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# COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

## Item 15 of the Provisional Agenda

### Eighteenth Regular Session

27 September – 1 October 2021

## REPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report has been prepared by the Secretariat of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (International Treaty) to inform the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Commission) of the recent developments under the International Treaty of relevance to the Commission. An earlier version of this document was provided to the Commission's Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.
2. This report is structured into two main sections, one to illustrate the major outcomes of the Eighth Session of the Governing Body of the International Treaty, which was held in November 2019, and another to present progress on selected implementing activities.

## II. OUTCOMES OF THE EIGHTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

3. The Eighth Session of the Governing Body adopted fourteen Resolutions and provided additional guidance in various appendixes to the report.<sup>1</sup> With a view to informing the Commission, the summary below presents the deliberations of the Governing Body on thematic areas which are of direct relevance to the on-going consideration of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) by Members of the Commission.

### A. Cooperation with the Commission

4. In line with established practice, the Governing Body adopted a separate Resolution on the matter.<sup>2</sup> The Governing Body welcomed the joint activities of the Secretariats of the International Treaty and the Commission during the intersessional period and requested its Secretary to continue strengthening collaboration and coordination with the Secretary of the Commission to promote coherence and synergies, while avoiding duplications, in the development and implementation of the respective programmes of work of the two bodies, and in particular with regard to:
  - a) the preparation of the *Third Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* and of a draft *Third Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, as appropriate;
  - b) the implementation and monitoring of the *Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* (GPA);
  - c) the implementation of the *Genebank Standards for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*, including through capacity building;
  - d) support to countries with strengthening their crop improvement capacity;
  - e) the preparation of in-depth case studies on the effects of seed policies, laws and regulations on: on-farm diversity of PGRFA; smallholders' access to sufficient, affordable, diversified and locally adapted PGRFA, including farmers' varieties/landraces; and food security and nutrition under the different seed systems;
  - f) access and benefit-sharing;
  - g) digital sequence information/genetic sequence data;
  - h) the Global Information System and FAO's World Information and Early Warning System on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (WIEWS), targets and indicators, as well as the development of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework;
  - i) joint training events at the regional level and the provision of assistance for the elaboration of national reports on monitoring of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, subject to the availability of resources;
  - j) conservation and sustainable use.

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<sup>1</sup> The full report is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/nb918en/nb918en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb787en/nb787en.pdf>

## **B. Conservation and Sustainable Use**

5. In its Resolution 5/2019, the Governing Body decided to reconvene the *Ad Hoc* Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use (*Ad Hoc* Committee) and requested the Secretary to cooperate with the Commission to organize the International Symposium on on-farm management and in situ conservation.<sup>3</sup>

6. The Governing Body invited the Commission to provide the Secretary of the Governing Body with the reports received from its members on the implementation of the Second Global Plan of Action for PGRFA that will be compiled, summarized and submitted to the *Ad Hoc* Committee for further review.

7. The Governing Body requested to facilitate training and capacity building to support implementation, including by collaborating with CGIAR centers, and to continue collaborating with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) on the interaction between genetic resources, community and farmer-led system activities, and protected area systems.

## **C. Farmers' Rights**

8. Through Resolution 6/2019,<sup>4</sup> the Governing Body welcomed the *Inventory of National Measures, Best Practices and Lessons Learned on the Realization of Farmers' Rights* and reconvened the *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights to work on the drafting of *Options for Encouraging, Guiding and Promoting the Realization of Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty*.

9. The Governing Body invited Contracting Parties to promote sustainable, biodiverse production systems, facilitate participatory approaches such as community seed banks, community biodiversity registries, participatory plant breeding and seed fairs as tools for realizing Farmers' Rights, as well as take initiatives to convene further regional workshops and other consultations with a broad range of stakeholders, including with farmers' organizations, particularly those in the centers of origin and crop diversity, for the exchange of knowledge, views and experiences on the realization of Farmers' Rights.

10. The Governing Body invited Contracting Parties that have not already done so, to consider reviewing, and, if necessary, adjusting national measures that affect the realization of Farmers' Rights, in particular legislation concerning variety release and seed distribution, to protect and promote Farmers' Rights as appropriate and subject to national legislation.

