Item 16.2 of the Provisional Agenda

NINTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

New Delhi, India, 19–24 September 2022

Report on the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk

Executive Summary

In the biennium 2020-2021, resource mobilization efforts for germplasm collections at risk have concretized in the establishment of a financial reserve, as a joint initiative with the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

This document summarizes activities undertaken in the biennium to establish the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk and develop its operational framework. It also contains the summary report on the operation the Reserve.

Guidance sought

The Governing Body is invited to welcome the establishment of the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk, and call upon donors to contribute to it.
I. INTRODUCTION

1. Germplasm collections of important food crops around the world are suffering significant damage or are under imminent threat of damage due to a range of emergency or rapidly changing circumstances. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, pest and pathogen outbreaks, institutional changes, land ownership issues and conflict. Damage to unique germplasm collections is not only a loss for the holding institution, but also for the global agricultural research and breeding communities, as well as farmers and society at large.

2. In armed conflict situations, FAO, the International Treaty and partners such as the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust) and the Svalbard Seed Vault, have been actively cooperating with countries, including Yemen, Syria, Iraq and currently Ukraine, in order to safeguard and rehabilitate plant germplasm collections and to assist farmers to rehabilitate affected crop systems based on locally adapted germplasm. This multilateral cooperation has enabled, for example, the rescue and reconstitution of the unique seed collection held in the international genebank of International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Syria. Being among the first depositors to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, ICARDA managed to safety duplicate more than 80% of its collection before the last staff had to leave the genebank in 2014 because of the war. Based on the safety duplicates, ICARDA has rebuilt their collections and resumed distribution of seeds to users internationally from their new premises in Morocco and Lebanon.

3. Starting from 2018, the Secretary of the Governing Body had explored the possibility of mobilizing financial resources in collaboration with the Crop Trust to enable rapid and immediate assistance to germplasm collections in situations of emergency. In the biennium 2020–2021, such efforts have concretized in the establishment of the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk (Emergency Reserve), as a joint initiative between the Secretariat of the International Treaty and the Crop Trust.

4. This document reviews activities undertaken in the biennium to establish the Emergency Reserve, summarizes the operational framework for the Reserve, and contains the summary report on the operation the Reserve. In the light of the role of the Crop Trust in establishing the Reserve, the Appendix to this document contains draft elements to be integrated into the draft Resolution on policy guidance to the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

II. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EMERGENCY RESERVE

5. At its Eighth Session, the Governing Body recommended expanding cooperation between the Crop Trust and the International Treaty on resource mobilization, in particular on joint fundraising activities with the Secretary, and encouraged donors to consider initiatives, projects and programmes that are jointly designed and implemented by the Crop Trust and the Secretary.

6. Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Secretariat of the International Treaty and the Crop Trust convened an expert panel in September 2020, on the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the International Treaty. In receiving a summary of the expert panel discussions, the Bureau of the Ninth Session noted the importance of supporting PGRFA collections at risk given the number of emergency situations and events posing threats to certain collections arising from the COVID pandemic and natural disasters.

7. Parallel fund raising efforts by the Secretary and the Crop Trust towards supporting collections in emergencies, resulted in the commitment of two State donors, respectively the governments of Italy and Norway (via the project ‘Biodiversity for Opportunities Livelihoods and Development’, BOLD). The Secretary, jointly with the Crop Trust, developed an initial concept note for an emergency reserve that the Bureau reviewed in November 2020. Following the

---

1 Resolution 10/2019, paragraph 8.
guidance by the Bureau, the Secretary informed the Standing Funding Committee of the initiative in March 2021. The Committee positively appraised a full concept note in October 2021.

8. The Secretary launched the Emergency Reserve in November 2021, during the event, “It Starts With A Seed: Adapting Agriculture to Climate Change”, organized by the Crop Trust as part of the Global Landscapes Forum Climate Conference at COP 26 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Immediately following the event, the Secretary formally communicated the establishment of the Reserve to Contracting Parties, through a notification, and the Reserve has been operational since then.2

III. SCOPE, PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA, GOVERNANCE

9. The Emergency Reserve is designed to provide rapid, short-term and urgent support to ex situ collections in the Multilateral System, where there is an imminent threat to the collection and no alternative financial support is available. The Emergency Reserve addresses requests for urgent and critical support and accelerates interventions to safeguard international and national collections. Both genebank and field collections are within the scope of the Emergency Reserve.

