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Organización
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Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda

COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Fourth Session

Rome, 15-17 July 2009

REPORT FROM THE GLOBAL CROP DIVERSITY TRUST

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Global Crop Diversity Trust (the Trust) was co-founded by FAO and Bioversity International (acting for the CGIAR Centres). Established in 2004 under international law as an independent international organization, the Trust operates within the framework of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Treaty) as an essential element of its Funding Strategy and in accordance with the overall policy guidance provided by its Governing Body. The Trust's objective as stated in its Constitution is "*to ensure the long-term conservation and availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture with a view to achieving global food security and sustainable agriculture.*" The Constitution further states that "*the Trust shall in particular, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing,*

- a. endeavour to safeguard collections of unique and valuable plant genetic resources for food and agriculture held ex situ, with priority being given to those that are plant genetic resources included in Annex I to the International Treaty or referred to in Article 15.1(b) of the International Treaty;*
- b. promote an efficient goal-oriented, economically efficient and sustainable global system of ex situ conservation in accordance with the International Treaty and the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (hereinafter referred to as "the Global Plan of Action");*
- c. promote the regeneration, characterization, documentation and evaluation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the exchange of related information;*
- d. promote the availability of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; and*
- e. promote national and regional capacity building, including the training of key personnel, with respect to the above."*

2. The Working Group at its Third Session in 2005 "*stressed the important role of the Trust in supporting the long-term conservation of the world's most strategic germplasm collections, and gave its full support to the development of crop and regional conservation strategies by the Trust*". The Working Group further stated that it "*fully supported and welcomed the technical cooperation among the Trust, FAO and IPGRI¹, and recommended it be continued and broadened as appropriate*". The Commission at its Eleventh Session noted the Trust's success in mobilizing funding for *ex situ* conservation.

3. This report provides an update on both institutional and programme developments within the Trust, in particular regarding its expanding cooperation with FAO and Bioversity International as well as with other organizations, both national and international, working on the conservation and use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA).

II. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

4. At the first meeting of the Governing Body of the Treaty in June 2006 in Madrid, the Trust and FAO signed a Relationship Agreement on behalf of the Governing Body (<http://www.croptrust.org/main/governance.php?itemid=6>). The Agreement recognizes the Trust as an essential element of the funding strategy of the Treaty. It provides for the Governing Body to give policy guidance to the Trust and that the Trust has reporting obligations to the Governing Body. It also recognizes the executive independence of the Trust in managing its

¹ Now known as Bioversity International

operations and activities. The Trust submitted annual reports to the Governing Body in October 2007 and 2008.

5. In 2007, the Executive Board of Trustees was established (<http://www.croptrust.org/main/board.php?itemid=70>) as the Trust's principal decision-making body, taking over from the Interim Panel of Experts. In accordance with the Constitution, the Executive Board comprises four members appointed by the Governing Body of the Treaty four appointed by the Trust's Donors' Council, representatives of FAO and the CGIAR (non-voting) and the Trust's Executive Secretary (*ex officio*). The Executive Board met for the fifth time at the end of April 2009.

6. The Donor Donor Council (<http://www.croptrust.org/main/council.php>) has grown to 30 members as the number of developing and developed country governments, foundations, companies and associations donating to the Trust and eligible for membership has increased. The Council meets annually and provides financial advice to the Executive Board. In addition, a number of individuals have also contributed to the Trust. The list of donors and their pledges can be found at (<http://www.croptrust.org/main/donors.php>).

7. The Trust's Secretariat is located in Rome at FAO headquarters (<http://www.croptrust.org/main/contact.php>). The Rome location facilitates cooperation with the Secretariats of the Treaty and Commission, FAO and Bioversity. It is expected that an Agreement will be signed this year with the Government of Italy confirming the permanent location of the Trust in Rome.

III. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENTS

8. The Trust's programme serves to implement the Treaty and Global Plan of Action. As noted in the Relationship Agreement with the Treaty, the Trust was established as an endowment with the objective of "*providing a permanent source of funds to support the long-term conservation of ex situ germplasm on which the world depends for food security*". In this regard the Agreement notes the calls in the *Global Plan of Action* and the Treaty for the development of an efficient and sustainable system of *ex situ* conservation. Since the last meeting of the Working Group in 2005, the Trust has substantially increased its efforts to ensure the permanent conservation of PGRFA collections of global importance and has embarked on a number of activities to further the development of the global system of *ex situ* conservation (<http://www.croptrust.org/main/role.php>)

9. The conservation strategies developed by crop experts with the Trust's support and highlighted at the Working Group's last meeting, have helped define the Trust's priorities and activities. The 9 regional strategies and 20 crop strategies that have been completed so far are available at (<http://www.croptrust.org/main/strategy.php>). The information provided in these strategies has also contributed to the preparation of the second *Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources* (SOW2), which will be used in the updating of the rolling *Global Plan of Action*.

10. In 2007, the Trust embarked on a four-year project aimed at strengthening the global system of *ex situ* conservation for 22 Treaty Annex I crops. The major elements of this project are summarized below.

