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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

**FUTURE WORK ON CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF PLANT
GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its Eighth Session, the Governing Body decided to convene the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ACSU or “the Committee”). Among the tasks assigned to it by the Governing Body, the Committee is requested to “recommend further steps on how the Governing Body can assist Contracting Parties in advancing the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty for consideration of the Governing Body at its Ninth Session”.
2. This document provides some background information on the work done and processes undertaken so far in the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the Treaty. It also outlines possible areas of future work and other specific elements for the consideration of the Committee in providing relevant recommendations to the Governing Body, as requested.

**II. OVERVIEW OF WORK DONE SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE *AD HOC*
TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE USE**

3. The Ad hoc Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of PGRFA was established at the Fourth Session of the Governing Body, through Resolution 7/2011.¹ This is based on its recognition of the second objective of the International Treaty and the vital role of sustainable use of PGRFA in addressing global challenges, including food security, biodiversity loss, climate change adaptation and poverty alleviation for smallholder farmers.
4. It was also a recognition that many Contracting Parties faced major challenges in the implementation of Article 6 of the International Treaty, and that further financial resources, capacity building and technology transfer were required.
5. In this context, the initial mandate of the ACSU focused on:
 - i. Identification of needs and opportunities to facilitate the sustainable use of PGRFA;
 - ii. Development of a toolbox to assist Contracting Parties in the implementation of Article 6;

¹ [Resolution 7/2011](#)

- iii. Elaboration of a draft Programme of Work on sustainable use of PGRFA, based on elements generated through stakeholder consultations;
- iv. Cooperation with the CBD, the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the International Agricultural Research Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, and other international processes and institutions in the field of sustainable use of PGRFA.

6. In the first biennium after its establishment (2012-2013), the ACSU developed the Programme of Work on Enabling Sustainable Use of PGRFA (*the Programme of Work*), including its vision, mission and goals, and specifying expected results for the next two biennia.² *The Programme of Work* consisted of key activities, which were aligned with the relevant priority activities of the *Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, to be implemented by Contracting Parties, stakeholders and international organizations, as well as Supporting Initiatives, involving a broader range of stakeholders.

7. The Governing Body, at its Fifth Session (2013), emphasized the link between Farmers' Rights under Article 9 and the provisions on conservation and sustainable use under Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty. It endorsed *the Programme of Work* and invited all the Contracting Parties to implement measures and activities as contained in *the Programme of Work* and its Supporting Initiatives, and to report on their implementation of activities to the Governing Body at its Sixth and Seventh Sessions.³

8. The Governing Body also decided to reconvene the ACSU to provide advice to the Secretary, especially regarding the coordination of *the Programme of Work*, the cooperation with the CBD and other international processes and institutions in the field of sustainable use of PGRFA, and the further development of *the Toolbox*.

9. At the Sixth Session of the Governing Body (2015), the ACSU reported on the implementation of various components of *the Programme of Work*, as requested by the Governing Body at its previous session.⁴ The ACSU further highlighted the interface of conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA as a continuum and the direct complementarity of between in-situ, on-farm and ex-situ approaches to conservation of PGRFA, stressing the importance of involving farming communities at regional and local levels.

10. An online survey was conducted in 2015 to develop a better understanding of the specific roles and interests of the broad range of stakeholders involved in the sustainable use of PGRFA. Based on the results of the consultation, the ACSU developed an outline of the preliminary structure, content and mode of delivery of *the Toolbox*, and made recommendations for next steps in its development.

11. Considering the progress made as well as experiences and insights shared by Contracting Parties and stakeholders, the ACSU proposed a revised *Programme of Work* that integrated the various activities in a more efficient way and added new programmes and activities. For example, training and capacity building on sustainable use and Farmers' Rights were added as a new area of activity, reflecting the clear interlinkage between both thematic areas.

12. The Governing Body endorsed the revised *Programme of Work* and requested Contracting Parties and stakeholders to continue reporting on its implementation.⁵ It further requested, *inter alia*, Contracting Parties to promote, as appropriate, the access of all farmers, including smallholder farmers, farmers organizations, indigenous peoples and local communities, to PGRFA in the Multilateral System; and the Secretariat to further explore options on how the Benefit-sharing Fund could support the

² Implementation of the Article 6 Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT/GB-5/13/9), available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/be567e/be567e.pdf>

³ [Resolution 7/2013](#)

⁴ Implementation of the Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT/GB-6/15/12), available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/mo314e/mo314e.pdf>

⁵ [Resolution 4/2015](#)

implementation of *the Programme of Work*, in particular with the aim to address farmers' needs. It further decided to reconvene the ACSU.