10. An ‘emergency’ is defined as an unforeseen situation that poses an immediate threat to the biological integrity of the collection, is untenable and leads to a serious financial need, not met by other available sources of funding.

11. The Emergency Reserve consists of resources specifically allocated and held by either the International Treaty Secretariat or the Crop Trust. Funds are disbursed in line with the principles of expediency, responsiveness and transparency.

12. The eligibility criteria are the following:
   - There is a demonstrated actual, imminent threat to a collection in an emergency situation;
   - Proposed rescue activities focus on immediate, short-term impact;
   - There is demonstrated financial need; in particular, it has to be demonstrated that sufficient financial support for the collection has been unsuccessfully solicited from other funding mechanisms, or that no suitable such mechanisms exist;
   - The collection, including those maintained in the field, comprises unique genetic resources of regional and international significance;
   - The recipient collection must be part of, or contain a reasonable amount of material that is in, the International Treaty’s Multilateral System, or is otherwise operating under the terms and conditions of the Multilateral System;
   - The recipient has, or agrees to develop as a matter of urgency, a risk mitigation strategy and contingency plan, and generally complies with due diligence requirements;
   - The collection is located in a developing country (as defined by the OECD’s DAC/ODA list) and has a written plan that explains the long-term conservation goals of the collection;
   - The recipient institution managing the collection agrees to transparent, efficient management of funds and timely reporting on their use.

13. The Emergency Reserve responds to direct applications submitted via email to either the Secretariat of the International Treaty or the Crop Trust, and does not issue calls for proposals.

14. Decisions on funding allocations are the joint responsibility of the Secretary and the Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Treaty, jointly with the Executive Director and the Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Crop Trust. A differentiated decision-making process involving either the Secretary and the Executive Director, or the Chairpersons, is in place depending on the requested amount, i.e. under or above USD 10 000.³

15. The decision makers determine whether funds are disbursed from the Crop Trust or the International Treaty Secretariat’s domiciled resources, and consequently who processes the granting request with the recipient.

16. Both organizations will jointly develop periodic reports, both financial and technical, on the functioning of the Emergency Reserve, which will be made available to the Bureau of the International Treaty, and the Donor’s Council and Executive Board of the Crop Trust. A summary of the operations is submitted to the Governing Body of the International Treaty.

### IV. SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS

17. Before the formal establishment of the Reserve, the Secretariat of the International Treaty and the Crop Trust jointly supported the Article 15 international germplasm collection held by the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center (CATIE). The cold room hosting part of the collection was at risk of being discontinued due to the failure of the generator. Joint financial assistance in September 2020 made it possible to purchase new equipment for the cooling system. This type of intervention constituted a proof of concept and gave impetus to the creation of the Reserve.

18. Since November 2021, the Emergency Reserve has already been activated in one case. The National Center for Plant Genetic Resources in Yemen communicated the urgency of replacing solar power batteries for the genebank, which is situated in a conflict zone. Following the successful pre-screening of the request and the submission of a full application, the Secretary of the International Treaty and the Executive Director of the Crop Trust approved the request, for an amount within the USD 10 000 range.

---

THE GOVERNING BODY,

Recalling the importance of cooperation with the Global Crop Diversity Trust on resource mobilization, including for national genebanks in developing countries and countries with economies in transition;

1. Welcomes the joint establishment of the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk with the Global Crop Diversity Trust, to facilitate the rapid response to imminent threats to unique germplasm collections that fall under the framework of the International Treaty, in particular its Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing;

2. Thanks the Governments of Norway and Italy for the financial contributions to the Reserve, and calls upon Contracting Parties, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other entities to contribute to the Reserve;

3. Requests the Secretary to provide the Bureau of the Tenth Session with a financial and technical report on the joint operation of the Emergency Reserve;

4. Notes the summary report on the Reserve that the Secretary provided at this Ninth Session of the Governing Body and further requests the Secretary to provide a similar report to the Tenth Session.