

October 2004



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para la
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y la
Alimentación

Item 9 of the Draft Provisional Agenda

COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Tenth Regular Session

Rome, 8 - 12 November 2004

FUTURE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Since its establishment in 1983,¹ the FAO Commission has played a key role in international policy development for agricultural genetic resources. The Commission was the first inter-governmental body dedicated to genetic resources, and remains the only such body dealing specifically with genetic resources for food and agriculture. The Commission's Tenth Regular Session marks its twentieth anniversary, and it may wish to take this opportunity to reflect on its past achievements and to lay the basis for its future activities.

2. The Commission's first focus was on plant genetic resources. In 1983, the FAO Conference adopted the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and decided to establish the Commission. By 1991, the Commission had negotiated the three annexes that constituted the agreed interpretation of the Undertaking. The Commission also guided the preparation of the 1996 Leipzig International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, where 150 countries adopted the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, and received the first report on *The State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. In 1995, the Commission decided to give priority to completing the negotiations that led to the adoption, at the 2001 FAO Conference, of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. At the same time, in 1998, the Commission initiated systematic work on animal genetic resources.

3. With the completion of these negotiations, the Commission is free to turn its attention to other pressing issues, and plan more systematically for its future work. The Commission already has major, multi-year programmes of work underway for animal genetic resources and for plant genetic resources. It will, in the near future, be necessary to develop cooperative structures with the Governing Body of the Treaty, in particular in relation to elements of the Commission's Global System on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture that are supporting components of the Treaty.² At the same time, developments in relevant international forums—in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)—will require coordination of activities over a multi-year period.³ FAO itself has established a multi-year planning framework, in its rolling Medium Term Plan,⁴ into which the guidance of the Commission should feed.

4. In the twenty-first century, demographic, socio-economic and environmental changes will pose great challenges to food security, socio-economic stability and the environment. Facing these will require the adaptation of, and innovation in, agricultural production and the management of agro-ecosystems. Genetic resources and biodiversity for food and agriculture and the ways in which these are managed by farmers and others are an invaluable resource and basis to meet the needs of humanity. Our growing dependency on genetic resources requires increasing international cooperation and policy.

5. The current document accordingly reviews these matters, in the light of the Commission's mandate, ongoing activities, emerging issues, and the various planning cycles involved. It seeks the guidance of the Commission for the development of a multi-year programme of work, to be submitted for the consideration of the Commission at its Eleventh Regular Session.

¹ Originally as the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources.

² See CGRFA-10/04/3, *Overview of the FAO Global System for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and its potential contribution to the implementation of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.

³ See CGRFA-10/04/12, *Cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity*.

⁴ See *Medium Term Plan 2004-2009*, available on the Internet at <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/MEETING/005/Y7016E/Y7016E00.HTM>.

II. THE COMMISSION'S MANDATE AND ROLE

6. The Commission was established under Article VI of the FAO Constitution. It normally meets biennially. It currently has 165 members.⁵ Observers to the Commission include a wide range of international inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, including civil society and private sector organizations, from the agricultural, environment and the trade sectors.

7. In 1995, the FAO Conference broadened the mandate of the Commission to cover all components of biodiversity of relevance to food and agriculture.⁶ By its Statutes, adopted at that time,⁷ the Commission has a coordinating role, and develops, reviews and advises FAO on its sectorial, cross-sectorial and inter-sectorial policy, programmes and activities related to the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources of relevance to food and agriculture, and the equitable sharing of benefits derived from their utilisation. It is also a forum for the negotiation of international agreements, undertakings, codes of conduct or other policy instruments relating to genetic resources of relevance to food and agriculture, and for monitoring their operation. The Commission also facilitates and oversees effective cooperation between FAO and other relevant international organizations.⁸

8. In 1997, the Commission established two subsidiary bodies: the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Animal Genetic Resources,⁹ and the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources,¹⁰ to provide scientific and technical advice on specific matters in these areas. These usually meet between regular sessions of the Commission, to address matters that it refers to them.

