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**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**



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

REPORT

OPENING OF THE MEETING

1. The fifth meeting of the *Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (ACSU or Committee), was opened by the Co-Chairs Ms. Teresita Borromeo (Asia region) and Mr. François Pythoud (European region). The ACSU had elected the two Co-Chairs by electronic means, in advance of the meeting.
2. The Co-Chairs welcomed the Members of the Committee and silent observers, recalling that the meeting had been planned to hold physically in Spain, based on the generous offer of the Spanish Government. However, it is now being held virtually, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. In his welcoming remarks, the Secretary of the Treaty, Mr. Kent Nnadozie, thanked the Members of the Committee and silent Observers for their flexibility to attend this meeting, especially those participants who experienced inconveniences because of time zone differences or technical challenges. He also recalled the vital role of the Committee in advancing the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty, the importance of conserving and sustaining the diversity of plant genetic resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA), as well as the integration of in situ and ex situ conservation approaches to address future food security and nutrition, resilient and sustainable food production.
4. Mr. José Antonio Sobrino from Spain conveyed best wishes from the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture for a successful meeting, noting that Spain would have been delighted to host the fifth meeting of the ACSU if the circumstances had allowed it. He further highlighted the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA for global food security, and the necessity of reflecting it in national programs and actions. Spain as one of the European countries hosting considerable diversity of PGRFA has made major efforts in this regard, in line with European frameworks and initiatives, and remains highly committed to further support the work on conservation and sustainable use under the International Treaty.

ITEM 1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK

5. The Committee adopted its agenda for the meeting as provided in the *Appendix 1* of this Report. The list of participants is contained in the *Appendix 2*.

ITEM 2. TOOLBOX ON SUSTAINABLE USE OF PGRFA

6. The Secretariat introduced the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/2, *Toolbox on Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, and provided an overview of the status of the online database, highlighting the increased number of information resources currently available in English, French and Spanish languages. The Secretariat recalled the mandate that the Committee received from the Governing Body, on assessing, evaluating and improving the Toolbox. The Secretariat provided some information on the outcomes of the online survey it conducted on the use, relevance and effectiveness of the Toolbox, further details of which are contained in the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/Inf.2, *Outcome of the online survey on the use, relevance and effectiveness of the toolbox for sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture*.

7. The Committee acknowledged the importance and usefulness of the Toolbox and noted the very useful recommendations made by the respondents of the online survey. It also made a number of suggestions to improve its use and effectiveness, especially:

- Regular updating of information and removing outdated resources, also by coordinating with other initiatives with similar objectives, and exploring if and how Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders can upload documents on the Toolbox;
- Enhancement of the structure, technical functioning and design of the Toolbox to make it more user-friendly;
- Expansion of the scope and coverage of the resources reflected in the Toolbox, for instance resources on crop wild relatives and wild edible species;
- Promotion of the Toolbox and creating awareness through increasing its visibility both on the International Treaty website and through other relevant systems and processes;
- Conducting capacity building activities on the contents and use of the Toolbox, including through regional webinars;
- Monitoring and collecting information on the use and users, which could be done with the help of stakeholders and evaluated by the Secretariat; and
- Regular evaluation of the Toolbox to enable the assessment of its added value.

8. Based on the above key points and suggestions received from the survey, the Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare a note detailing the proposed improvements to the Toolbox and how it could be practically and meaningfully evaluated, including broadening the scope of the Toolbox to include information for promoting the implementation of Article 5 provisions that are relevant for sustainable use of PGRFA, for the consideration of the ACSU at its next meeting.

ITEM 3. POSSIBLE JOINT PROGRAMME ON BIODIVERSITY IN AGRICULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE USE OF PGRFA

9. The Secretariat introduced the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/3, *Possible Joint Programme on Biodiversity in Agriculture for Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, followed by several presentations by partners, stakeholders and other invited speakers.

10. Ms. Regine Andersen presented the outcomes of an informal meeting of experts on the implementation of the sustainable use of PGRFA and the possible Joint Programme on Biodiversity in

Agriculture for Sustainable Use of PGRFA, which was held in Bari, Italy, from 23 to 25 May 2018 (see IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/Inf.5).

11. Further presentations were made by Mr. Santiago Carrizosa on UNDP's experiences on conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity and potential areas of participation in the possible Joint Programme; and Ms. Caridad Canales Davila (CBD Secretariat) on the status of negotiations on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. UNDP further expressed its availability to collaborate in the Joint Programme, if established. The pre-existing Memorandum of Understanding between UNDP and FAO could form a good basis for such collaboration.

12. The ACSU appreciated the presentations and took note of the experiences that were shared, especially the approaches that are supportive to the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty. It was highlighted that there is currently a "window of opportunity" for developing and implementing a Joint Programme, taking into account the urgency, momentum, and importance of cross-sectoral cooperation for addressing the climate crisis, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (when adopted), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the outcomes of the United Nation Food Security Summit (UNFSS).