11. The Governing Body noted the ongoing review process of the FAQs on the interrelations between the UPOV Convention and the International Treaty and exchange of experiences and information on implementation of the UPOV Convention and the International Treaty, and requested the Secretary to continue exploring how Contracting Parties to the International Treaty could further contribute to these processes, and to continue the dialogue with UPOV on these matters.

## **D. Multi-Year Programme of Work and Digital Sequence Information**

12. Through Resolution 13/2019,<sup>5</sup> the Governing Body adopted its first Multi-Year Programme of Work in order to plan and structure implementation of the International Treaty and the work of the Governing Body in a coherent and integrated manner, as well as to highlight the expected major outputs and milestones to be achieved at the respective Sessions of the Governing Body.

13. In the context of the Multi-Year Programme of Work, the Governing Body requested the Secretary to continue following the discussions on digital sequence information in other fora and coordinating with the Secretariats of the CBD and the Commission in any related activities in order to ensure coherence and avoid duplication of efforts. It further requested the Secretary to inform the Governing Body, at its next, i.e. Ninth, Session, of the state of discussions and outcomes of the related

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb783en/nb783en.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb784en/nb784en.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb791en/nb791en.pdf>

processes in the two fora as they relate to the potential implications of the use of digital sequence information on genetic resources, for the objectives of the International Treaty.

14. Provisions on digital sequence information are reflected in the Multi-Year Programme of Work. At its Ninth Session, the Governing Body will consider the status of the science-based process of the CBD, and the discussions of the Commission in relation to PGRFA. It will also consider additional inputs from Contracting Parties and the updates by the Secretary on CBD's and Commission's processes. At its Tenth Session, the Governing Body will consider the potential implications of the use of digital sequence information on PGRFA for the objectives of the International Treaty.

#### **E. Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing**

15. The Governing Body conducted intense negotiations for the development of a package of measures to enhance the functioning of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing. Given the complex legal, policy and practical implications, a Resolution was not adopted at the Session. The Chair's compromise package that was presented during the Session included drafts of: a Resolution; a revised SMTA; an amendment to expand Annex I of the Treaty; terms of reference for an *Ad Hoc* Advisory Technical Committee on the SMTA and the Multilateral System for the biennium 2020-21; and a proposal on consideration of potential implications of the use of digital sequence information / genetic sequence data for the objectives of the International Treaty under the Multi-Year Programme of Work.

16. The Governing Body took note of the need to take stock and to assess the next steps on further work on the Enhancement of the Multilateral System. While there has been no formal intersessional process on the enhancement of the Multilateral System during the current biennium, the Governing Body encouraged informal consultations among Contracting Parties and especially national consultations amongst sectors and relevant stakeholders.<sup>6</sup>

17. Regarding implementation of the Multilateral System, the Governing Body took note of the biennial report indicating that 2.2 million PGRFA materials were available and had been documented. The Report also reflected a 21 percent increase in the material exchanged and reported to the Governing Body. The Governing Body requested the Secretary, among other tasks, to facilitate the availability and transfer of material and to strengthen operations, including the provision of support to SMTA users and for the reporting on the transfers to the Governing Body through Easy-SMTA.<sup>7</sup> It further requested, subject to the availability of financial resources, the organization of regional training workshops in support of Contracting Parties.<sup>8</sup>

18. With regard to the reviews and assessment of the Multilateral System and the implementation and operation of the SMTA, the Governing Body requested the Secretary to prepare reports based on Contracting Parties' and other stakeholders' inputs, including on possible measures to be considered by the Governing Body in order to encourage natural and legal persons to make material available in the Multilateral System.

#### **F. Global Information System**

19. In its Resolution 4/2019,<sup>9</sup> the Governing Body took note of the ongoing collaboration with WIEWS, among other partners, on the implementation of the Global Information System. The Governing Body requested the Secretary to continue enhancing cooperation with relevant institutions and initiatives, and to facilitate the exchange of PGRFA information through the Global Information System.

20. The Governing Body also took note of the progress made in the voluntary use of the Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) and their usefulness to link the material to digital sequence information/

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<sup>6</sup> IT/GB-8/19/Report, paragraphs 30–35.

