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COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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REPORT FROM FAO ON ITS POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES ON AGRICULTURAL BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY:

(2) CROSS-SECTORIAL MATTERS

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**REPORT FROM FAO ON ITS POLICIES, PROGRAMMES
AND ACTIVITIES ON AGRICULTURAL BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY:
(2) CROSS-SECTORIAL MATTERS**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission regularly receives reports from international organizations, including FAO, on their policies, programmes and activities for the conservation and use of plant genetic resources. The Commission considers such reports to be of value, both for it and for the organizations, which are able to acquaint countries with their objectives and programmes, and benefit from their comments.

2. In 1995, by Resolution 3/95, Conference broadened the Commission's mandate to "all components of biodiversity of relevance to food and agriculture" and decided that the implementation of the broadened mandate should be "carried out through a step-by-step approach, beginning with animal genetic resources". The broadening has now been implemented for plant and animal genetic resources, but, as in the last session, this report provides information on the wide range of FAO's activities relevant to genetic resources for food and agriculture. It is in two sections: this section deals with FAO policies, programmes and activities of a cross-sectorial nature. Sectorial matters, relative to the genetic resources of crops; farm animals; forestry; fishery; soil biota; naturally occurring insects; bacteria and fungi relevant to integrated pest control; and micro-organisms of relevance to food processing, are covered in the other section: document CGRFA-8/99/10.1. FAO's relevant field projects are listed in document CGRFA-8/99/10/Inf. 8.

II. LEGAL ACTIVITIES

3. The Legal Office conducts significant activities in the area of genetic resources for food and agriculture, especially through direct support to inter-governmental negotiations, such as those currently underway for the revision of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources. It also provides legal support in areas such as the development of the International Network of *Ex Situ* Collections under the Auspices of FAO, the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the development of FAO's programme on animal genetic resources, and the development of and follow-up to related codes of conduct and agreements (such as the International Code of Conduct for Plant Germplasm Collecting and Transfer, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and the FAO Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas). The Legal Office also participates in international activities related to biosafety and plant variety protection.

4. Under the major programme, *Legal Assistance to Member Nations*, the Legal Office, through the Regular and Field Programmes, provides technical assistance, regionally and nationally, in the formulation of policies, strategies and legislation in the field of genetic resources for food and agriculture and related matters.

5. During 1997 and 1998, the Legal Office assisted Belize in drafting legislation to regulate the Citrus Certification Scheme, under the Technical Cooperation Programme project. Ecuador, Georgia, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Namibia, were assisted to prepare national seed legislation and quality control

schemes. In addition, national authorities were advised on Plant Variety Protection; the pertinent draft act was formulated for the Kyrgyz Republic.

III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

6. The Sustainable Development Department (SD) has many activities that focus on the inter-relationship between biological diversity and the conservation and sustainable utilization of genetic resources, taking into consideration gender questions.

7. The *Ad Hoc* Interdepartmental Working Group on Biological Diversity for Food and Agriculture was revitalized in July 1997. It allows a coordinated approach to FAO's contribution to the implementation of, and follow-up to, the recommendations of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA).

8. Many decisions of the COP/CBD are of direct relevance to FAO. In particular, decisions III/11 and IV/6 recognize FAO's leading role in agricultural biological diversity. Decision IV/6 referred to FAO's "coordinating role in the assessment of on-going activities and instruments at regional and international levels and requests the Executive Secretary, in collaboration with FAO, to further consult with Parties, Governments and relevant organizations and bodies in the finalization of this review...". FAO's response to this request is described in document CGRFA-8/99/12, section 3.

9. In this context, the CBD Secretariat and FAO signed a *Memorandum of cooperation for a joint programme of work* in September 1997. In this context, FAO and the CBD Secretariat jointly organized, with the support of the Government of the Netherlands, two technical workshops on farming systems approaches for agricultural biological diversity in agroecosystems (document CGRFA-8/99/12, para. 8).

10. An Interdepartmental *Ad Hoc* Biosafety Working Group was created in April 1998, to follow the developments related to the CBD Biosafety Protocol. It prepared a paper, entitled *Biosafety issues related to biotechnology for sustainable agriculture and food security*, which was made available to the August 1998 meeting of the CBD's Open-ended *Ad Hoc* Working Group on Biosafety. FAO presented this paper, in an expanded form, to the Biosafety Enabling Workshops, organized by UNEP/GEF in late 1998 and early 1999. It provides information on the full range of FAO's relevant activities and mandate, in relation to biosafety issues. This paper is available to the Commission as document CGRFA-8/99/Inf. 11.