13. In its report to the Seventh Session of the Governing Body in 2017,⁶ the ACSU noted that significant progress had been made with regard to the implementation of *the Programme of Work*, whereas lack of capacity and resources continued to be the main limiting factors. Regarding *the Toolbox*, the ACSU stressed the need to move as swiftly as possible to the implementation phase and proposed that *the Toolbox* should initially focus on a few priority areas and be developed further over time. The ACSU further proposed the organization of regional training/capacity building workshops to provide guidance and technical support to Contracting Parties and other stakeholders in implementing the provisions of Article 6.

14. Following the proposals made, the Governing Body reconvened the ACSU once again.⁷ Its mandate focused mainly on the continuation and strengthening of ongoing and proposed activities. It requested the Secretary, *inter alia*, to explore possibilities for the establishment of a long-term programme for the period 2020-2030 involving relevant international organizations and other stakeholders.

III. WORK OF THE ACSU IN THE CURRENT BIENNIUM

15. Taking into account the need to strengthen synergies between the various areas of work of the International Treaty, and recognising that sustainable use should be closely linked to the conservation of PGRFA,⁸ the Governing Body decided, through Resolution 5/2019,⁹ to rename and reconvene the ACSU as the *Ad Hoc* Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

16. The current mandate of the ACSU includes activities to support and assist Contracting Parties and stakeholders in promoting, enhancing and further developing the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA as set out in Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty, including to:

“...recommend further steps on how the Governing Body can assist Contracting Parties in advancing the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty for consideration of the Governing Body at its Ninth Session”.

IV. POSSIBLE ENTRY POINTS FOR FUTURE WORK

17. Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty cover a very broad range of issues to be addressed through various proposed approaches, measures and activities to be undertaken by Contracting Parties and other stakeholders. It is to be recognised that different Contracting Parties are at different stages of implementation, with differing contexts and needs, and therefore have different priorities. However, it is possible to explore overarching approaches that would best assist most Contracting Parties, especially those that require support in developing the necessary measures and capacity to implement the provisions of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty.

18. In this context, given that the mandate of the ACSU covers both Articles 5 and 6, a range of thematic areas could be addressed in an integrated way. For example, Article 5 addresses in situ, on-farm and ex situ conservation, including activities for monitoring the maintenance of the viability, degree of variation, and the genetic integrity of PGRFA collections. It also addresses the need to identify

⁶ Implementation of the Programme of Work on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT/GB-7/17/16), available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/mu386e/mu386e.pdf>

⁷ [Resolution 6/2017](#)

⁸ Report on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT/GB-8/19/11), available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/na397en/na397en.pdf>

⁹ [Resolution 5/2019](#)

and minimize or, if possible, eliminate threats to PGRFA. Article 6 is about developing and maintaining appropriate policy and legal measures that promote the sustainable use of PGRFA and suggests a range of possible measures.

19. In addition, based on the compilation and summaries provided by the Secretariat,¹⁰ the consultations about the possibility of a future Joint Programme on Biodiversity in Agriculture for Sustainable Use of PGRFA,¹¹ other high level panel discussion webinars, symposia, etc. that were organized or co-organized by the Secretariat,¹² and results from the ongoing activities that are being implemented (e.g. in the context of the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF)),¹³ the following entry points were identified, which further steps could focus on:

- i. Integrated approaches (*in situ*, on-farm and *ex situ*) for the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, including the importance of seed systems in this regard, and the contributions of diverse actors to their functioning and sustainable development.
- ii. Documentation and scientific underpinning of the evolving traditional knowledge systems, nature-based solutions, and resilient practices such as agroecological farming systems, regenerative agriculture, and other sustainable approaches for conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA.
- iii. Financial and incentive mechanisms supporting the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA.
- iv. Policies and regulatory frameworks supporting the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, including Crop Wild Relatives and wild edible plants, by integrating them in national sectoral and intersectoral plans, programmes and strategies, such as for enhancing national food security, climate change adaptation, biodiversity protection, agricultural development, etc.

V. POSSIBLE IMMEDIATE FURTHER STEPS

20. Possible immediate further steps could be divided into (i) activities for strengthening and capitalising on ongoing initiatives to increase their benefit, impact and visibility; and (ii) possible new activities to further support Contracting Parties and stakeholders in the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty.

- i. Activities for strengthening and capitalising on ongoing activities:
 - a. Organize/co-organize knowledge exchange and exchange of practical/technical experience, including through global and regional workshops for capacity development, on diverse topics that are related to the above-mentioned entry points.
 - b. Update *the Toolbox* to collect and share relevant experiences on sustainable use of PGRFA and widely communicate the content and possibilities offered by *the Toolbox* through targeted communication activities.
 - c. Share with the Contracting Parties and interested stakeholders the experiences gathered through the Benefit-sharing Fund, the Programme of Work on the Global Information System, the Inventory on Farmers' Rights and the Multilateral System on conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA.

