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**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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**The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

**INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

**FIFTH MEETING OF THE AD HOC TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON
CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF PLANT GENETIC
RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

4 – 7 October 2021

**TOOLBOX ON SUSTAINABLE USE OF PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

I. Introduction

1. At its Eight Session, the Governing Body convened the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ACSU or Committee).¹
2. The Governing Body, at the same Session, requested the Secretary to continue updating the Toolbox on Sustainable use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Toolbox), disseminate information about it and provide information about its use for consideration by the ACSU.
3. According to the Terms of Reference established by the Governing Body, one of the tasks of the ACSU is to review the information provided by the Secretary on, and assess the relevance and effectiveness of the Toolbox, and prepare concrete recommendations on how the Toolbox can be monitored, evaluated and improved to better guide Contracting Parties and stakeholders for the sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA).
4. In February 2021, the Secretariat organized an informal briefing session for the members of the Committee to provide updates and receive initial guidance on the preparations for the upcoming meeting of the ACSU.
5. During the informal meeting, the Secretariat presented a proposal to conduct an online survey on the usage, relevance, and effectiveness of the Toolbox, which the members of the Committee welcomed.

II. The Toolbox on Sustainable Use of PGRFA

The development of the Toolbox

6. The process for the development of the Toolbox commenced in 2009, when the Governing Body, at its Third Session, requested the Secretary to clarify the notion of a toolbox to assist countries in designing measures to promote the sustainable use of PGRFA in order to come to a common understanding, for further consideration during its Fourth Session.

¹ Resolution 5/2019 <http://www.fao.org/3/nb783en/nb783en.pdf>

7. At its Fourth Session, the Governing Body requested the Secretary to further explore, in collaboration with FAO technical units and other stakeholders, subject to the availability of financial resources, the development of the Toolbox for sustainable use of PGRFA.²

8. At its Fifth Session, the Governing Body, endorsed the Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and its Supporting Initiatives. The Toolbox was one of the two programmes foreseen to contribute the goals of the Programme of Work, and to help strengthen collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders participating in projects and programmes relevant to sustainable use.³

9. Further work was undertaken in consultation with experts and discussions held within the Committee regarding structure, content and resources that may be included in the Toolbox. In 2017, prior to the Seventh Session of the Governing Body, the Toolbox was finally launched online.

About the Toolbox

10. The Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA is an online database of information and other relevant resources on the management and sustainable use of PGRFA. It contains publications, reports, research and studies and other information from various organizations and bodies from across the globe, including research and academic institutions, intergovernmental bodies, as well as national and international agricultural research institutions.

Purpose of the Toolbox

11. The Toolbox was created as a one-stop hub of knowledge and learning, for people seeking information resources on sustainable use of PGRFA, or on guidance, policies, strategies and activities that can promote and enhance the sustainable use of PGRFA, particularly at national and local levels. Ultimately, the purpose is to facilitate the sustainable use of PGRFA so as to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity and genetic erosion, promote sustainable agriculture and to ensure global food security.

Information resources available in the Toolbox

12. The currently available information resources in the Toolbox are divided into three major thematic groupings: (i) sustaining local crop diversity; (ii) policy for sustainable use, each with several subject areas and categories; and (iii) others, resources that can apply to both thematic groupings (i) and (ii), as presented in Figure 1.

² Resolution 7/2011 <http://www.fao.org/3/be457e/be457e.pdf>; Resolution 7/2013 <http://www.fao.org/3/be601e/be601e.pdf>