<sup>7</sup> <https://mls.planttreaty.org/itt/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb779en/nb779en.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb782en/nb782en.pdf>

genetic sequence data.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, it requested the Secretary to encourage and guide users to link scientific publications and datasets to PGRFA material.

21. The Governing Body reconvened the Scientific Advisory Committee which, among other tasks, shall continue considering scientific and technical issues of relevance to digital sequence information/genetic sequence data and their implications, and relevant national legislation, as appropriate.

22. The Governing Body requested the Secretary to continue its efforts to build the capacity of relevant stakeholders, especially in developing countries, and to review the DOI Guidelines taking into account comments from national genebanks. It also took note of the project “Development of a Globally Agreed List of Descriptors for *in situ* Crop Wild Relatives Documentation”.<sup>11</sup>

### **G. Funding Strategy**

23. Through Resolution 3/2019,<sup>12</sup> the Governing Body adopted the Funding Strategy for the period 2020-25 and established, within the Strategy, a target of USD 0.9-1.1 billion per year over a period of ten years with a milestone of 40 percent to be achieved by 2026 to support the implementation of the International Treaty. In adopting the Strategy, it called upon FAO to prioritize the delivery of programmes and projects supportive of the implementation of the International Treaty, and to support the nexus between biodiversity and climate change, in particular, through its involvement in the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund and to actively contribute to the work of the newly established Standing Committee on the Funding Strategy and Resource Mobilization.

24. The Contracting Parties made extensive use of the FAO’s Second Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (GPA) in adopting its updated Funding Strategy. The funding target range was established taking into account the GPA. The new programmatic approach of the Benefit-sharing Fund focuses on GPA priority area 2<sup>13</sup> and GPA priority area 11.<sup>14</sup> The Funding Strategy has been designed with a view to improve links with the GPA and its monitoring through the WIEWS.

### **H. Cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity**

25. Through Resolution 11/2019,<sup>15</sup> the Governing Body emphasized the importance of enhancing cooperation with the CBD in the development and implementation of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and recommended that targets for PGRFA should be maintained and strengthened, including by relying on monitoring systems available through the reporting processes of the International Treaty and Commission, and the experience gained in monitoring Target 2.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also recommended that such targets should deal not only with conservation of genetic diversity, but also with its sustainable use. With regard to targets on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization, the Governing Body recommended that such targets expressly consider the International Treaty and its Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing, and that monitoring rely, *inter alia*, on the monitoring systems available through the reporting systems of the International Treaty.

### **I. Capacity Development Strategy**

26. The Governing Body welcomed the initiative for a Capacity Development Strategy to enhance implementation of the International Treaty through improving the coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of capacity development initiatives and activities. It requested the Secretary to develop a

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<sup>10</sup> The Governing Body clarified that, since it has not yet decided on the official terminology for digital sequence information/genetic sequence data, it uses “DSI/GSD” until new terminology is agreed.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3256en/cb3256en.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb780en/nb780en.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Supporting on- farm management and improvement of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

<sup>14</sup> Promoting the development and commercialization of all varieties, primarily farmers’ varieties/landraces and underutilized crops.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb789en/nb789en.pdf>

draft Strategy (2022-2025) with inputs from stakeholders and in consultation with relevant subsidiary bodies, for consideration by the Governing Body at its next Session.

#### **J. Contribution by FAO to implementation of the International Treaty**

27. The Governing Body invited FAO, through Resolution 8/2019,<sup>16</sup> to continue actively support the International Treaty as a key international instrument required for the fulfilment of SDG 2 (zero hunger) and 15 (life on land) and to build awareness of the importance of the implementation of, and compliance with, the International Treaty at the highest national levels.

28. The Governing Body recommended that FAO's Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors place adequate emphasis on genetic diversity, and invited FAO to continue including the Secretariat of the International Treaty in activities to implement the Strategy.

### **III. PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY**

29. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat of the International Treaty organised a number of meetings of subsidiary bodies and other events, in virtual mode.<sup>17</sup> A brief overview of selected implementing activities is presented in the sections below.

