



The International Treaty

ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

“10th Anniversary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture”

FAO, Rome 14 November 2011

November 2011 marked the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) by the FAO Conference. The successful implementation of the Treaty in the past years has been the outcome of more than 15 years of work at FAO. On the occasion of this major Anniversary, a high-level celebration was held at FAO on 14th November, convened under the patronship of the High-level Task Force of the ITPGRFA's Benefit-sharing Fund.

Purpose

1. To consider the Treaty as an international policy instrument for Policy Coordination to prevent or mitigate world food price crises, strengthen the longer-term productivity, sustainability and resilience of food and agriculture systems world-wide;
2. To present the Treaty as an instrument to assist low-income food-deficit countries through the support of farmers and local communities' efforts to manage and conserve their plant genetic resources for food and agriculture;
3. To officially launch the new approved portfolio of projects under the Benefit-sharing Fund of the Treaty;
4. To demonstrate the direct effect of conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources addressed to supporting agricultural research and innovation and to creating a favourable environment to encourage public and private investment in agriculture;
5. To showcase the Treaty as one of the foremost legal instruments leading the agricultural field internationally with innovative mechanisms such as the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing and its Benefit-sharing Fund;

Anniversary Celebration Programme

09.00 – 10.30 : The First Ten Years – Looking Back

What Has Been Achieved, Recent Progress and Current Challenges of the Treaty.

10.30 – 12.00: Looking Towards the Next Ten Years

Designing a Trajectory to Address Future Challenges, Opportunities, and the Potential of the Treaty.

13:45–15.00: High-Level Task Force of the Benefit-sharing Fund of the Treaty and Roundtable discussion on the future perspectives of the Treaty

Main outcomes of the discussion

In the last ten years the International Treaty has placed itself at the forefront of international governance concerning plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, access and benefit-sharing for plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, adaptation of food crops to climate change, with the aim of ensuring food security through conservation and sustainable use of agro-biodiversity. This successful implementation phase following its adoption shows that the Treaty is truly “Leading the Field”.

In the future it is imperative to understand the role that agro-biodiversity can play in increasing income, improving nutrition, and ensuring sustainable and resilient agricultural systems in smallholder farming communities across different agricultural ecosystems.

The Treaty has a double nature: it represents a set of operational systems on the one hand (the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing, the Benefit-sharing Fund, the Global Information System) and it acts as a global governance framework through its intergovernmental management structures.

The newly approved portfolio of projects funded by the Treaty’s Benefit-sharing Fund will support vulnerable farmers and rural communities in at least one of the following geographic areas:

- centers of origin or diversification of cultivated plants;
- areas with high levels of rural poverty or food insecurity of targeted countries;
- regions where climate change is severely affecting food security and agriculture in the next decades.

Countries like Spain, Italy, Australia, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland and institutions like IFAD have demonstrated their real commitment to the Treaty with concrete contributions to the Benefit-sharing Fund, whose funded projects are today helping farmers worldwide to conserve agro-biodiversity in the face of the adverse impact of climate change, for the future food security of us all.

The future of the Benefit-sharing Fund is to try to launch a new generation of projects, looking for a niche which will differentiate it from other instruments of development finance. To implement the *in-situ* conservation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture the most effective approach should be “Conservation-through-sustainable-utilization”.

The Treaty should be considered not only as a valuable instrument for technical experts but also as an investment to prevent and mitigate world food price crises, through facilitated access of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

It would have to form an essential part of any Policy Coordination strategy to prevent or mitigate world food price crises by focussing on:

1. the longer-term productivity, sustainability and resilience of the food and agriculture system world-wide, and
2. a tangible assistance to low-income food-deficit countries through the support of farmers and local communities in their efforts to manage and conserve plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

In this context FAO is recognized at the global level as a main promoter of conservation and sustainable utilization of PGRFA, through its role in the negotiation and hosting of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT-PGRFA) and in the implementation of some of its supporting components, such as the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (GPA).

