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PROMOTING SYNERGIES AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND THE COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES OF FAO AND THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (ITPGRFA)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Biodiversity for food and agriculture are among the earth's most important resources. Crops, farm animals, aquatic organisms, forest trees, micro-organisms and invertebrates - thousands of species and their genetic variability make up the web of biodiversity in agricultural and other ecosystems that the world's food production depends on. Biodiversity, and in particular genetic diversity, continues to be under threat and is being lost. With the erosion of these resources, humankind loses the potential to adapt to new socio-economic and environmental conditions, such as population growth, nutritional needs and climate change.

2. Maintaining biodiversity for food and agriculture is a global responsibility, which requires action and cooperation at national, regional and international levels. The Latin American and Caribbean Region is, on one hand, the centre of origin of many plants and several livestock species important for global food security, and on the other hand, highly dependent on the genetic diversity of crops and livestock originated in other Regions to fulfil the potential of its food and agriculture. The value of these resources for Latin America and the Caribbean will only be realized if effective priority-setting and action plans support their optimal conservation and use within integrated agricultural production systems, and if their exchange between countries and regions is facilitated.

3. The last decades have seen an increasing recognition of the importance of biodiversity and its components, as a crucial resource for sustainable development. The United Nations has established the year 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity that provides a unique opportunity for the Regional Conference to reflect on the challenges ahead for Latin America and the Caribbean with regard to genetic resources for food and agriculture.

4. This document provides some background information on the status of implementation of policies and decisions agreed by FAO's Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and

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Agriculture, the Governing Body of the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It then provides several examples of the work that Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its partners are undertaking in the Region to promote the implementation of relevant international policies and seeks guidance from the Regional Conference.

II. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

5. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) hosts two key intergovernmental biodiversity forums, particularly focusing on genetic resources. The Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture was established in 1983 and its current mandate covers all components of biodiversity of relevance to food and agriculture. Currently 171 countries and the European Union are Members of the Commission. In 2007, the Commission adopted its Multi-Year Programme of Work, a rolling 10-year work plan covering plant, animal, forest, aquatic, micro-organism and invertebrate genetic resources.

6. The Commission oversees global assessments of the state of the world's genetic resources for food and agriculture. It recently endorsed the *Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.¹ It has also negotiated major international instruments, including the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, the *Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources* and the *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.

7. The *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* was adopted by the FAO Conference in November of 2001. The Treaty's objectives 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 on Biological Diversity, for sustainable agriculture and food security. The Treaty currently has 123 Contracting Parties. The Governing Body of the Treaty held its Third Session in June 2009, which was chaired by Cuba as the Regional Vice-Chair of Latin America and the Caribbean. The Treaty covers all plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. It recognizes Farmers' Rights.

8. The Treaty creates a *Multilateral System for Access and Benefit-Sharing* which places 64 of our most important crops – crops that together account for 80 percent of the food we derive from plants – into an easily accessible global pool of genetic resources that is available for research, breeding and training for food and agriculture. The Multilateral System of the Treaty foresees four primary benefit-sharing mechanisms, namely: exchange of information on plant genetic resources; access to and transfer of technology; capacity building; and sharing of benefits arising from commercialization of plant genetic resources. It now includes more than 1.2 million samples of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, the world's largest gene pool of agricultural plant genetic resources.

9. The Treaty also provides for a *Funding Strategy*, which aims to enhance the availability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of the provision of financial resources for the implementation of the Treaty. It includes a *Benefit-sharing Fund* which supports projects and programmes for the benefit of farmers in developing and countries with economies in transition. The Fund is the first fully operational mechanism in the history of genetic resource law, which implements international benefit-sharing for plant genetic resources within a binding legal architecture. The Treaty's benefit-sharing mechanisms have funded 11 benefit-sharing projects in developing countries and least-developed countries in 2008-09. The Governing Body also

¹ <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/017/ak528e.pdf>

adopted a Strategic Plan and funding target for the Benefit-sharing Fund for the 2009-2014 period. The Treaty is thus the first multilateral mechanism providing financial support as a form of shared benefits arising from the access to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

10. The Commission and the Treaty cooperate and coordinate their activities on a regular basis. The Commission served as the Treaty's interim committee until the first Session of the Governing Body of the Treaty. The Commission and the Governing Body of the Treaty have adopted a *Joint Statement for Cooperation*² which forms the basis for cooperation between the Commission and the Governing Body and between the Secretariats of the two bodies.

