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PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ON-FARM MANAGEMENT OF FARMERS' VARIETIES/LANDRACES

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CGRFA 17

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Commission), at its last session, reviewed the concept note on *Global networking on in situ conservation and on-farm management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture*¹ and referred it to its Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Working Group) for further consultations.² In response to the Commission's request and upon consultation with experts and stakeholders, FAO developed two separate concept notes, one on on-farm management³ and one on *in situ* conservation.⁴

2. The concept note, *Global networking on on-farm management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture*,⁵ was considered by the Working Group at its Ninth Session in July 2018. The Working Group recognized the importance of on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces. It agreed, however, that the creation of a global network on on-farm management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) is premature. The Working Group recommended instead that the concept note for a global network on on-farm management of PGRFA be revised to propose, subject to the availability of the necessary extra-budgetary resources, an international symposium, to be held in cooperation with the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Treaty).⁶ The purpose of the symposium is to share experiences with, and best practices for, on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces and discuss possible future activities, including the creation of possible information exchange and networking mechanisms.

3. In response to the request of the Working Group, this document contains the concept for an international symposium on on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces. The concept has been prepared in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Treaty.

II. RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION

4. The challenges to feed an ever-growing population⁷ are exacerbated by the ever more erratic and extreme weather events as well as new strains and biotypes of pests and diseases significantly affecting global crop production. The diversity of PGRFA is key for global food security and nutrition. However, despite the existence of diverse crops and their varieties, only 17 crop species provide about 80 percent of human food energy needs.⁸ In fact, only seven of these (rice, wheat, sugarcane, maize, soybean, potatoes and sugarbeet) account for about 55 percent of the energy intake of the world's population.

5. A significant amount of local crop diversity is maintained in farmers' fields, often under low-input and in small-scale production systems, which provide livelihood for millions of farmers throughout the world. PGRFA in these systems are adapted to specific ecological conditions and farming practices and represent a diverse and rich repository of traits. Such local crop diversity is particularly relevant for the resilience of farming systems and the eradication of hunger.

6. Promoting and supporting on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces have become firmly established key components of crop conservation strategies. As highlighted in *The Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, there is a need for better characterization of local materials, improvement through breeding and processing, greater access to information, promoting increased consumer demand for neglected or underutilized crops and more supportive policies and incentives.⁹ The Second Global Plan of Action (Second GPA) provides,

¹ CGRFA-16/17/Inf.20.

² CGRFA-16/17/Report/Rev. 1, paragraph 64.

³ CGRFA/WG-PGR-9/18/Inf.5. Rev.1.

⁴ CGRFA/WG-PGR-9/18/Inf.6.

⁵ CGRFA/WG-PGR-9/18/Inf.5 Rev.1

⁶ CGRFA-17/19/9.1, paragraphs 10–11.

⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2009. How to feed the world in 2050. (Available at: http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/docs/expert_paper/How_to_Feed_the_World_in_2050.pdf).

⁸ Figures for 2013 as recorded in FAOSTAT Database on Agriculture (Available at: <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home>)

⁹ FAO. 2010. The Second Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Rome, FAO, p. 42

as one of its objectives: “Supporting on-farm management and improvement of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture”.¹⁰ The Treaty also promotes on-farm management of PGRFA, such as in Articles 5 (conservation), 6 (sustainable use) and 9 (Farmers’ Rights).¹¹ On-farm management of PGRFA is one of the three priorities of the Treaty’s Benefit-sharing Fund.¹²

7. The necessity for greater attention to be paid to crop diversity that is essential for food security is a recurring theme in the FAO’s work, including programmes and approaches that promote the on-farm management and sustainable use of farmers’ varieties/landraces. With the publication of *Save and Grow*, FAO proposed a new paradigm of intensive crop production, which stresses that farmers must have access to a diverse suite of well-adapted crop varieties in order adjust to the challenges posed by climate change and other drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition.¹³ The importance of farmers’ varieties/landraces is also reflected by the *Draft Voluntary Guidelines for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Farmers’ Varieties and Landraces - Second Revision*, which outline the process for preparing national plans for the conservation and sustainable use of farmers’ varieties/landraces, with the aim to support national authorities in developing a systematic approach to the management of these PGRFA.¹⁴ Through Resolution 6/2017 on the implementation of article 6 of the Treaty, the Governing Body requested its Secretary, among others, to cooperate with the Commission in finalizing these draft voluntary guidelines.¹⁵

8. Various drivers of genetic erosion, such as climate change, changes in agricultural practices and land use, and other factors are increasingly threatening the continued existence, and hence availability, of farmers’ varieties/landraces. Moreover, much of the local crop diversity found in farmers’ fields is inadequately conserved, documented, valued and studied on-farm. This situation may soon lead to a permanent loss of this rich reservoir of PGRFA.