¹⁰ See Toolbox on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/2), available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb6727en/cb6727en.pdf>

¹¹ See IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/4 available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb6878en/cb6878en.pdf>

¹² See, for example: [Proceedings of the Informal Meeting of Experts on Exploring possible elements of a Joint programme on biodiversity in agriculture for sustainable use of PGRFA 2020–2030](#) (2018); [Technical Consultation on in situ conservation and on-farm management of PGRFA](#) (2021)

¹³ See <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharing-fund/overview/en/> for further information.

- d. Contribute to the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019–2028) and other United Nations initiatives and observances of relevance for the International Treaty, such as the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables (2021) or the International Year of Millets (2023).
- ii. Possible new initiatives to further support Contracting Parties and stakeholders in the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty, through commissioning political, technical and scientific studies, on topics such as:
 - a. regeneration methods that go beyond classical seed storage, such as cryopreservation methods, which are of crucial importance for some nutritionally important crops, including fruits and vegetables.¹⁴
 - b. methods for building effective collaborative networks between diverse actors focusing on specific components of the conservation and sustainable use system.
 - c. contributions of farmers, local and indigenous communities to the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, possibly with a focus on gender-responsive approaches.
 - d. future opportunities to promote the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA in the context of the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, when adopted.
 - e. creating or strengthening platforms for knowledge exchange under the umbrella of the International Treaty on standards/good practices on various aspects of the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA.

VI. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

21. The Committee is invited to:
- i. to consider the initial information provided in this document, as a potential basis for developing the future work on the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty;
 - ii. to provide guidance on how it may wish to proceed and to indicate how the Secretary could further assist the Committee in undertaking its task of developing the recommendations on further steps in advancing the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty, as well as in the preparation of its report to the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, for its consideration.

¹⁴ See <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/news/news-detail/en/c/1413498/> for further information.

*Annex 1***TEXT OF ARTICLES 5 AND 6 OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY¹⁵****Article 5 - Conservation, Exploration, Collection, Characterization, Evaluation and Documentation of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**

5.1 Each Contracting Party shall, subject to national legislation, and in cooperation with other Contracting Parties where appropriate, promote an integrated approach to the exploration, conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and shall in particular, as appropriate:

- a) Survey and inventory plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, taking into account the status and degree of variation in existing populations, including those that are of potential use and, as feasible, assess any threats to them;
- b) Promote the collection of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and relevant associated information on those plant genetic resources that are under threat or are of potential use;
- c) Promote or support, as appropriate, farmers and local communities' efforts to manage and conserve on-farm their plant genetic resources for food and agriculture;
- d) Promote in situ conservation of wild crop relatives and wild plants for food production, including in protected areas, by supporting, inter alia, the efforts of indigenous and local communities;
- e) Cooperate to promote the development of an efficient and sustainable system of ex situ conservation, giving due attention to the need for adequate documentation, characterization, regeneration and evaluation, and promote the development and transfer of appropriate technologies for this purpose with a view to improving the sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture;
- f) Monitor the maintenance of the viability, degree of variation, and the genetic integrity of collections of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

5.2 The Contracting Parties shall, as appropriate, take steps to minimize or, if possible, eliminate threats to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

Article 6 - Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources

6.1 The Contracting Parties shall develop and maintain appropriate policy and legal measures that promote the sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

6.2 The sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture may include such measures as:

- a) pursuing fair agricultural policies that promote, as appropriate, the development and maintenance of diverse farming systems that enhance the sustainable use of agricultural biological diversity and other natural resources;
- b) strengthening research which enhances and conserves biological diversity by maximizing intra- and inter-specific variation for the benefit of farmers, especially those who generate and use their own varieties and apply ecological principles in maintaining soil fertility and in combating diseases, weeds and pests;

¹⁵ Text of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/i0510e/i0510e.pdf>

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- c) promoting, as appropriate, plant breeding efforts which, with the participation of farmers, particularly in developing countries, strengthen the capacity to develop varieties particularly adapted to social, economic and ecological conditions, including in marginal areas;
 - d) broadening the genetic base of crops and increasing the range of genetic diversity available to farmers;
 - e) promoting, as appropriate, the expanded use of local and locally adapted crops, varieties and underutilized species;
 - f) supporting, as appropriate, the wider use of diversity of varieties and species in on-farm management, conservation and sustainable use of crops and creating strong links to plant breeding and agricultural development in order to reduce crop vulnerability and genetic erosion, and promote increased world food production compatible with sustainable development; and
 - g) reviewing, and, as appropriate, adjusting breeding strategies and regulations concerning variety release and seed distribution.