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| | FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS | |
| | ORGANISATION DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ALIMENTATION ET L'AGRICULTURE | |
| | ORGANIZACION DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS PARA LA AGRICULTURA Y LA ALIMENTACION | |

Item 8 of the
Provisional
Agenda

COMMISSION ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

First Session

Rome, 11-15 March 1985

FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE COMMISSION

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I. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMISSION

1. The work programme of the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources will, to a considerable extent, evolve out of the discussion of substantive issues at its sessions. At the same time, the Commission may find it useful to develop an overall view of how best to promote the conservation and exchange of plant genetic resources. In developing a medium to long-term view, the Commission will be better able to tackle methodically and coherently all the matters within its mandate.

2. The Commission may find it helpful to divide the work programme into three broad functions, which are separate but inter-related, corresponding to the Commission's terms of reference defined by the FAO Council in Resolution 1/85. These functions are:

- (i) The global monitoring of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources;
- (ii) Recommending measures that will lead to improvements in the global system;
- (iii) Advising FAO on the Organization's own activities in the field of plant genetic resources.

3. Suggestions regarding a future work programme in connection with each of these functions are advanced below.

II. MONITORING THE INTERNATIONAL UNDERTAKING

4. The Undertaking aims at the development of a "global system" for the exploration, collection, conservation, maintenance, evaluation and documentation of plant genetic resources, as well as for their exchange and use. It is suggested that at each future session the Commission review overall progress towards achieving the objectives of the Undertaking.

5. The Commission's discussions would be based on a monitoring report, which would also be useful for other purposes. It would serve as a background paper for the Commission's session as a whole. By highlighting problems, it would help the Commission to select items for in-depth consideration on future occasions. It could also be utilized as the basis for a popular publication.

6. The monitoring report should be prepared on the basis of information provided to the Director-General by the Governments and Institutions in accordance with Article 11 of the Undertaking, utilizing also the annual or other regular reports issued by the IBPGR, the FAO Panel of Experts on Forest Genetic Resources and other international and national bodies active in the field of genetic resources.

7. The Commission might envisage conducting at periodic intervals (say at every fifth Session) an in-depth review of the global system as a whole.

III. RECOMMENDING IMPROVEMENTS IN THE GLOBAL SYSTEM

8. The main part of the Commission's work at each session is likely to consist of examining a small number of issues in depth, with a view to making recommendations for the improvement of the global system. The choice of the specific issues to be considered might normally be made by the Commission, based at least partly on the outcome of discussion on the monitoring report, at its preceding session.

9. So far as concerns the general approach, it is suggested that the Commission review genetic resource questions in a broader framework of resource conservation and development. Its programme of work should thus be orientated towards the concept of usefulness and appropriateness in the medium and long-term.

10. With this in mind, the Commission may wish to consider how it could best structure its work programme in order both to tackle the various components of a future system, and to fulfill the general mandate given to it by the FAO Conference and Council. There are

three possible approaches: by problem or function; by crop; and by geographical (or agro-ecological) area.

11. It is suggested that the basis of the Commission's work programme be the functional approach (as at the first session), with the option of looking at specific problems in terms of crops and/or regions.

12. The principal problems and functions requiring attention may be briefly analyzed as follows:

- (i) Completeness of coverage of the world's base collections. Here both the crop and geographical dimensions will have to be taken into account. Gaps can be identified through the monitoring report suggested above, or through special surveys. Such a first survey is provided at the Commission's first session under agenda item 4 "Base Collections of Plant Genetic Resources".
- (ii) This first survey reveals a number of particular issues which will need to be kept under periodic review within an international network of base collections in genebanks, i.e. adherence to international scientific standards for the conservation, maintenance and operation; security arrangements for the duplication of base collections, including the possibility of establishing special international security collections; extension of the principle of base collections towards plant genetic resources which cannot be stored as seed.
- (iii) In situ conservation of plant genetic resources has received comparatively less attention than ex situ conservation in genebanks and collections. For forest genetic resources but also for many agricultural genetic resources, in situ conservation will be the most efficient way to ensure the maintenance of natural genetic variability. In addition, it preserves natural habitats for further exploration of plants not yet cultivated but potentially useful as crops. Through the inter-relationship of in situ conservation with general conservation strategies and the conservation of nature, the development of special concepts and policies at national and international levels are required which the Commission might wish to consider in collaboration with other international bodies concerned such as UNEP and IUCN. Under agenda item 5 the Commission will be considering a first report on the "Status of in situ Conservation".
- (iv) Information gathering and information exchange on plant genetic resources is one of the main issues for future rational approaches in developing international cooperation in plant genetic conservation and utilization. Its complexity and various actions required for improvements will be considered by the Commission under agenda item 6 "International Information System on Plant Genetic Resources". As a stepwise approach seems to be warranted to tackle this main issue, the Commission might wish to review progress made on the individual components of the system in future sessions, on the basis of which a final policy formulation could be based.
- (v) Active genetic resources collections are those through which the major exchange of germplasm takes place. The functioning of an international network will depend on their well-established links with base collections on the one side, and with plant breeders on the other. The IBPGR is identifying suitable active collections. The Commission may wish to review active collections and their linkages. Particular attention would have to be paid to their appropriateness for developing countries and the future support they require.
- (vi) The ultimate use of plant genetic resources in agricultural development is determined by the strength of plant breeding in various countries and countries' capabilities in seed production and distribution to supply improved seed in sufficient quantity and quality to agriculture. An assessment of plant breeding and seed production capabilities in developing countries, particularly in food deficit countries, would allow the Commission to review the existing weaknesses and to recommend measures to overcome constraints in this most important part of a global system on plant genetic resources. This assessment should include physical, organizational and manpower deficiencies. It would follow-up on proposals which the Commission will consider at its first session under other

