems and develop viable indicators. The failure to achieve the MDG target on biodiversity by the 2010 target year demands greater attention to the so-called means of interpretation as well as the relationship between meaningful indicators for pragmatic monitoring and a highly visible key indicator for post-2015 SDG monitoring purposes.
- Moving into the next and final phase of the Post-2015 Development Agenda process, Member States are likely to focus on three issues: first, consolidation of existing goals and targets; second, development of a reasonable number of indicators to support action on the agenda; and, most intensively, discussion of international cooperation on means of implementation.
- The consolidation of existing goals and targets involves opportunities and risks. There are certain countries which feel strongly about maintaining the

ambition of the agenda and do not want to reopen the OWG proposal, while others would like to reduce the number of the goals while acknowledging that the current package represents a very delicate balance.

- Streamlining the current package of goals and targets may indeed be beneficial, both for communication purposes, and, most importantly, for more effective implementation on the ground. The challenge is how to maintain the comprehensive vision arising from the OWG report.
- This cannot be taken for granted. Member States may eventually decide to merge Goals 14 and 15 for example. Then again, there are key issues that may be perceived as less important. This could be the case with mountains, seeds, animal breeds, ecosystem services and rural-urban linkages. Then, we could lose the recognition that genetic resources play a crucial role in food security and nutrition.
- Let us therefore continue to work together to intensify our efforts in this last phase of the post-2015 process, and to build a sustainable development agenda that is ambitious, but at same time coherent, realistic and implementable.
- Thank you for your kind attention.