11. Since 1993, cooperation between FAO and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has been strong and effective, with FAO being a key partner and contributor to the implementation of the CBD. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is a framework convention, with a broad mandate in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

13. A number of measures have facilitated cooperation between FAO and the CBD, including the establishment of a Memorandum of Cooperation in 1997, which was revised in 2005.³ The revised Memorandum recognizes the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture as the international forum where governments specifically address all components of biological diversity of relevance to food and agriculture. Upon request of the Commission and the CBD Conference of Parties, the Secretariat of FAO and its Commission and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity recently concluded a joint work plan. The joint work plan aims at enhancing synergies in the implementation of the Commission and the CBD programmes of work, including work on cross cutting issues.

14. At the intergovernmental level, the Commission has a lead role in the cooperation between FAO and the Conference of the Parties of the CBD. At numerous occasions, the Commission and the Conference of the Parties to the CBD have stressed the importance of cooperation between FAO and the CBD and called for the development of mutually supportive activities. The joint work plan recognizes that fostering collaboration between agencies responsible for agriculture and environment working on biodiversity represents an essential mechanism for promotion of synergies at the national level.

III. SUPPORT TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GLOBAL POLICIES FOR GENETIC RESOURCES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

15. Genetic resources for food and agriculture are a common concern of all countries. Most countries have established or are in the process of establishing national programmes or strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture. Such strategies and programmes aim to support economic and social development and underpin efforts to develop more productive, efficient, and sustainable agricultural systems. They lie at the heart of the global efforts for conserving and using genetic resources for food and agriculture.

16. During the last decade, there has been considerable progress in establishing and strengthening national programmes for genetic resources and biodiversity for food and agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean, at least in part as a consequence of the adoption of the *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* and the *Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources*. However, even in countries with active and well-coordinated national programmes, certain gaps still often exist. Country Reports on the status and trends of plant and animal genetic resources in the Region often cite the following needs and gaps:

² CGRFA-12/09/Report, *Appendix H*: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/017/k6536e.pdf>

³ *Memorandum of Cooperation between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity*: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/014/k0111e.pdf>

- It is vital that there be effective coordination and collaboration among national stakeholders for the implementation of national programmes, including ministries, government institutions, universities, private companies, NGOs, farmers' groups, and others.
- The links between institutions concerned with the conservation of genetic resources and those concerned primarily with its use are often weak or even absent in many countries and need to be strengthened.
- In spite of the expansion of education and training opportunities over the past decade, they remain inadequate overall. More opportunities are needed both for the training of young researchers and development workers, and for upgrading the knowledge and skills of existing staff.
- National programmes still receive inadequate and unreliable funding, making it difficult to plan over multiple years.
- Greater attention is needed in many countries to the development of appropriate, non-conflicting and complementary national policies and legislation relating to the conservation, exchange, and use of genetic resources for food and agriculture, including such areas as access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing.⁴

17. International cooperation also plays a critical role in guaranteeing the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture. All countries depend on genetic resources for food and agriculture that originated elsewhere. Such interdependence makes international cooperation not just desirable but essential if the full value of genetic resources for food and agriculture is to be realized.

18. Below a brief overview of activities is given that FAO and its partners undertook in recent years to support the implementation of global policies for genetic resources in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Support to the implementation of the Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

19. As stated above, the Commission recently endorsed the *Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. The report is the result of country-driven assessments of the status and trends of plant genetic resources. Country Reports were prepared by 19 countries from the Region, namely: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela. Fifteen of those countries⁵ also established with the participation and contribution of national stakeholders a National Information Sharing Mechanism on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, a country-owned tool for fostering partnerships, promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Global Plan of Action.

20. In this context, FAO, jointly with Bioversity International and CIAT and with support from the Spanish and Italian Governments, organized the regional consultation for the Latin American and Caribbean countries to discuss the changes, needs, gaps and opportunities to conserve and utilize plant genetic resources in the region. Inputs from the consultation were incorporated in the final version of the Second Report. Through the consultation, experts also identified regional priorities for the update of the *Global Plan of Action* for plant genetic resources.

⁴ See, for example, Chapter 5 "The state of national programmes, training needs, and legislation" of the recent *Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*

⁵ Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

21. In response to requests from the governments of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, FAO has recently begun implementation of an important sub-regional project funded by the Government of Spain. This project will strengthen national systems to provide quality seed of basic grains to resource-poor farmer in a sustainable manner. The strengthened capacities will improve implementation of *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, in particular with regard to sustainable utilization of these resources.

22. In 2007, the Commission endorsed the first *State of the World's on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*⁶. In that year, FAO also organized the First International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The Conference was organized upon request by the Commission and was hosted by the Government of Switzerland. The Conference adopted the *Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources*, which is the first international framework for the conservation and sustainable use of animal genetic resources. The Commission oversees the implementation of the Global Plan of Action.

