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FEASIBILITY STUDY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF AN INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

Table of Contents

	<u>Paragraphs</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1-4
II. PURPOSE OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND	5-7
III. FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS AND THEIR ADMINISTRATION AT FAO HEADQUARTERS	8-16

FEASIBILITY STUDY ON THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF AN INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The FAO Conference at its Twenty-Second Session in November 1983 adopted the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources. Article 6(d) of the Undertaking states that international cooperation in this field will include "measures, such as the strengthening or establishment of funding mechanisms, to finance activities relating to plant genetic resources". Article 8 of the Undertaking deals with financial security and reads as follows:

8.1 Adhering governments, and financing agencies, will, individually and collectively, consider adopting measures that would place activities relevant to the objective of this Undertaking on a firmer financial basis, with special consideration for the need of developing countries to strengthen their capabilities in genetic resource activities, plant breeding and seed multiplication.

8.2 Adhering governments, and financing agencies, will, in particular, explore the possibility of establishing mechanisms which would guarantee the availability of funds that could be immediately mobilized to meet situations of the kind referred to in Article 7.1 (f).

8.3 Adhering governments and institutions, and financing agencies, will give special consideration to requests from FAO for extra-budgetary funds, equipment or services needed to meet situations of the kind referred to in Article 7.1 (f).

8.4 The funding of the establishment and operation of the international network, insofar as it imposes additional costs on FAO, in the main will be funded from extra-budgetary resources.

2. In November 1985 the Twenty-Third Session of the FAO Conference again discussed the financing of plant genetic resources activities. In the course of the debate, the Director-General was requested to study the feasibility of establishing an international fund for plant genetic resources.

3. The Working Group of the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources at its First Meeting (2-3 June 1986) stressed that special attention should be paid to a clear definition of the objectives of the fund, in line with the provisions of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources.

4. The present document outlines the possible objectives of such a fund and indicates ways and means for its operation.

II. PURPOSE OF THE INTERNATIONAL FUND

5. Article 8 of the Undertaking covers a very wide range of activities, including the collection, conservation and utilization of plant genetic resources, as well as the broad areas of plant breeding and seed multiplication. However, the latter two activities are already receiving substantial support through a wide range of bilateral and multilateral technical assistance projects and through the network of International Agricultural Research Centres. Consequently, an international fund for plant genetic resources should be directed in particular to supporting the collection, conservation and utilization of plant genetic resources, especially at the national level.

6. In line with the provisions of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources, the objectives of the fund, as referred to in Article 7 of the Undertaking, would be those oriented towards providing support for:

- (a) developing an internationally coordinated network of national, regional and international centres, including an international network of base collections in genebanks;
- (b) increasing progressively the number of centres in order to achieve as complete a coverage as necessary, in terms of species and geographical distribution, account also being taken of the need for duplication of the resources to be safeguarded and preserved;
- (c) ensuring the application of appropriate scientific standards for the exploration, collection, conservation, maintenance, rejuvenation, evaluation and exchange of plant genetic resources;
- (d) developing a global information system relating to plant genetic resources maintained in various collections, and linked to systems established at the national, sub-regional and regional levels, on the basis of relevant arrangements that already exist;
- (e) providing prompt international action to safeguard the material maintained by a centre in case any hazard threatens the efficient maintenance and operation of the centre;
- (f) expanding and improving the professional and institutional capability within developing countries, including training within appropriate institutions in both developed and developing countries; and
- (g) ensuring a significant improvement in the capacity of developing countries for the production and distribution of improved crop varieties, as required to support major increases in agricultural production, especially in developing countries.

7. In line with the Undertaking, the activities to be supported by the fund would supplement the efforts of national governments; national, regional and international organizations; and the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources. To avoid duplication and complement the supporting activities and/or projects on plant genetic resources of IBPGR and other organizations, their interest in specific projects and activities would be assessed. Interest expressed by the organizations consulted in offering support would be communicated to the concerned recipient countries, and if they concur, the project or activity would be directed to the interested organization for support.

III. FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS AND THEIR ADMINISTRATION AT FAO HEADQUARTERS

8. Financial Regulation 6.7 provides that "Voluntary contributions, whether or not in cash, may be accepted by the Director-General, and Trust and Special Funds may be established by him to cover moneys made available to the Organization for special purposes, provided that the purposes of such contributions and moneys are consistent with the policies, aims and activities of the Organization".

9. The Organization has a variety of financing arrangements to receive, administer and disburse funds deposited with it, in accordance with Financial Regulation 6.7. The type of international fund to be established and financing arrangements to be made would be determined by a number of factors, such as: origin of the contributions (whether exclusively from governments or from other sources), nature of the activity to be financed (headquarters-based activities, field projects, etc.) and expected duration of the fund, which would depend on the circumstances for which it was created, such as meeting an emergency or financing stable activities over a longer period of time. The level of resources expected to be made available would also, of course, be a

major factor for consideration.

10. The international fund, foreseen under Article 8 of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources and as further considered by the Working Group, would be supported by various sources, including donor governments, non-governmental agencies and private industry. The activities it would finance, in accordance with the objectives identified in the previous section, would encompass actions related to the development of a network of centres and base collections, global information systems and other activities of a general character. It would also finance concrete projects in support of the establishment of national, regional or international centres and projects aimed at developing the capacity of developing countries for the production and distribution of improved crop varieties.

11. In view of the variety of purposes of the international fund and the multiplicity of contributing sources envisaged, the financing arrangements should permit maximum flexibility while ensuring appropriate monitoring and control of the activities. The proposed arrangements are similar mutatis mutandis to those made for the Prevention of Food Losses Programme (PFL), (Conference Resolution 3/77). However, at this stage they are described in general terms pending the views of the Commission and also taking into account that participation from non-government sources is expected to be stronger than for PFL.

12. A general fund would be established as a Multidonor Trust Fund subject to FAO Rules and Regulations. Contributions from all sources would be invited to this fund which would be utilized by FAO for activities designed to implement the undertaking under the general guidance provided by the Commission. Donors to the fund could either identify the general or specific activities for which the contribution should be utilized or make contributions for the general purposes of the fund, and FAO (through its Plant Production and Protection Division) would decide how to utilize them. In both cases, donors would receive periodic technical and financial reports.

13. In addition, specific projects could be financed through separate Trust Fund accounts at the request of the donor. Mainly field-level action would be supported in this way. The project proposals would be sent by FAO to potential donors, after clearance by recipient countries where applicable. Donors could also put forward ideas for projects to be further developed and negotiated by FAO. Contributions in kind would also be possible provided that the nature of such contributions is suitable for and consistent with the objectives of the projects concerned. Service charges would be assessed at the normal rates for Trust Fund projects administered by FAO. When projects are financed by governments, the project formats, procedures and other requisites under the FAO/Government Cooperative Programme would apply.

14. The Organization's financial Regulations, Rules and Procedures would apply to the receipt of funds, their allocation to projects or other activities, their obligation, disbursement, accounting and internal control. Their use would also be subject to external audit under the provisions of Financial Regulation XII.

15. The identification of projects to be financed through the fund would be a joint exercise of the countries concerned and FAO. Within FAO the Field Programme Development Division and the Plant Production and Protection Division would be responsible for this exercise. The activities supported by the fund would be reviewed on a regular basis by the FAO Commission on Plant Genetic Resources.

16. In conclusion, the implementation of the various objectives of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources requires considerable financial support. The financing arrangements suggested in this paper are based on those in force for existing FAO Action Programmes and could be further developed in the light of the comments of the Commission. Pending a final decision, individual projects would be submitted by FAO to prospective donors, inviting their support.