#### Conservation and sustainable use

30. The Secretariat of the International Treaty, the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the Commission co-organized the First International Multi-Stakeholder Symposium on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which was held on 29-30 March 2021 in virtual mode. The Symposium brought together technical experts and stakeholders on in situ conservation and on-farm management of PGRFA and provided an open-ended forum for the exchange of information and experiences to strengthen and support on-going efforts with regard to the conservation and sustainable use of crop diversity. The Secretariat of the International Treaty will present the outcomes of the Symposium to the Governing Body at its next Session.

31. A new, larger version of the toolbox on sustainable use has been published on the International Treaty's website.<sup>18</sup> The toolbox contains more than 1 300 resources, in English, French and Spanish. A survey was recently launched to seek inputs for improving the toolbox.

#### Reporting cycle under the *Compliance Procedures*

32. The submission of national reports on implementation of the International Treaty for the second reporting cycle is ongoing. The Secretariat makes the information available online. The reports include information regarding the development of legislation, policies and programmes for the implementation of the International Treaty at the national level. They illustrate the progress and achievements and identify the major gaps that remain to be addressed and that may need additional attention from International Treaty bodies and donors. The information provided by the Contracting Parties through this mechanism supplements, at narrative level, the information contained in the indicators under the GPA.<sup>19</sup>

#### Farmers' Rights

33. The Secretariat has published on-line the *Inventory of national measures that may be adopted, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty*.<sup>20</sup> Through the *Inventory*, Contracting Parties and interested stakeholders share the experiences gained so far with, and lessons learned from, the realization of Farmers' Rights.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.fao.org/3/nb838en/nb838en.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> The calendar and documentation of meetings are available at: <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/en/>

<sup>18</sup> The *Inventory* can be accessed at: <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/tools/toolbox-for-sustainableuse/overview/en/>.

<sup>19</sup> The reports are available at: <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/compliance/compliancereports/en/>.

<sup>20</sup> The *Inventory* is available at: <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/farmers-rights/overviewinventory/en/>.

34. Based on the *Inventory*, inter-sessional work is on-going to develop the *Options for encouraging, guiding and promoting the realization of Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty*.

35. The Secretariat continues to reach out to Contracting Parties and interested stakeholders, to submit measures and practices for inclusion in the *Inventory* and/or update their submissions. The Secretariat is also facilitating the initiatives of interested stakeholders to communicate information on Farmers' Rights, including by sharing the *Inventory* in relevant fora within and outside FAO.

#### Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-Sharing

36. Under the initiative of the Government of Switzerland, an informal consultation among representatives of Contracting Parties, in their individual capacity, was held on 21 January 2021. The objectives of the informal consultations were to:

- take stock of the progress made so far in the process established under the International Treaty to enhance the functioning of the Multilateral System and
- exchange views and ideas on how best to move forward in our efforts to enhance the functioning of the Multilateral System.

37. Thanks to progress made in the current biennium, the Multilateral System has facilitated the transfer of more than 6 million PGRFA, of which 1.4 million were materials under development. The transfers of wheat, rice and maize PGRFA alone constitute more than two-thirds of all transfers.

38. The Secretariats of the International Treaty and the Commission are collaborating to prepare a report on germplasm flow as one of the thematic studies in preparation for the *Third Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.

#### Global Information System

39. As of 5 May 2021, more than 1.1 million PGRFA have been identified and linked with the related datasets in other systems through the registration of DOIs on the Portal of the Global Information System. Through the helpdesk, the Secretary has continued providing regular support to users in Contracting Parties, mainly national collections, including during the period of most severe restrictions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

40. The Portal of the Global Information System was redesigned in early 2021 with a directory of links to sources of PGRFA (for *ex situ*, *in situ*, on-farm and others), added-value activities, users' themes and PGRFA documentation. It also provides advanced search tools for material in the Multilateral System and DOI registrants. The new Portal facilitates access to various datasets in WIEWS for *ex situ* and on-farm records, as well as organizations with a WIEWS instcode. In addition to several improvements in the search form, the System presents statistics module with customized standard views and sample queries for users.<sup>21</sup>

41. Under the project "Development of a Globally Agreed List of Descriptors for in situ Crop Wild Relatives Documentation", the International Treaty has released an updated list of passport descriptors for crop wild relatives conserved in situ. The publication, *Descriptors for Crop Wild Relatives Conserved in situ*, is available in English, Arabic, French and Spanish.<sup>22</sup> It provides an international standard to ensure consistency in the way data about plant genetic material of crop wild relatives are documented and exchanged around the world.