13. The ACSU considered the outcomes of the Bari expert meeting as a basis for the possible Joint Programme, and identified Thematic area 3 ("*A food-system approach to food and nutrition security and ensuring resilience to climate change*") as the most relevant to link the possible Joint Programme to the current challenges and context, but emphasised the importance of framing this topic within the context of food systems transformation. It considered all objectives for a possible Joint Programme identified at the informal meeting in Bari and emphasised that Objective 5 ("*Boost sustainable use activities on the ground through an integrated approach to in-situ, on farm and ex-situ strategies*") is central.

14. The ACSU advised the Secretary to identify a number of initial potential partners that are most relevant for the selected thematic area for the Joint Programme, initiate informal contacts with these potential partners and prepare a draft note for its further consideration, before the Ninth Session of the Governing Body. The note should provide the basis for engaging potential partners and include, among other elements, the objectives, scope, mission and vision and the possible structure of the Joint Programme, and also capacity development, especially to support developing countries in the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty, and the consideration to tailor the Joint Programme to diverse needs of different regions, e.g. by involving stakeholders that are operating in different regions and at different levels.

ITEM 4. EXAMPLES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT AND ASSIST CONTRACTING PARTIES AND STAKEHOLDERS IN IMPLEMENTING ARTICLES 5 AND 6 OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY

15. The Secretariat introduced the agenda item and presented the relevant documents, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/4, *Compilation and Summaries of Submissions and Examples on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA*; IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/Inf.4.1, *Summary of National Reports on Compliance submitted by Contracting Parties in relation to Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty*; IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/Inf.4.2, *Summary of the Experiences, Lessons Learned and Best Practices on Conservation and Sustainable Use from Projects Implemented under the Benefit-sharing Fund of the International Treaty*; IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/Inf.4.3, *Regional Training Workshops on Conservation, Sustainable Use of PGRFA and Farmers' Rights: Summary of Presentations*; IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/Inf.4.4, *Compilation of submissions by Contracting Parties and Stakeholders on the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty*.

16. In addition to these compilations and summaries of submissions and examples prepared by the Secretariat, four introductory presentations were given under this agenda item.

17. Ms. Bonnie Furman (FAO) reported on the *First International Multi-stakeholder Symposium on in situ conservation and on-farm management of PGRFA*, which was held virtually in March 2021 and co-organised with the Treaty Secretariat. The Symposium comprised four sessions, on challenges and opportunities for sustainably managing crop diversity, on *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives and

wild food plants, on on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces, and on creating communities of practice as the way forward; as well as a panel discussion on opportunities, necessary actions and recommendations. The Symposium identified two principal needs: Greater dialogue among the agriculture, environment, forestry, and health sectors was deemed essential for promoting and integrating effective *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of PGRFA; and frequent exchange of experiences and best practices regarding *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of crop diversity, including in complementary *ex situ* programmes.

18. Ms. Arshiya Noorani (FAO) provided an overview of the *Second Global Plan of Action for PGRFA (GPA)*, its aims, preparatory process, context, and actions suggested to Members. She clarified that, through its 18 priority activities, the Second GPA provided a comprehensive and flexible framework to adopt supportive policies and programmes for PGRFA, thereby facilitating the implementation of the International Treaty as one of its supporting components. In addition, she presented further examples of FAO initiatives promoting the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, including voluntary guidelines for farmers' varieties and landraces, as well as crop wild relatives and wild food plants, a draft guide for *ex situ* conservation, and efforts to support Members in strengthening plant breeding. Finally, she presented key technical gaps, for example the lack of quality seeds, the poor integration of biotechnology and informatics in national breeding programmes, the need for increased use of diversity and further development of crops to tackle challenges of climate change, pests and malnutrition, as well as the need for public-private partnerships.

19. Ms. Anita Dohar (Oxfam-Novib) presented *Experiences in supporting conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA*. She gave a comprehensive overview of the programme "Sowing Diversity = Harvesting Security (SD=HS)", which is a global programme implemented by a consortium of organizations in eight countries across three continents led by Oxfam Novib, the Netherlands, and focuses on people's capacities to organize, learn and engage, including in the context of conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. She described the work of farmer field schools on participatory plant breeding, on farmer seed enterprises, and on local food plants for nutrition. The SD=HS programme promotes an enabling policy environment for farmer seed systems and the implementation of Farmers' Rights (e.g. one key topic is on registration of farmer varieties). These activities contributed, in particular, to the objectives of Articles 5 and 6 for instance by increasing crop diversity in smallholder farming systems, breeding for local adaptation and by increasing farmers' participation across all breeding activities. She concluded with some lessons learnt, namely the dire needs for a collaborative farmers-breeders varietal development and seed diffusion work through development and testing of shared methodologies and tools that allow farmers' full participation in research; the requirement of working beyond technical innovation, but also at institutional and social levels to contribute to broader development goals related to poverty reduction, nutritious food, cultural values and agrobiodiversity conservation; and the need for an enabling policy environment for the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA and Farmers' Rights.