23. Since 2007, FAO has been active in promoting the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources in the Region, including through:

- Support to the establishment of a Regional Focal Point on Animal Genetic Resources, which led to the election of EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation) as hosting organization. The Regional Focal Point provides a mechanism for regional coordination in preparation of global negotiations on animal genetic resources and to support formulation of regional projects.
- Support to the formulation of national strategies and action plans for animal genetic resources⁷ and establishment of national breeding strategies in countries such as Chile or Colombia.
- Organization of regional workshops in the region on breeding strategies for sustainable management of animal genetic resources (Peru, 2008); characterization of animal genetic resources (Argentina, 2009); conservation of animal genetic resources, with emphasis on gene banking (Ecuador, 2010).

24. At its Eleventh Regular Session, the Commission, in adopting its Multi-Year Programme of Work, requested FAO to prepare the first country-driven *State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources*. Currently, FAO is taking the first steps to initiate the process and will shortly request countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to nominate National Focal Points for the preparation of country reports on forest genetic resources. FAO plans to coordinate work in the Region in cooperation with Bioversity International, the Latin American Forest Genetic Resources network (LAFORGEN) and other regional institutions, and INIA-Spain.

Support to the implementation of the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

25. Through its Multilateral System for Access and Benefit-Sharing, the Treaty allows governments, genebanks, and agricultural research centres to pool their genetic resources in an innovative management system that ensures the facilitated use of the materials and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their utilization:

- More than 1 million accessions of genetic material have already been included in the Multilateral System;

⁶ www.fao.org/docrep/010/a1250e/a1250e00.htm. The Spanish version is planned for publication in May 2010.

⁷ FAO. 2009. *Preparation of national strategies and action plans for animal genetic resources*.

- More than 600 transfers of genetic material occur every day in the Multilateral System under the Standard Material Transfer Agreements;
- Information technology systems to manage this information are currently being set up.
- Contracting Parties have initiated discussions on the implementation of the non-commercial benefit-sharing mechanisms of the System, namely information exchange, technology transfer and capacity building.

26. In order to facilitate the implementation of the Treaty, and in particular its Multilateral System, the Secretariat of the Treaty has established, in partnership with FAO and Bioversity International, a joint capacity programme for developing countries. The objectives of the joint capacity building programme are to improve knowledge among national stakeholders of issues underlying the implementation of the International Treaty and in particular the Multilateral System and to improve institutional, legal and administrative infrastructure for the operation of the Multilateral System. The countries in the LAC region receiving assistance are: Dominica, Ecuador and Peru.

27. A regional workshop for GRULAC countries is scheduled for June this year in order to discuss main Treaty implementation issues in the region, with particular attention to the benefit-sharing mechanisms operating under the Treaty's Multilateral System. Back-to-back with the regional workshop, an awareness raising workshop for the government of Guatemala will also be organized.

29. The Benefit-Sharing Fund of the International Treaty recently became operational. In December 2008, the first call for proposals of the Treaty was opened. Five out of eleven projects approved for funding are located in Latin America and the Caribbean: Cuba, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Peru and Uruguay. These 5 projects aim to rescue, conserve and sustainably use native crops of potato, beans and maize, useful to climate change adaptation and food security. Participation of farmers and local and indigenous communities is a strong element within the projects funded in the Region.

Support to the implementation of the CBD Programme of Work on Agricultural Biodiversity

30. FAO is the leading agency in the implementation of the CBD programme of work on agricultural biodiversity. FAO coordinates and facilitates the International Pollinators Initiative within this programme of work. In doing so, FAO is coordinating a global project, funded by UNEP/GEF amongst others, on "Conservation and Management of Pollinators for Sustainable Agriculture, through an Ecosystem Approach", of which Brazil is one among seven participating countries.

31. In Brazil the project is being implemented by a joint initiative of the Ministry of Environment and Funbio, a national NGO, with multiple partners throughout the country that participate in the Brazilian Pollinator Initiative. Seven demonstration sites are being established, focusing on developing pollination management plans of crops such as apples, Brazil nut, cashew, melon and tomatoes. Funding for the project is complemented by a number of Brazilian funding sources.

IV. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

20. The Regional Conference may wish to:
- i) Emphasize the essential role of genetic resources for food and agriculture for achieving food security and addressing challenges of the Region, including adapting to climate change;
 - ii) Call upon governments in the Region to strengthen national programmes and policies for the conservation and sustainable utilization of genetic resources for food and agriculture, and for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use, including through adequate and predictable funding;
 - iii) Stress the need to develop appropriate, non-conflicting and complementary national policies and legislation relating to the conservation, exchange, and use of genetic resources for food and agriculture, including such areas as access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing;
 - iv) Request FAO, the Secretariat of the International Treaty and their partners to continue giving priority to supporting countries in the Region in the development of relevant national programmes and policies for the conservation and sustainable utilization of genetic resources for food and agriculture, and for sharing the benefits arising from their use;
 - v) Call upon donors to support the conservation and sustainable utilization of genetic resources in the Region.