#### Funding Strategy and Benefit-Sharing Fund

42. A multi-year Operational Plan for the Funding Strategy has been developed for the period 2020-2025 and is actively being implemented.

43. The Secretariat has engaged in a number of global initiatives, including through collaboration with FAO, that offer opportunities for leveraging and mobilizing resources for the International

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<sup>21</sup> The GLIS home page is: <https://ssl.fao.org/glis/>. The statistics are available at: <https://ssl.fao.org/glis/stats/index>.

<sup>22</sup> The publication is available at: <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/global-informationsystem/development-of-a-globally-agreed-list-of-descriptors/en/>

Treaty. These include the GEF-7 and 8 programs, the COVID-19 food systems recovery measures and packages that countries are putting in place, and the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables.

44. In the framework of the Funding Strategy, the International Treaty and the Global Crop Diversity Trust are working together on a number of joint outreach and resource mobilization initiatives, including in relation to emergencies suffered by genebanks, Article 15 collections, and innovative funding by for example bringing the finance sector to support conservation of PGRFA. The partnership is also advancing on scientific and technical matters, including to strengthen capacity-building for genebank staff and others to enhance conservation and availability of PGRFA.

45. A draft strategy to mobilize funds from food processing industries has been developed and takes into consideration FAO's new Strategy for Private Sector Engagement 2021-2025. The strategy will be further developed over the coming months and considered by the Governing Body at its next Session.

46. The on-going Fourth Cycle of the Benefit-Sharing Fund (BSF-4) consists of 20 projects executed in 29 developing countries.<sup>23</sup> The BSF-4 portfolio marks a transition towards a programmatic approach and a more strategic, sustainable and diversified implementation of the new Funding Strategy of the International Treaty. The main beneficiaries of BSF-4 projects are farmers who receive support for *in situ* and on-farm management. A total of 48 among research institutes, NGOs, governments, farmers organization, national genebanks, universities and food industries are partnering in the execution of BSF-4 projects. Project activities include the establishment of community seed banks, the duplication of germplasm in national genebanks and the Global Seed Vault, and the evaluation of target crop accession for breeding.

47. The Independent Evaluation of BSF-3 projects is on-going and will be finalized before the end of 2021. The Secretariat has published the Phase 1 Report of the Independent Evaluation.<sup>24</sup>

48. Based on an *Options Paper* and advice received, progress is being made towards BSF-5, with the aim of launching the new project cycle by 2021.<sup>25</sup>

49. The Secretariat has provided inputs to *the Study on the Role of Genetic Resources in Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation* that the Commission requested at its last Session, including by selecting successful tools, good practices, models and lessons learnt from Benefit-Sharing Fund projects that pursue climate change adaptation and mitigation through PGRFA management.

#### The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

50. The Bureau of the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, with the support of the Secretary, is engaging in the process for the preparation of the Post-2020 Framework to speak on behalf of the Contracting Parties and thereby ensure strong contributions from the International Treaty in the development and implementation of the new Framework, including through cooperation with other biodiversity-related conventions. The Secretariat of the International Treaty is actively participating and providing input in the ongoing negotiations of the framework at the CBD.

#### The Capacity Development Strategy

51. In partnership with UNEP-WCMC, the Secretariat convened an informal group of expert stakeholders to gather insightful information and views on capacity development, including in synergy with biodiversity and climate change international conventions, instruments and processes. The draft strategy under preparation will be reviewed by the subsidiary bodies of the International Treaty before submission to the Governing Body.