³ Resolution 7/2013 <http://www.fao.org/3/be601e/be601e.pdf>

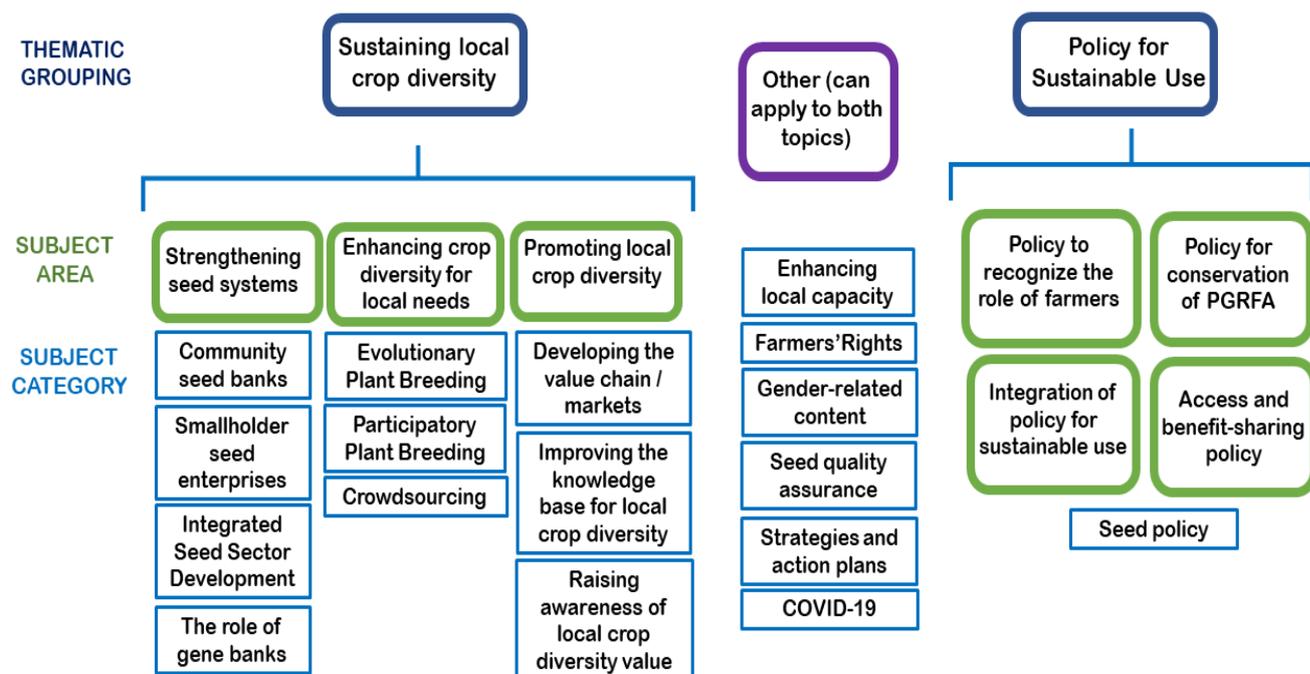


Figure 1. Subject areas and categories of the Information and resources contained in the Toolbox.

13. Resources are classified according to the relevant subject areas and specific subject categories as well as by their geographic area of relevance, language, publication date, and format.

14. Most of the information resources are open access and freely available for download from the Internet.

III. Status and updates

15. As of August 2021, a total of 1581 resources are available in the Toolbox.⁴ Most of them are open sources, thus all users can have access freely to these materials. The Secretariat regularly updates the Toolbox to include latest relevant information and resources that comes to its knowledge from different sources.

IV. Use, Relevance and Effectiveness of the Toolbox

16. Due to the technical limitations of the platform where the Toolbox is hosted, it has not been feasible for the Secretariat to effectively evaluate the use of the Toolbox, as there is currently no mechanism within the platform for obtaining detailed and disaggregated information on the usage of the database.

17. In order to obtain information on the use of Toolbox for consideration by the Committee on its fifth meeting, the Secretariat proposed to conduct an online survey for this purpose. The Committee welcomed the proposal to conduct an online survey to evaluate the use, relevance, and effectiveness of the Toolbox, as well as to gather suggestions for its further improvement.

⁴ As of 3 August 2021

Summary of the Results of the Online Survey on the Use, Relevance, and Effectiveness of the Toolbox

18. The Secretariat developed the online survey, taking into account the suggestions of members of the Committee, comprising of questions that required respondents to describe their experiences in using and navigating the Toolbox. The questionnaire was made available in four languages (Arabic, English, French and Spanish), and launched in April 2021.⁵

19. Forty-nine respondents from different regions responded to the survey: Europe (11), Africa (10), Latin America and the Caribbean (10), Asia (8), Near East (5), North America (2) and South West Pacific (2).