9. The Commission plays an important role in the implementation of Corporate Strategy B of FAO's *Strategic Framework for FAO 2000 – 2015*, namely *Promoting, developing and reinforcing policy and regulatory frameworks for food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry*.¹¹ The *Strategic Framework* provides the framework for the Organization's future programmes, to be developed through successive Medium-Term Plans, and biennial Programmes of Work and Budget.

III. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COMMISSION AND CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME

10. As it looks back on twenty years of activity, the Commission can reflect on a series of major achievements, through the development and adoption of a range of important policy decisions and

⁵ The Commission is open to all Members and Associate Members of the Organization, and composed of those Members or Associate Members that notify the Director-General of their desire to be considered as members of the Commission.

⁶ Conference Resolution 3/95.

⁷ CGRFA-10/04/Inf.1, *Statutes of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.

⁸ International forums relevant to the work of the Commission are identified in Conference Resolution 3/95 as including, in particular, the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its Council on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Council); the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and its Inter-governmental Committee on Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (IGC); the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV); and the International Agricultural Research Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

⁹ CGRFA-10/04/Inf.2, *Statutes of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and Members elected by the Ninth Regular Session of the Commission*.

¹⁰ CGRFA-10/04/Inf.3, *Statutes of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and Members elected by the Ninth Regular Session of the Commission*.

¹¹ The *Strategic Framework for FAO 2000-2015* was approved by the Conference at its Thirtieth Session. It is available on the Internet at <http://www.fao.org/strategicframework/default.htm>.

instruments (see *Table 1*), in particular in the context of the Global Strategy for the Management of Farm Animal Genetic Resources, and the Global System for Plant Genetic Resources.¹²

Table 1: Milestones in the work of the Commission

1983:	Adoption of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, and decision to establish the Commission.
1985	First meeting of the Commission.
1991:	Agreed interpretation of the International Undertaking, recognizing national sovereignty over plant genetic resources, Farmers' Rights, and that plant breeder's rights are not inconsistent with the International Undertaking.
1991	Commission requests the development of a Code of Conduct on Biotechnology.
1993:	Adoption of the International Code of Conduct for Plant Germplasm Collecting and Transfer
1994:	Establishment of the International Network of <i>Ex Situ</i> Collections under the Auspices of FAO: twelve CGIAR centres place most of their collections in the network, in trust for the international community.
1995:	Commission's mandate broadened to cover all components of biodiversity of relevance to food and agriculture, including plant, animal, forestry and fisheries genetic resources.
1996:	150 countries adopt the <i>Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture</i> at the Leipzig International Conference
1996:	First <i>State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture</i>
1998:	Commission takes up the Global Strategy for Farm Animal Genetic Resources and initiates the preparation of the <i>State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture</i>
2001:	Adoption of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
2001:	Commission acts as the Interim Committee for the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
2004:	Entry into force of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

11. Over this period, the Commission has, in particular, directed the development of the Global System on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which provides a coherent and articulated international approach to the conservation and sustainable use of these crucial resources, on which food security depends. The FAO Global System comprises a series of international instruments and global mechanisms, to promote international cooperation and reach consensus on areas of mutual interest to the Commission members.¹³ The Commission monitors the operation of the Global System.

12. Elements of the Global System will now assume even greater prominence, in that they act as supporting components to the Treaty, as foreseen in Part V of the Treaty.¹⁴ The Commission maintains a major and, in fact, directing role with respect to the Treaty's supporting components (particularly the

¹² The statutes of the Commission provide that it shall "to recommend such measures as may be necessary or desirable to ensure the development, as appropriate, of a comprehensive global system or systems on genetic resources of relevance to food and agriculture and to monitor the operation of its/their components, in harmony, where applicable, with the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant international instruments".

¹³ Information on the Global System is available on the Internet at <http://www.fao.org/ag/cgrfa/PGR.htm#diagram> and http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPS/Pgrfa/Gsmap_e.htm.