11. In direct support to countries in implementing biosafety legislation, Ecuador is being assisted in the initial stages of project development to improve its access to biotechnology, to develop biosafety legislation, and to establish their respective regulatory bodies.

12. Document COAG/99/8, *Biotechnology*, was prepared for the Fifteenth Session of the Committee on Agriculture (COAG), in January 1999, with a proposed programme of work for FAO in biotechnology, including in relation to the conservation and utilization of genetic resources, and to capacity-building in developing countries.

13. SD provides the Secretariat for the Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS), launched in January 1996, to provide data, information and analysis to help understand and evaluate the significance of change in terrestrial ecosystems, and assist countries to formulate appropriate policies; it covers land quality, freshwater resources, biodiversity, climate change, and pollution and toxics.

14. SD works on several aspects of environmental and “sustainability” indicators, in cooperation with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Division for Economic and Social Analysis (DESA) of the United Nations, and the World Bank. A paper on the socio-economic aspects of agricultural biodiversity, which looks at the development of a framework, criteria and indicators for this topic, is under development and will be completed in 1999. A paper will be prepared in early 1999, which will take into account, *inter alia*, biodiversity issues, in the context of trade, agriculture and the environment.

15. The Women in Development Service deals mainly with the inter-relationships between biodiversity and gender. Within the context of the regional project, “Gender, Biodiversity and Local Knowledge Systems to Strengthen Agricultural and Rural Development” (GCP/RAF/338/NOR), field project activities in Zimbabwe and Tanzania started in July 1998. The project focuses on working with communities to strengthen their management and conservation of agrobiodiversity and information-sharing at all levels. Three case studies on gender issues and management of plant genetic resources were prepared in 1998. These were: *Peasant Women and Andean Seeds*, *Women and Indigenous Knowledge in Animal Production in Bolivia*, and *The Role of Women in the Conservation of Maize Genetic Resources in Guatemala*. Research on the gender impacts of crop diversity in Mali was supported. Other activities included mainstreaming gender issues into FAO’s work in biodiversity, by providing technical assistance to technical divisions; the preparation of a gender and biodiversity fact sheet; and a gender and biodiversity inventory of actors and issues in Peru.

IV. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS

16. The Economic and Social Department (ES) is undertaking a number of activities of relevance to agro-biological diversity, in cooperation with technical units involved, with the aim of developing and deploying analytical tools for the economic valuation of genetic resources and conservation and utilization strategies.

17. The programme element, *Economics of sustainable agriculture and the environment*, addresses a number of inter-related questions, regarding the valuation of genetic resources. Linkages between valuation and strategies for the conservation and sustainable development of genetic resources for food and agriculture (including questions of intellectual property, and Farmers’ Rights) were addressed at an international symposium, organized by the University of Tor Vergata in Rome, with FAO sponsorship (May 13-15, 1996). It was attended by high-level researchers from around the world, and is the first attempt specifically to consider methodologies for agrobiodiversity valuation. The book, *Agricultural values of plant genetic resources*¹, was published in 1998, as follow-up to the Symposium on this subject co-sponsored by FAO in 1996. Studies on the *Economic value of genetic diversity for crop improvement*, and on the implications of agricultural innovations in developing countries for the conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture and the economy, were undertaken in 1998, for publication in 1999. The element contributed directly to the work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, included in the preparation of document CGRFA-8/99/8, *Possible formulas for the sharing of benefits based on different benefit-indicators*.

18. *Biodiversity and trade*: FAO regularly studies the interaction between environmental policies and commodity trade, including aspects of relevance to agrobiodiversity. The Committee on Commodity Problems, at its Sixty-second Session in January 1999, reviewed the analytical work assessing biotechnology developments, and their impact on international trade, for the oilseeds,

¹ R. Evenson, D. Gollin and V. Santaniello; CAB International, University of Rome.

livestock and meat sectors, on the basis of Document CCP: 99/15, *Trade and environment, biotechnology and SPS measures*, as a follow-up to an earlier study that had developed a framework for analysing these factors.

19. The programme element, *Improving household food security and community nutrition*, emphasizes the improvement of diets, through more intensive and diversified home gardens in developing countries. It encourages farmers, in particular women, to make appropriate use of both local plants and improved seed resources, and contributes to the *in situ* conservation of agrobiological diversity and nutritionally valuable food plants. It also helps preserve indigenous knowledge about cultivation practices.