

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources

Steering Committee Discusses action plan for the Near East and the North Africa

Cairo, 13 July 2014 – FAO hosts the first Steering Committee to discuss the implementation of the Near East and North Africa Action Plan for the Benefit-Sharing Fund in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resource for Agriculture.

The Treaty NENA Action Plan addresses water, plant genetic resources and food security in the region. It comes as a direct result of the Ministerial Conference held at the Treaty's Governing Body in Muscat, Oman, in September 2013.

The Benefit-Sharing Fund for the conservation and use of plant genetic resources

The Treaty's Benefit-Sharing Fund (BSF) invests in high impact projects, technology transfer and capacity building, to support developing countries in the conservation and use of plant genetic resources.

“The Benefit-Sharing Fund of the International Treaty is well placed to make a significant contribution to addressing drought and food security in the NENA Region,” said Dr Shakeel Bhatti, Secretary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources. “With the needed financial support, the Treaty can assist the NENA region to cope with drought and desertification's impact on local food crops by using plant genetic diversity and new technologies to develop drought- and salinity tolerant crops for the region. The Treaty NENA Action Plan would also conserve most, if not all, of the cultivated diversity of major crops currently existing in the Region.”

The Treaty's BSF has already supported two rounds of projects benefiting the lives and livelihoods of over 17000 farmers. Projects are still on-going in 33 countries across Africa, Asia, Near East, Latin America and the Caribbean and are expected to benefit over 500,000 people. The Treaty is currently reviewing submissions made under the third round of Calls for Proposals.

The Treaty NENA Action Plan is expected to be part of the 4th round of BSF Projects.

Plant Genetic resources for drought-tolerant food crops in the region

Climate change, growing populations, water scarcity and limited natural resources currently present a great challenge to the food security of the NENA region. Plant genetic resources, which are the raw materials used to create new crop varieties, play a strategic role in helping agriculture adapt to a dryer climate and related challenges. Drought- and salinity-tolerant crop varieties, for instance, contribute to saving scarce water resources and allow more water for other crops.

The BSF's regional Action Plan will have a specific focus on agricultural production under conditions of water scarcity, drought, desertification and climate change and will also create the basis to foster partnerships with the non-profit and the private sector on the matter across the region.

"This plan is of a paramount importance for the NENA Region," said Abdessalam Ould Ahmed, FAO Assistant Director-General for the Near East and North Africa, "It provides a framework that spells out goals to be achieved and specific measures to be implemented by countries and partners of the Near East and North Africa, including FAO" he added. Besides other areas, such as improved irrigation systems, water desalination and water reuse, the plant genetic resources addressed by the Treaty are an important aspect of addressing water scarcity in agriculture in the region.

Heads of key agricultural institutions in the region, including Dr Tariq Al-Zadjali, Director-General of the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD); Dr Mahmoud Solh, Director-General of International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA); Dr Mohammad Ajlouni, Executive Secretary of Association of Agricultural Research Institutions in the Near East and North Africa (AARINENA); Dr Ismahane ElOuafi, Director-General of International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA); Dr Shakeel Bhatti, Secretary of the International Treaty on plant Genetic Resources, and officers from each of these bodies attended the Treaty Nena Action Plan Steering Committee. The Steering Committee meeting and Treaty Action Plan come as the direct implementation of the Muscat Ministerial Declaration, adopted at the regional Ministerial Conference hosted by H.E. Dr Fuad bin Jafaar Al-Sajwani, Oman's Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth, on the occasion of the Fifth Session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty.