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The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**Views, Experiences and Best Practices as an example of possible options for
the national implementation of Article 9 of the International Treaty**

Note by the Secretary

At its [second meeting](#) of the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (AHTEG), the Expert Group agreed on a revised version of the [template](#) for collecting information on examples of national measures, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights

This document presents information on best practices and measures of implementing Article 9 of the International Treaty submitted by African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) on 11 December 2020.

The submission is presented in the form and language in which it was received.



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Template for submission of

Measures, Best Practices and Lessons Learned from the Realization of Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty

Basic information

- Title of measure/practice

Seed sovereignty and agroecological scaling: Focus on two cases of seed recovery, conservation and defence in Colombia

- Date of submission

11th December 2020

- Name(s) of country/countries in which the measure/practice is taking place

Colombia

- Responsible institution/organization (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s) and contact person)

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- Type of institution/organization (categories)

University

- Collaborating/supporting institutions/organizations/actors, if applicable (name, address, website (if applicable), e-mail address, telephone number(s))

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Description of the examples



Mandatory information:¹

- Short summary to be put in the inventory (max. 200 words)

Seed sovereignty and agroecological scaling: Focus on two cases of seed recovery, conservation and defense in Colombia is a study based on two grassroots organisations that both belong to the *Red de Semillas Libres de Colombia* (Free Seed Network of Colombia or RSLC). The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between seed recovery, conservation and defense and the expansion of agroecology. From January 2016 to December 2017, fieldwork was carried out. The study situated its outcomes in detail on the construction of seed sovereignty in Colombia, cases of seed recovery, conservation, and defense, the role of seed custodians organised in the Free Seed Network of Colombia, Agroecology and seed defense, collective actions and strategies toward the defense of seeds and agrifood autonomy and social reappropriation of territory based on native and creole seeds.

- Brief history (including starting year), as appropriate

The Seed sovereignty and agroecological scaling: Focus on two cases of seed recovery, conservation and defense in Colombia. This study was conducted on two grassroots organisations in Colombia; *Custodios de Semillas de Riosucio* (Seed Custodians of Riosucio, in the Department of Caldas) and *Red Agroecologica del Caribe* (Caribbean Agroecological Network of RECAR, in the Department of Cordoba), which are part of the Free Seed Network of Colombia (Red de Semillas Libres de Colombia–RLSC). The paper was published online on the 27th of February 2019.

- Core components of the measure/practice (max 200 words)
 - Field work carried out from January 2016 to December 2017 which included 16 semi-structured interviews with seed custodians, community leaders and specialists on the topics of seeds; focus groups were used; participant observation was carried out in 14 plots and photographs were taken.
 - Examining the relationship between seed recovery, conservation and defense and the expansion of agroecology. In this case, it was found out that seed sovereignty contributes to seed availability, access, and control, as well as to protection of the right to preserve, reproduce, and exchange native and creole seeds.
 - Description of mechanism of control over seeds which are currently in effect worldwide, including in the study areas as well as processes of resistance in response to global changes.
 - Results of field research addressed (a) environmental and socio-political context of the grassroots organizations studied; (b) the adoption of agroecology and seed defense; (c) the role of seed custodians in their organizations and in the RSLC; (d) collective actions and strategies carried out by the grassroots organizations regarding seed use, conservation, and management; and (e) social processes involving seeds in territories in which agroecology is practice
 - Discussion on both cases in the contribution of agroecological scaling by building seed sovereignty
- Description of the context and the history of the measure/practice is taking place (political, legal and economic framework conditions for the measure/practice) (max 200 words)

¹ This mandatory information is required in order for the measure/practice to be included in the Inventory.



Due to neoliberal policies as a result of several factors including Free trade Agreements (FTA) with the United States, several reforms were made, including Resolution 970 that regulates marketing of seeds produced by agribusiness and limiting access to native and creole seeds. As a result, in 2010 and 2011, the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA), together with government authorities confiscated 2 tons of seeds – principally rice, potato, maize, and beans. The 2013 National Agrarian Strike resulted to over 430 agreements in favor of Colombia’s rural population and a temporary suspension of Resolution 970, and the Colombian government committed to working with farmers. However, government policies still promote certified seed. During this time, members of 80 peasant and indigenous organizations, NGOs, and activist groups addressed three broad topics: 1) recovery, conservation, and management of native and creole seeds; 2) political advocacy; and 3) communication and media to promote and make visible actions and strategies for defending seeds. As a result, the Free Seed Network of Colombia, was formally launched and is currently active in six regions of the country. Thus, the study shows the importance of support for peasant organisations in the recovery, conservation and defense of seed in their territories.

- To which provision(s) of Article 9 of the International Treaty does this measure relate

- Art. 9.1
- Art. 9.2a
- Art. 9.2b
- Art. 9.2c
- Art. 9.3

Other information, if applicable

- Please indicate which category of the Inventory is most relevant for the proposed measure, and which other categories are also relevant (if any):

No.	Category	Most relevant ²	Also relevant ³
1	Recognition of local and indigenous communities’, farmers’ contributions to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, such as awards and recognition of custodian/guardian farmers		
2	Financial contributions to support farmers conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA such as contributions to benefit-sharing funds		
3	Approaches to encourage income-generating activities to support farmers’ conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA		X
4	Catalogues, registries and other forms of documentation of PGRFA and protection of traditional knowledge	X	

² Please select only one category that is most relevant, under which the measure will be listed.

³ Please select one or several categories that may also be relevant (if applicable).



5	In-situ/on-farm conservation and management of PGRFA, such as social and cultural measures, community biodiversity management and conservation sites		
6	Facilitation of farmers' access to a diversity of PGRFA through community seed banks ⁴ , seed networks and other measures improving farmers' choices of a wider diversity of PGRFA.	X	
7	Participatory approaches to research on PGRFA, including characterization and evaluation, participatory plant breeding and variety selection		X
8	Farmers' participation in decision-making at local, national and sub-regional, regional and international levels		
9	Training, capacity development and public awareness creation	X	
10	Legal measures for the implementation of Farmers' Rights, such as legislative measures related to PGRFA.		X
11	Other measures / practices		X

- In case you selected 'other measures', would you like to suggest a description of this measure, e.g. as a possible new category? Declaration of GMO-free territories of farmers or peasants in order to prevent the risk of contamination of their local, native and creole/traditional seed
- Objective(s)

The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between seed recovery, conservation and defense and the expansion of agroecology.

- Target group(s) and numbers of involved and affected farmers⁵

The study targeted 16 semi-structured interviews with seed custodians, community leaders and specialists on the topics of seeds; focus groups were used; participant observation was carried out in 14 plots in the study area.

- Location(s) and geographical outreach
Department of Caldas and Department of Cordoba in Colombia
- Resources used for implementation of the measure/practice
- How has the measure/practice affected the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture?

⁴ Including seed houses.

⁵ Any classification, e.g. of the types of farmer addressed, may be country-specific.



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As it is a study, it has helped to create awareness on the measures and practices that grassroots farmer organisations are using to recover, conserve and defend native and creole seed which are important practices for the promotion of farmers' rights and the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

- Please describe the achievements of the measure/ practice so far (including quantification) (max 200 words)

The study on the two grassroots organisations has revealed a few important practises of farmer organisations in the recovery, conservation and defense on seed.

- Other national level instruments that are linked to the measure/practice
- Are you aware of any other international agreements or programs that are relevant for this measure/practice?

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety – in relation to the declaration of GMO-free territories

- Other issues you wish to address, that have not yet been covered, to describe the measure/practice

The study on the two grassroots organisations has revealed a few important practises of farmer organisations in the recovery, conservation and defense on seed. These are described in detail as below:

1. The *Red Agroecologica del Caribe* (Caribbean Agroecological Network of RECAR, in the Department of Cordoba)
 - RECAR began to defend seeds when GMOs were introduced to Colombia which brought the risk of contamination of maize, principally in the Caribbean region.
 - In 2005, with support of RECAR, the *Resguardo San Andres de Sotavento* declared itself to be the first GMO-free territory in Colombia.
 - RECAR also promotes land recovery and diversified crop production, and currently, 77 families act as seed custodian, growing and conserving seed of 26 varieties of maize, 25 varieties of cassava, 11 varieties of rice, 8 varieties of yam, 6 varieties of squash (*cucurbita spp.*), 4 varieties of sweet potato (*Ipomoe batata*), and 71 other vegetable varieties.
 - They have established two community seed houses where they exchange and sell seed of 8 varieties of maize and 20 other crop species.
 - RECAR has recovered 600 traditional maize-based recipes, evidencing the diversity of Caribbean gastronomy.



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2. *Custodios de Semillas de Riosucio* (Seed Custodians of Riosucio, in the Department of Caldas. This is located in the Indigenous *Resguardo* Canamomo-Lomapieta of the Embera Chami ethnic group, in the municipality of Riosucio
 - In 2009, *Resguardo* declared itself to be a GMO-free territory, and in 2012 the municipality of Riosucio did the same.
 - Seed custodians of Riosucio currently consists of 57 families who work on collective seed recovery and conservation; research, education and training regarding seeds, as well as re-establishment of traditional agricultural systems. They run 10 community seed houses where they exchange and sell seeds of beans, maize, and other food species. They also carry out annual regional agrobiodiversity fairs.

The Free Seed Network of Colombia has carried out efforts with the political intention of confronting some of the challenges facing seed through three initiatives;

- Declaration of GMO-free territories (to prevent genetic contamination)
- Community seed houses
- Participatory “guarantee” – or seed certification – systems

Currently 6 CSH exist, many of which were built through the Seeds of Identity campaign. In an effort to sustain themselves economically and maximise their autonomy, CSH of five local networks market their agroecological seeds nationally through the *2018 Seeds Catalogue*. Thus far, this catalogue offers 18 varieties of maize, 12 varieties of beans and 4 varieties of tomato (*Solanum lycopersicum*). In this manner the local networks are gaining control over seeds in their regions, and in turn over their local economy.

In 2015, as a result of collective effort by custodian farmers, local organisations, and the RSLC, participatory guarantee (or certification) systems (PGS) were established as local mechanism to ‘certify’ and promote agroecological seeds from peasant, indigenous, and afro-descendent communities which are pest and disease-free and adapted to specific cultural and biological context.

These PGS provide an alternative to external certification and industrialised seeds, and contribute to communities being able to provision themselves with high quality seeds and thereby increase their agrifood autonomy.

Through GMO-free territories, community seed houses, and participatory “guarantee” systems, Colombian peasants unite in defence of life with other struggles such as those against land-grabbing, mining, and hydroelectric dams.

Lessons learned

- Describe lessons learned which may be relevant for others who wish to do the same or similar measures/practices (max 250 words).

These case studies of custodians and the seeds they defend allow us to understand the defense of diversity in general as an emancipating force in the face of the current hegemonic system that manifests itself in



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agrifood homogenization. Attempts by capital to appropriate seeds place at risk access to food, which is essentially expropriation of life.

These cases motivate us to continue to explore the contributions of agroecological networks as well as the process of strengthening of local seed systems in the face of a dispute of among meanings given the current trend toward institutionalization of agroecology as well as attempts by agribusiness to co-opt agroecology

- What challenges encountered along the way (if applicable) (max 200 words)
- What would you consider conditions for success, if others should seek to carry out such a measure or organize such an activity? (max 100 words)

Further information

- Link(s) to further information about the measure/practice

<https://www.researchgate.net/deref/https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.1080%2F21683565.2019.1578720>