¹⁴ This relationship considered in detail in document CGRFA-10/04/3.

Global Plan of Action and the *State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources*). The Treaty underlines their importance and, in Article 7.2c, foresees that “international cooperation shall, in particular, be directed to [...] maintaining and strengthening the institutional arrangements provided for in Part V [of the Treaty]”.

13. In order for the Commission to be able to play its intended role in supporting the implementation of the Treaty, it will be necessary for the Commission and the Governing Body of the Treaty jointly to make arrangements for the planning and execution of the relevant work of the Commission, which would be facilitated by systematic, multi-year planning of the Commission's activities.

14. In the realization of the Commission's expanded mandate to all components of agricultural biodiversity of interest to food and agriculture, the Commission has recognized the need to create a strong global foundation to underpin decision-making regarding animal genetic resources. In 1999, the Commission recommended that FAO coordinate the development of the country-driven first *Report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources*.¹⁵ At this session, the Commission will take a number of key decisions regarding the future direction of this work, which will extend over a number of years. This, too, would profit from being programmed on a systematic multi-year basis.

15. The Commission regularly receives reports from and provides guidance to other FAO technical sectorial units dealing with forestry, fisheries and microbial genetic resources relevant to food and agriculture. It also regularly receives reports on, and provides guidance on, a variety of cross-sectorial and inter-sectorial matters, including in relation to FAO's Priority Areas for Inter-disciplinary Action (PAIAs) on Biodiversity, Biotechnology, Biosecurity, Ethics in Food and Agriculture, Organic Agriculture and Trade, and FAO's technical work programme on legal, socio-economic and nutritional issues related to genetic resources for food and agriculture. One of the areas of ongoing work is in the development of a Code of Conduct on Biotechnology as it relates to genetic resources for food and agriculture, as was requested by the Commission.

16. At this session, the Commission's attention is drawn to the complexity and importance of FAO's growing cooperation with the CBD, the oversight of which is one of the Commission's statutory tasks.¹⁶ The CBD has itself adopted a Multi-year Programme of Work,¹⁷ and is seeking cooperation with FAO within this planning framework. The CBD has recognized the specificity of the agricultural sector and its capacity to find solutions to its specific problems, and increasingly depends on FAO to support its work programme on agricultural biodiversity. The revised Memorandum of Cooperation with the CBD will provide a framework for specific programmes to be developed, for better policy coordination, and for joint resource mobilization. It would facilitate the Commission's work in guiding the Organization's response to requests from the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, or in making recommendations to the Conference of the Parties regarding matters of the Commission's mandate, if preparation for and consideration of the relevant questions can be scheduled on a systematic multi-year basis.

17. The Commission may also wish to provide guidance to the Secretariat for any necessary preparations in relation to those parts of its mandate that it has not yet addressed, and schedule when and how it wishes to address them.

¹⁵ The current state of development of this work, as well as its future direction, is described in document CGRFA-10/04/5 Add.1, *Progress in the preparation of the Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.

¹⁶ CGRFA-10/04/12, *Cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity*.

¹⁷ [Decision VII/31](#), Multi-year programme of work of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, up to 2010.

IV. EMERGING ISSUES OF RELEVANCE TO THE COMMISSION

18. The ultimate goal of FAO and the Commission's work is the attainment of food for all and sustainable agriculture, which are major global concerns. The *Strategic Framework for FAO 2000-2015* states that the present international policy and regulatory framework for food and agriculture needs to be further developed, as it is an important prerequisite for achieving food security for all, and that, through the Commission, FAO has recognized competence in facilitating international negotiations on aspects of biological diversity of relevance to food and agriculture.¹⁸