9. Given the threats to the diversity of farmers’ varieties/landraces that are managed on-farm, joint and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders involved are needed to safeguard and use these PGRFA sustainably. An international symposium bringing together experts, practitioners and other stakeholders could provide the basis for the development of cohesive and sustainable strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of farmers’ varieties/landraces, as well as provide a forum that facilitates regular exchange of relevant information and experiences. The symposium could be the first in a series of symposia which could be held, as necessary and appropriate, to address evolving needs for sharing diverse, innovative approaches and information in this area. Held back-to-back with the sessions of the Working Group, such symposia could also offer a platform for Working Group Members to meet relevant stakeholders. They could also provide state-of-the-art information to the Working Group and the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of the Treaty at their Regular Sessions.

III. OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTPUTS

10. *Specific Objectives*: The objective of the symposium is to provide a neutral forum for discussion on the challenges and opportunities relating to on-farm management of farmers’ varieties/landraces and potential mechanisms for information exchange. It will specifically present and discuss:

- a) Experiences with on-farm management of farmers’ varieties/landraces;
- b) Best practices for on-farm management of farmers’ varieties/landraces; and
- c) Possible future activities, including the creation of possible information exchange and networking mechanisms.

¹⁰ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/015/i2624e/i2624e00.htm>

¹¹ FAO. 2009. International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Rome, FAO. (Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i0510e.pdf>)

¹² <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharing-fund/overview/en/>

¹³ FAO. 2011. *Save and Grow: A policymaker’s guide to the sustainable intensification of smallholder crop production*, Rome, FAO. (Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2215e/i2215e.pdf>).

¹⁴ CGRFA-17/19/9.2/Inf.1.

¹⁵ Resolution 6/2017 Implementation of Article 6, Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. (Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mv086e.pdf>)

11. *Expected Outputs*: Symposium proceedings, including a compilation of key presentations and other information materials will serve as a permanent record of the symposium. Topics to be addressed will include:

- a) Common/key needs and constraints, as well as priority research areas, relevant to on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces;
- b) Best practices and lessons learnt for management of farmers' varieties/landraces on-farm; and
- c) Mechanisms and possible partners for cooperation to enable stakeholders to benefit from the expertise and experience of others.

The outcomes of the Symposium will be presented to the following Session of the Working Group and to the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Sustainable Use of the Treaty.

IV. TARGET AUDIENCE

12. The Symposium is expected to be attended by policy makers, non-state actors, researchers and practitioners, as well as representatives from regional networks of community seed banks, farmers' cooperatives and associations, seed producers and extension agents.

V. TENTATIVE PROGRAMME AND STRUCTURE

13. The Symposium, organized under the auspices of the Commission and in collaboration with the Treaty Secretariat, is tentatively scheduled over two days and would be held prior to a Session of the Working Group. A list of possible key themes is given in Annex I to this document.

VI. ESTIMATED BUDGET

14. The minimum cost of the two-day symposium is estimated to be in the order of 42 400 USD, and includes travel of external keynote speakers and session chairs as well as meeting logistics (see Annex II). This estimate does not include participant travel, daily subsistence allowances, symposium proceedings and interpretation/translation.

ANNEX I**INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ON-FARM MANAGEMENT OF FARMERS' VARIETIES/LANDRACES****POSSIBLE KEY THEMES**

- Approaches and practices to on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces: successes and challenges:
 - Policies affecting on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces;
 - Practices and incentives for sustainable on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces;
 - The role of stakeholders in the conservation and management of PGRFA on-farm.
- Technologies and tools in the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA on-farm:
 - Measuring, documenting and monitoring PGRFA diversity on-farm;
 - Targeting on-farm diversity for conservation and sustainable use;
 - Improving and marketing farmers' varieties/landraces.
- Mechanisms for collaboration and exchange of best practices and lessons learnt among stakeholders:
 - Lessons from existing networks and stakeholder partnerships;
 - Role of community seed banks in on-farm management of farmers' varieties/landraces;
 - Agricultural extension and Farmers' Field Schools for capacity building.

ANNEX II
ESTIMATED TENTATIVE BUDGET*

Items of Expenditure		Cost (US\$)	Total (US\$)
Meeting logistics	Book of abstracts, communication material, technical support, meeting rooms	10 000	10 000
15 Key note speakers and session chairs	Travel (economy round trip airfare): 1500 x 15	22 500	32 400
	Ad hoc per diem: 220 x 3 x 15	9 900	
Total			42 400

* Estimated costs exclude participant travel and per diem, symposium proceedings and interpretation/translation costs. The symposium is expected to be held in English only.