20. The majority of the respondents were from Contracting Parties (43%), with others from agricultural research and academic institutions (31%), non-governmental institutions (10%), intergovernmental organization (7%), and the rest of the respondents were from other stakeholders.

21. The respondents were from organizations and institutions operating at different levels: national (61%), regional (15%), global (12%), and at community/local level (12%). However, it should be noted that this was a multiple-choice question hence, some respondents' organizations may operate at multiple levels.

22. The majority of the respondents (87%) found the subject areas and categories in the Toolbox to be adequate for their work in sustainable use of PGRFA, while few of the respondents (13%), who indicated that the toolbox does not cover an adequate range of "subject categories/areas" they needed to support their work in the field of sustainable use of PGRFA, specified what they thought was missing or made suggestions as to what needed to be included. These suggestions include:

- That while the categories are adequate, the content could be improved and more regularly updated;
- The need for an additional category on linkages between formal and informal seed systems;
- The role of the private breeding sector and their contribution to sustainable use of PGRFA;
- The need to include information on crop wild relatives and wild edible species;
- Missing or the need to have sufficient information on seed system dynamics, transitions from underdeveloped to developed systems, as well as information resources on the economics of seed systems especially in an international context;
- Information on traditional crops may need to be included;
- Information about traditional crop seeds rehabilitation could be added, where researchers in genebanks can study the characteristics of these resources by evaluating them and determining the good traits, especially what suits the local taste, market demands, and redeploing their cultivation among farmers, especially in areas of small holdings and for local varieties that have deteriorated and their use has decreased; and
- Information on training courses or postgraduate studies for developing countries in the field of the use of PGRFA.

23. Almost all the respondents suggested that the Toolbox be updated on a regular basis, and made more user-friendly. Specific suggestions on how to improve the Toolbox in order to support their work include:

- Creating an advanced search function with filter on the topics;
- Users would benefit from a more detailed presentation of the results to include publication year, author (along with Subject area and Subject category);
- A download function of the full citations would be useful to do a first screening and selection of results;

⁵ See: [Notification – Online Survey on the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, available at: http://www.fao.org/3/cb4298en/cb4298en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/cb4298en/cb4298en.pdf)

- Checking for potentially outdated resources;
- Inclusion of information and material on the contributions of the private seed sector to sustainable use, this information to be visible and searchable under relevant categories/subjects;
- Promotion and dissemination the use of the Toolbox, including by conducting virtual training workshops;
- Include information on conservation strategies and resources on access and benefit-sharing, and Farmers' Rights;
- Carry out reviews (and validate with users and potential users) of the toolbox on a regular basis so as to incorporate new ideas;
- Select only the best and relevant resources for PGRFA;
- Make the Toolbox more visual or interactive, more user-friendly, develop a manual on how new users can use of the tool;
- Ensure that the information is accurate, objective, and up-to-date;
- The greater value of the Tool Box is heuristic rather than providing guidance;
- Link the Toolbox with the GLIS Portal and avoid duplication;
- Make the Toolbox available *offline* for those who do not have reliable access to the internet; and
- Include a feedback form for the users.

24. Overall, the majority of the respondents found the Toolbox to contain information resources relevant to their work on sustainable use of PGRFA, and only very few have experienced difficulties in navigating the Toolbox.

25. The full report of the online survey is provided in the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/Inf.2, *Outcomes of the online survey on the use, relevance and effectiveness of the Toolbox for Sustainable Use of PGRFA*.

V. Guidance Sought

26. The Committee is invited to review the information given in this document and assess the relevance and effectiveness of the Toolbox and prepare concrete recommendations on how it can be monitored, evaluated and improved in order to better guide Contracting Parties and stakeholders on the sustainable use of PGRFA. In so doing, it may wish to indicate any support it might require from the Secretary to assist its work.