19. In recent years the international community has increasingly focussed its attention on the following matters:

- *Eradication of poverty and hunger:* at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders agreed to a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. The Millennium Development Goals focus the efforts of the world community on achieving significant, measurable improvements in people's lives by the year 2015. They now stand at the centre of the global agenda, and provide a framework for the entire United Nations system to work coherently towards a common end. The future work of the Commission should provide a fundamental contribution in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal number 1, *Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger*.¹⁹
- *Science, technology and knowledge applied to genetic resources for food and agriculture:* global trends indicate that financial support for public research in these sectors has declined significantly over the last decade, both at the level of National Agricultural Research Systems and of international research institutions. The way biotechnologies are applied, and the type of regulatory measures placed on their use, are and will remain major policy issues. Another key policy question is how science, technology and knowledge applied to genetic resources, for food and agriculture, including through complementarity with local knowledge systems and farmer technologies, can reach and benefit the poor.
- *Biodiversity for sustainable development, food security and improved nutrition:* the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development emphasized the critical role that biodiversity plays in overall sustainable development, poverty eradication, and generally in enhancing our livelihoods. There is increasing recognition of the important role that biodiversity can play in enhancing food security, improving health through diversified diets and nutrition; supporting income generation for rural households and the rural economy generally, and ensuring sustainability of agriculture and food production.
- *Integrated agro-ecosystem management:* The diversity of agro-ecosystems, and their management by farmers, is of great importance in the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture, food security, and adaptation to environmental and socio-economic changes. Agro-ecosystemic approaches integrate many of the Commission's sectorial and cross-sectorial concerns, and can contribute to the realization of its goals.

20. The Commission can play an important coordinating role in developing international policy approaches in areas under its mandate that relate to these key questions. They are, however, complex, and the Commission may need to consider its contributions to the process in a systematically planned manner, including through its work on agricultural biodiversity through its major policy instruments, and the development of periodical reports on the *State of the World's Agricultural Biodiversity and*

¹⁸ Para. 52-58.

¹⁹ Millennium Development Goal number 1 derives directly from the Rome Declaration on World Food Security and the World Food Summit Plan of Action. The Declaration of the World Food Summit: *five years later* reiterated governments' "global commitments made in the Rome Declaration at the World Food Summit in 1996 in particular to halve the number of hungry in the world no later than 2015, as reaffirmed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration".

Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, in complementarity and cooperation with the work programmes of other relevant forums.

21. The *Strategic Framework for FAO 2000-2015* has stressed the need to ensure that the specific needs and concerns of the food and agriculture sector are adequately reflected within international instruments, and that appropriate policy advice is provided to the relevant forums dealing with natural resources, environment and trade.²⁰ With the growing number of international processes and forums addressing genetic resources generally, the Commission—as the only inter-governmental forum dealing specifically with genetic resources for food and agriculture—may accordingly wish to be informed on relevant parallel processes in a timely fashion, and for any actions it may wish to take to be consolidated into a structured multi-year work programme (see Box below).

***Other major inter-governmental processes of relevance
to genetic resources for food and agriculture***

In recent years, there has been increasing work in other forums on genetic resources for food and agriculture, particularly in relation to access and benefit-sharing. Current processes include the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the country-driven process for the development of the *State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources*,²¹ and the processes within the CBD:²² the Bonn Guidelines on Access to Genetic Resources and Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising out of their Utilization, the follow-up to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development and the negotiation within the framework of the CBD of an international regime to promote and safeguard the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.²³ In addition, the World Intellectual Property Organization has established an Inter-Governmental Committee on Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, which is considering, *inter alia*, the possible development of an international instrument or instruments on intellectual property-related aspects of genetic resources. The Council for Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights of the World Trade Organization (WTO/TRIPS Council) has also discussed genetic resources on a number of accessions. The Commission Secretariat has attended many of the relevant discussions in these forums, in order to provide, where appropriate, information on the roles of the FAO, its Commission, and the Treaty.

22. The Commission can, in this way, contribute to synergy and coordination, and avoid duplication between the relevant programmes of various international organizations and between programmes at the national and regional levels established under the auspices of international organizations, while respecting the mandates and existing programmes of work of each organization and the intergovernmental authority of the respective governing bodies, commissions and other forums.