#### Collaboration with FAO's Legal Office and GODAN

52. FAO's Legal Office, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the International Treaty, formulated and commissioned a study on agricultural data policy and management, which is being

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<sup>23</sup> The list of approved projects is available at: <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharingfund/projects-funded/bsf-fourth-cycle/en/>

<sup>24</sup> The Draft Report of Phase 1 of the Independent Evaluation of the BSF III is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3418en/cb3418en.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> The Options Paper for BSF-5 is available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3452en/cb3452en.pdf>

undertaken in partnership with the Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition Initiative (GODAN) and the University of Ottawa. The study under preparation is intended to develop knowledge and insights into existing legal and policy structures of agricultural data ownership, control and management, including intellectual property rights, and, in particular, addresses the case of the International Treaty.

#### SDGs and the International Treaty

53. The International Treaty, through FAO, is actively contributing under the SDG indicator and monitoring framework. In particular, Target 15.6 promotes the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and appropriate access to such resources. UNEP-CBD is the custodian agency for indicator 15.6.1, which refers to the number of countries that have adopted legislative, administrative and policy frameworks to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits. In the current biennium, the Secretariat continues providing updated information and data related to the implementation of the International Treaty, thus contributing to annual SDG progress reports and feeding into the High-Level Political Forum's follow-up and review processes.

54. The work of the International Treaty is also relevant to SDG Target 2.5, for which FAO is the custodian agency. Indicator 2.5.1 refers to the number of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in either medium- or long-term conservation facilities. While WIEWS assists countries with measuring such progress for the implementation of the GPA, the implementation of the International Treaty by Contracting Parties contributes towards the achievement of Target 2.5 through increasing the number of PGRFA secured in conservation facilities.

#### COVID-19 response

55. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat has been collecting information, seeking technical inputs and ensuring continuous dialogue among International Treaty stakeholders on the impact of the pandemic on relevant contexts and core implementing activities. Among other activities, the Secretariat conducted surveys between June and August 2020 with National Focal Points and partners of the Benefit-Sharing Fund.

#### International Panel of Experts

56. The Secretariat of the International Treaty and the Global Crop Diversity Trust have joined forces to organize a series of virtual international panels that bring together PGRFA experts and stakeholders to discuss matters of emerging importance for the International Treaty community. Three panels of experts have been organized so far - with the possibility of continuing the series in the short to mid term - namely on:

- *Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the conservation, use and exchange of plant genetic diversity.* The panel was held on 15 September 2020 with the sponsorship of the of the Kingdom of Morocco.<sup>26</sup>
- *Fruit and vegetable genetic diversity: the status and challenges of conservation, exchange and use.* The panel was held on 16 February 2021 with the sponsorship of the Government of Italy and in collaboration with the International Society for Horticultural Science. It was one of the events to celebrate the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables.<sup>27</sup>
- *Cryopreservation: A long-term strategy for hard-to-serve PGRFA collections in a postCOVID world.* The panel was held on 25 June 2021 with the sponsorship of the Government of Belgium.<sup>28</sup>

#### Cyclone-Idai response

57. The Secretariat has been working in collaboration with the national genebanks of Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique, Bioersivity International and in coordination with relevant FAO subregional and country offices to support the implementation of a Cyclone-Idai emergency response project with

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/overview/partnerships/expert-panel>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/overview/partnerships/international-panel/en/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/overview/partnerships/international-expert-panel/en/>

funding from the Governments of Germany and Norway. The project, which has been implemented from October 2019 to date, focuses on restoring local seed-systems, strengthening national and regional PGRFA emergency response coordination and supporting the implementation of the International Treaty.

58. The Government of Germany has recently committed further support to expand the project. The project is ongoing and will conclude in May 2021.

#### **IV. NEXT SESSIONS OF THE GOVERNING BODY**

59. As agreed by the Bureau of the Ninth Session, the next Sessions of the Governing Body will be held as follows:

- a. First Special Session: 7 – 8 December 2021.
- b. Ninth Session: 9–15 May 2022.

60. In accordance with the request of the Governing Body at its Eighth Session, the Secretariat of the International Treaty will continue to cooperate with the Secretariat of the Commission on joint activities and areas of common interest. The Treaty Secretariat will also bring to the attention of the Governing Body, at its Ninth Session, any relevant discussions and outcomes of this Eighteenth Regular Session of the Commission.