After the adoption of the Treaty by the FAO Conference in 2001, the international scenario for access and benefit-sharing of genetic resources has changed. A new international agreement, the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization of the Convention on Biological Diversity, was adopted on 29 October 2010.

In adopting the Nagoya Protocol, the Conference of Parties in the Decision X/1, *inter alia*, recognized:

- i) the International Treaty as one of the complementary instruments that constitute the International Regime;
- ii) that the objectives of the International Treaty are the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use, in harmony with the Convention, for sustainable agriculture and food security.
- iii) the importance of genetic resources for food security, public health, biodiversity conservation, and the mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
- iv) the special nature of agricultural biodiversity, its distinctive features and problems needing distinctive solutions.

The two instruments are very different in many ways but both instruments convey one clear and simple message: we need to ensure access to genetic resources as well as the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from their use, if we want to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity.

In the future, a renewed and high-level policy dialogue will be needed in the context of the Treaty on some of these pressing issues in food and agriculture facing the world community today.

In order to implement the objectives of the Treaty the focus of future work should be on :

- Promoting further accession or ratification of the Treaty by non-Contracting Parties;
- Including plant genetic resources for food and agriculture held by Contracting Parties in the Multilateral System, as established in the Treaty under Article 11;
- Implementing the Treaty's operational systems in a practical and coherent manner in all Contracting Parties' institutional, legal and administrative infrastructure;
- Using the Standard Material Transfer Agreement also for non-Annex I crops, when so desired by Providers and Recipients;
- Exploring the possibility of expanding the list of crops under Annex I for all breeding activities to respond to climate change, in the context of an overall review of the functioning of the Treaty and its Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing;
- Need to develop the argument that climate change increases interdependence on PGRFA and therefore requires more PGRFA to be exchanged multilaterally through facilitated access for food security;
- Implementing the Farmers' Rights provisions of the Treaty;
- Ensuring that Benefit-sharing be directly proportional to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA;
- Recognizing the contribution of farmers to shaping the gene flows within and amongst crop variety populations.

We need to continue building a high-level policy dialogue in the framework of the International Treaty about the pressing issues in food and agriculture facing the global community today. This high-level dialogue should address the key challenges in the field of agriculture, environment and trade when it comes to plant genetic resources.

Some of the questions which the speakers mentioned included:

- how can we conserve agricultural biodiversity, and specifically the genetic diversity of our food crops, to stop the loss of diversity which will jeopardize the food security of future generations?
- how can we adapt agriculture to climate change by using our existing plant genetic diversity and develop climate smart crops?
- how can we facilitate sustainable development by agricultural stakeholders in developing countries and sustainably intensify crop production while ensuring environmental sustainability?
- how can we utilize and apply the Treaty systems – the genepool under the Multilateral System and the Benefit-sharing Fund - for the transition to a Green Economy and at the same time ensure that agriculture fulfils the crucial role it needs to play in this Green Economy?
- how will we utilize and govern the scientific revolution of plant genomics in agricultural breeding and genebanking through a coherent global information system on plant genetic resource for food and agriculture in the future?
- How can the success of the Treaty in implementing its Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing play a leading role in making access and benefit-

sharing systems for genetic resources work in other domains, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the work of the WHO on virus-sharing and benefit-sharing, and genetic resources in the deep seabed? Given that the Treaty covers all plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, we must continue to directly implement its interfaces with its sister convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity.

- How can we reduce vulnerability and increase the resilience of countries to price volatility of basic food crops by adapting and leveraging the operation of the Treaty's financial, technical and infrastructural systems for plant genetic resources?
- How can the Treaty optimally contribute to the governance architecture for agriculture and environment in linking with its fellow biodiversity-related conventions?

This reflection should be initiated by commissioning a series of high-level policy papers on the above questions followed by discussions at a Second High-level Roundtable on the International Treaty, which could be held in 2012. The discussion of these important questions should then continue at high-level meetings organized by the Treaty in conjunction to other international events, such as the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nation General Assembly, the G-20 or similar meetings and summits.