- a. *Regeneration of threatened priority collections.* The Trust is supporting the regeneration of approximately 100,000 accessions identified in the conservation strategies, by networks and through other consultations as unique and at risk from low viability. The partners are national PGRFA programmes as well as crop and regional networks. The projects include the characterisation and documentation of the regenerated accessions and their duplication at a genebank meeting international standards of management, and provide any necessary equipment and supplies. Bioversity and other CGIAR Centres are

collaborating with the Trust in providing technical backstopping where necessary and in facilitating the safety duplication of the regenerated germplasm. In addition, they have developed, with other specialists, multilingual guidelines for the regeneration of the 22 target crops. To date, the Trust has made grants to 28 institutes in 27 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as to members of 6 regional and 2 crop networks, involving a further 32 institutes in 23 countries. Further grants are likely to be made in the near future to members of other regional networks and additional national collections. In addition, the Trust is supporting CATIE, Costa Rica and the World Vegetable Centre to upgrade the management of some of their globally important collections.

- b. *Development of information systems.* The Trust has joined with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the development of a state-of-the-art genebank management system building on the US Genetic Resources Information Network (GRIN). Bioversity will assist with the deployment of the system, which will be provided free of charge to institutes that are interested to use it. In addition, the Trust is collaborating with Bioversity and the Treaty Secretariat in the development of a global on-line portal to accession-level information on PGRFA collections. This will build on existing systems such as SINGER (international collections managed by CGIAR Centres), EURISCO (European genebanks), GRIN and others. It will allow the searching and ordering of germplasm across multiple databases and will be fully compliant with Treaty requirements for SMTA management.
- c. *Promoting evaluation and use.* The Trust is funding projects to evaluate collections for traits of relevance to poor farmers and climate change adaptation through a competitive grants scheme. 12 projects are underway on 13 different Annex 1 crops and agreements are being concluded for a further set of projects. A further call for proposals will be announced later this year. The Trust is involved with the FAO-led Global Partnership Initiative for Plant Breeding Capacity Building (<http://km.fao.org/gipb/>) in supporting activities to enhance the use of PGRFA in developing countries. This includes support to the training, assessment and information activities of the GIPB as well funding 6 projects on pre-breeding.
- d. *Research on conservation bottlenecks for difficult crops.* The Trust has initiated a number of collaborative research activities aimed at overcoming key bottlenecks in conservation. These include optimizing embryo culture protocols in partnership with the global coconut network (COGENT) and developing robust cryopreservation methodologies for cassava, sweet potato, yams and edible aroids in partnership with the relevant CGIAR Centres (CIAT, CIP and IITA), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and specialist laboratories in Belgium and France.

11. The Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway acts as an ultimate back-up for collections of PGRFA of global importance (<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/lmd/campaign/svalbard-global-seed-vault.html?id=462220>). At its Eleventh Session, the Commission “*commended the Government of Norway for this valuable contribution to the long-term conservation of the world’s PGRFA*”. During the opening ceremony of the Vault in February 2008, FAO’s Director-General remarked that it was “*one of the most innovative and impressive acts in the service of humanity*”. The Trust supports the annual operations of the Vault and cooperates with the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Nordic Genetic Resources Centre (NordGen) in its management. In addition, the Trust is facilitating the safety duplication of international collections and national collections from developing countries by providing support for the packaging and shipment of the samples to Svalbard. To date the Trust has assisted with the deposit of 300,000 accessions and the Vault now holds more than 400,000 accessions in total. Deposited samples remain the property of the depositor, and the Seed Vault’s “black box” storage is provided free of charge to depositing genebanks.

12. The core of the Trust is the endowment fund, created to provide financial security to globally important collections of crop diversity in perpetuity. An initial package of long-term

grants is ensuring the conservation and availability of international collections of 13 major crops (banana, barley, bean, cassava, fava bean, forages, grass pea, lentil, pearl millet, rice, sorghum, wheat, yam). The collections managed by CGIAR Centres, have an exclusively international purpose and are the backbone of the rational, efficient and effective global system. They were therefore a high priority for the first Trust investments of this type. Their role is recognized in Article 15 of the Treaty.

IV. OTHER AREAS AND MECHANISMS OF COOPERATION

13. In addition to the involvement of FAO, Bioversity and other CGIAR Centres with regards to the governance of the Trust and implementation of its programme, cooperation between the Trust and these organizations has expanded in a number of other ways. For example:

- a. Trust staff have been involved in the revision process of the SOW2 and *Global Plan of Action*. They participated in regional meetings and contributed to the review of draft chapters of SOW2.
- b. The initiative on regeneration and safety duplication of threatened collections, involving more than 50 national institutes worldwide, represents a significant effort in Treaty implementation as it relates to *ex situ* conservation. Trust staff are participating in the workshops of the FAO-Bioversity Joint Programme on Treaty implementation, to discuss progress and issues arising from the initiative with the regeneration partners.
- c. Trust staff also participated in the workshop on Climate Change and Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture organized by FAO and Bioversity with the Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research and the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- d. Regular meetings and informal interactions with staff of the Secretariats of the Treaty and Commission are important means that the Trust uses to strengthen cooperation and joint planning in other areas. Regular meetings and informal interactions are also used to ensure cooperation between Bioversity and the CGIAR System-wide Genetic Resources Programme.