items of the agenda (4,6) and particularly under item 7 "Training Activities and Requirements in Support of Plant Genetic Resources Conservation and Use in Developing Countries".

- (vii) The exchange and unrestricted availability of plant genetic resources for scientific and plant breeding purposes will be of particular concern for a functional global system. Various legal measures at national and international levels may govern or influence such exchange. In addition, the legal status of (and particularly the rules governing access to) recognized base collections of plant genetic resources is insufficiently documented. The Commission might wish to review the possible effect of laws on seed and plant breeders rights on the availability of plant genetic resources in order to formulate recommendations.
- (viii) Finally the development of various activities within the global system will depend on sufficient funding being available. The Commission will have to consider possible sources and availability of funds for each recommendation it wishes to make. It might call for a special mobilization of funds for particular activities, and for others, it may wish to review selectively the security of funding. The latter is particularly important for base collections and their duplications being held in national or international institutes. The Commission will need to keep the funding situation under review, which could normally be accommodated within the monitoring report it will receive at each session.

IV. ADVISING ON FAO ACTIVITIES

13. The third main function of the Commission is to give advice on FAO's own activities in the field of genetic resources. FAO Conference resolution 9/83 specifies that this advice will be given to the Committee on Agriculture or, where appropriate, to the Committee on Forestry.

14. The Committee on Agriculture reviews FAO's work in the food and agriculture sector, usually examining the implementation of the current Programme of Work and Budget, the Summary Programme of Work and Budget for the following biennium, and the medium and longer term outlook, including the related aspects of the field programme. The sections dealing with plant genetic resources, crop improvement, seeds and research related aspects (Sub-programme 2.1.2.2., 2.1.2.3., 2.1.3.1. and 2.1.4.2.) in the documents for the Committee on Agriculture could be extracted for the Commission. The Commission's comments would, in turn, be available to the Committee when discussing the relevant item.

15. It would appear desirable for the Commission to start with a comprehensive review of FAO's work in the fields of plant genetic resources, crop improvement and seed development. For the second session, in 1987, arrangements should be made for an in-depth review of the relevant parts of the Major Programme Agriculture to be considered by the Programme Committee, the Commission, which will report to the Committee on Agriculture, and under the Review of the Regular Programme, the Council and Conference.

16. A parallel procedure could be adopted for the Committee on Forestry. Insofar as the documentation prepared for that Committee deals with FAO's activities in forest genetic resources under Sub-Programme 2.3.1.2. Tree Improvement and Plantations, extracts could be made available to the Commission for comment. The report would include the work performed by the FAO Panel of Experts on Forest Gene Resources which assists in planning and co-evaluating FAO's efforts to explore, utilize and conserve the gene resources of forest trees. The relevant section of the Commission's report would, in turn, be submitted to the Committee on Forestry. The procedure could be launched in 1987 with an in-depth review of the activities of the Organization in forest genetic resources, along the same lines as that proposed for the agricultural sector.

V. PROPOSALS FOR THE SECOND SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

17. Considering the three functions of the Commission and subject to the Commission's conclusions on the suggestions outlined above to arrange the Commission's work accordingly, it is proposed to include the following items in the agenda for the Second Session:

- (i) Monitoring the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources:
A report would be prepared by the Secretariat based on information provided by Governments and on regular reports provided by the IBPGR, and other international and national bodies active in this field.
- (ii) Review of FAO activities in crop and forest genetic resources, including crop improvement and seed development:
An in-depth review would be provided on relevant parts of Sub-programmes 2.1.2.1., 2.1.2.2., 2.1.2.3., 2.1.3.1., 2.1.4.2. and 2.3.1.2. as part of the Review of the Regular Programme and related field activities to be prepared for the 24th FAO Conference together with relevant extracts from the Medium-Term Objectives and the Summary Programme Work and Budget 1988/89 to be prepared for the 9th Session of the Committee on Agriculture.
- (iii) Assessment of capabilities in genetic resources, plant breeding and seed development of developing countries:
A study would be prepared by FAO with the countries concerned to assess their capabilities, strength and weaknesses to actively use plant genetic resources of major food crops in breeding and provision of improved seeds in relation to present and future needs. The study will outline improvements and resources required to better orient national and international efforts to strengthen national capabilities.
- (iv) Legislation on seeds and on plant breeding in relation to the international exchange of plant genetic resources:
A review would be prepared by FAO on national laws and international agreements including plant breeders rights legislations in relation to possible present and future effects on seed trade and on the exchange of plant genetic resources for scientific and plant breeding purposes.