V. COORDINATION WITH FAO'S POLICY AND PLANNING PROCESSES

23. FAO Members have repeatedly stressed the importance of cross-sectorial collaboration within FAO, and the PAIAs have evolved to support and facilitate cross-sectorial approaches and activities,

²⁰ See para. 56.

²¹ Decision VI/5 of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD recognizes that the *State of the World's animal genetic resources* “will contribute to conservation, sustainable use, access and benefit-sharing of animal genetic resources for food and agriculture”.

²² There are currently only two binding international agreements dealing with access and benefit-sharing: the CBD, and the Treaty.

²³ The CBD Working Group on Access and Benefit-sharing will consider the process, nature, scope, elements and modalities of an international, and provide advice to COP-7 in March 2004, on how it may wish to address this issue.

including for the integrated management of biological diversity for food and agriculture.²⁴ Much of the work of the relevant PAIAs is of direct relevance to the Commission, in its role in advising FAO on its sectorial and cross-sectorial policy, programmes and activities in relation to biological diversity and genetic resources for food and agriculture, and cooperative activities with other international organizations in these fields. This work would be facilitated through the integration of these functions into a systematic multi-year work programme.

24. The adoption by the FAO of a planning instrument in the rolling *Medium Term Plan* provides FAO members with a six-year programme plan, up-dated every two years. The *Medium Term Plan* feeds directly into the preparation of the Organization's biennial programme of work and budget. The Commission may consider that, in order for its guidance to the Organization on the projects, programmes and activities in the fields of its mandate to be adequately taken into account, it may need similarly to put its activities onto a multi-year planning cycle, in line with the Organization's planning processes.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE COMMISSION

25. The analysis in this paper suggests that the development of a multi-year programme of work for the Commission would provide a number of benefits.²⁵ In particular it could:

- Enable Member countries to integrate the work of the Commission into their policy agendas in relation to genetic resources;
- Enhance coordination with the Governing Body of the International Treaty on the management, by the Commission, of the supporting components of the International Treaty;
- Allow a streamlining of the work programme and prioritization of activities, reducing the need for continuous reporting and focusing the contributions of FAO and other international organizations;
- Ensure that the Commission's guidance is reflected in FAO's Medium Term Programme and biennial Programme of Work and Budget;
- Improve interaction with other important international processes (such as the Millennium Development Goals), increasing the visibility of the Commission at the international level;
- Promote coordination with the Convention on Biological Diversity, which operates through longer-term programmes of work, and with other relevant international forums; and
- Improve the commitment and participation of other international institutions, major groups and scientific experts in the work of the Commission.

26. The Commission may accordingly wish to request the Secretariat to:

- Prepare and submit to Commission's Eleventh Regular Session a rolling multi-year programme of work and a roadmap with medium and long-term goals and objectives for the consideration of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies;
- Consult with the CBD Secretariat and other relevant organizations, with a view to promoting cooperation and synergy with relevant processes, and report to the Commission;

²⁴ CGRFA-10/04/10.3, *Report from FAO on its policies, programmes and activities on agricultural biological diversity: (3) Priority Areas for Inter-disciplinary Action (PAIAs)*.

²⁵ It should be noted that other United Nations intergovernmental forums have tackled complex agendas by developing a multi-year programme of work. Recent examples include the Convention of Biological Diversity and the Commission on Sustainable Development, and, in FAO, the International Plant Protection Convention and the *Codex Alimentarius* Commission.

- Explore and report on options for streamlining the Commission's work, including by the reorientation and possible reduction of reporting by international organizations, through more focused consultation with them, on a subject and priority basis, related to the multi-year programme of work; and
- Provide options for the structure of future meetings of the Commission, including dedicated sessions and inter-sessional work.

27. The Commission may also wish to provide guidance on priorities to be taken into account on the preparation of the multi-year programme of work and a roadmap with medium and long-term goals and objectives