20. Mr. Carlo Fadda (Alliance of Bioversity International-CIAT) gave a presentation on *CGIAR experiences in exchanging genetic resources and future role of the CGIAR about conservation and sustainable use*. He presented the work of the CGIAR on community seed banks in the Africa, Asia and GRULAC regions and highlighted, as the major achievements, increased crop and varietal diversity, increased seed quality and longer storage time, improved crops (yield, pest and disease tolerance, taste), improved knowledge and skills about seed and crop management, possibilities for new income generation, stronger collaboration and networking, and the empowerment of communities. Additionally, the presentation gave an overview of the Benefit-sharing Fund project "Open Source Seed Systems for climate change adaptation for beans, sorghum and finger millet in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania", which resulted in the multiplication of genetic materials at national research stations, the introduction of new PGRFA diversity, enhanced capacity and the establishment of learning platforms.

21. The Committee took note of the information provided in the documents and the additional information shared through the presentations.

22. The Committee recalled that its mandate was "to identify examples and opportunities to support and assist Contracting Parties and stakeholders in promoting, enhancing and further developing the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA" (Resolution 5/2019). It identified the following options on how best to address this request:

- a. Development of a collection of examples and opportunities on the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA; with a concise structure of categories, building on the different sub-provisions of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty; the collection would subsequently be used to assess possible gaps and needs in promoting the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA and for the Governing Body to identify any further work in these areas;
 - b. Updates to the *Toolbox*, so that it would become the repository of examples to support and assist Contracting Parties and stakeholders in promoting, enhancing and further developing the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA; or
 - c. Consider the summary list given in paragraph 33 of the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/4, to develop a more comprehensive list of examples and opportunities.
23. The Committee agreed that work on this item would need to avoid duplication of efforts and to consider the availability of resources. Taking into account the diversity of proposals and the complexity of the task, the Committee agreed that these proposals should be considered at the next meeting of the ACSU.

ITEM 5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STEPS TO ASSIST CONTRACTING PARTIES IN ADVANCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLES 5 AND 6 OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY

24. The Secretariat introduced the agenda item and presented the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/5, *Future work on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.
25. The Committee considered the document and thanked the Secretary for the efforts made to support the Committee in undertaking its task of developing 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.
26. The Committee agreed to focus on the possible immediate further steps set out in section V of the document, particularly (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.
27. The Committee discussed whether there is a need for a new Programme of Work on Conservation and Sustainable use of PGRFA. The Committee considered that a draft mandate for the next biennium should build upon strengthening and capitalising on ongoing activities.
28. The ACSU also requested that the possible Joint Programme on Biodiversity in agriculture for sustainable use of PGRFA was not mentioned in the list of ongoing activities and noted that it represents a unique opportunity to promote the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA in the context of the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, when adopted, and the outcomes of the United Nations Food Systems Summit.
29. The Committee also discussed a range of possible new areas for future work, taking into account the possible new initiatives listed in paragraph 20 of the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/5. The Committee highlighted the following indicative area for further consideration:
- Contributions and participation of farmers, local and indigenous communities to the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, possibly with a focus on gender-responsive approaches; and
 - Country/region-specific studies to address poor implementation of Articles 5 and 6.
30. The Committee expressed strong interest in the possibility to develop, as an additional initiative, tailored intra- and inter-region based activities of exchange of knowledge and practical/technical experience based on the diverse topics mentioned in paragraph 20 of the document, IT/GB-9/ACSU-5/21/5, in order to identify the bottlenecks to the implementation of Articles 5 and 6, with particular emphasis on access to

PGRFA, including seeds, and give examples of how to proceed and identify opportunities of improvement and collaboration to solve the identified bottlenecks.

31. The Committee recognized the need for further discussions on this agenda item, including considerations for the design of future work that would comprehensively and practically follow a streamlined approach for supporting progress towards integrated implementation of Articles 5 and 6, and agreed to continue discussions at its next meeting.

ITEM 6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

32. Recognizing the need for further work, the Committee agreed to reconvene before the Ninth Session of the Governing Body and requested the Co-chairs and the Secretary to identify a suitable format and dates, and communicate them to the members as soon as possible. The Committee further advised the Secretary to make the necessary preparations for that meeting.

33. The Committee noted low participation of some regions in this meeting of the Committee and agreed to revisit the issue at its next meeting including possible recommendations to the Ninth Session of the Governing Body.

ITEM 7. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

34. The Co-Chairs expressed their appreciation for the constructive contributions of the members and experts and thanked the observers for their participation, and the Secretary for his support.

35. The Committee adopted this Report.

*Appendix 1***AGENDA**

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Toolbox on sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
3. Possible Joint Programme on Biodiversity in Agriculture for Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
4. Examples and opportunities to support and assist Contracting Parties and stakeholders in implementing Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty
5. Recommendations to the Governing Body on further steps to assist contracting parties and stakeholders in advancing the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty
6. Any other business
7. Adoption of the Report

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