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Item 8 of the Draft Provisional Agenda

COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Eighth Regular Session

Rome, 19-23 April 1999

REPORTS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THEIR POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES ON AGRICULTURAL BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

PART III: INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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PART III: INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is the only inter-governmental body where member countries, both donors of funds and technology, and users of genetic resources, discuss matters specifically related to agricultural biological diversity. The Commission, regularly receives reports from relevant international organizations, including FAO, on their policies, programmes and activities for the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources. It has considered that such reports are of value both to the Commission, and to those organizations, which would thereby be able to better acquaint countries that are donors of germplasm and funds with their objectives and programmes, and benefit from their comments.

2. With the expansion of its mandate, the Commission for the first time received reports from organizations covering all fields of agricultural biological diversity at its Seventh Session. On that occasion, thirteen United Nations and other inter-governmental organisations, fourteen International Agricultural Research Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), and seven international non-governmental organizations provided reports.[1] The Commission welcomed these reports, and warmly thanked the organizations that had presented them. The Commission considered that these reports were an important contribution to its task in promoting coordination of activities in the field of agricultural biodiversity. It encouraged organizations to continue to submit such reports to its regular sessions.

3. This document contains reports from the following *International non-governmental organizations*, received by 5 February 1999:

> The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), the European Association for Animal Production (EAAP), the International Association of Plant Breeders (ASSINSEL), the International Centre for Underutilized Crops (ICUC), the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC).

4. The following *International non-governmental organizations* informed FAO that they would, for various reasons, not be able to report to this session:

> Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN), and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

5. The Secretariat has limited itself to compiling the reports, as submitted. Each report is fully the responsibility of the organization submitting it. FAO's own activities are reported in documents CGRFA-8/99/10.1 and CGRFA-8/99/10.2.

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[1] AsDB, Commonwealth Secretariat, CBD, GEF, IICA, IAEA, CABI, IFAD, UNESCO, OIE, UNEP, UNIDO, WB; CIAT, CIFOR, CIMMYT, CIP, ICARDA, ICRAF, ICRISAT, ICLARM, IITA, ILRI, ISNAR, IPGRI, IRRI, WARDA; ASSINSEL, EAAP, ICUC, IUFRO, ICAR, RAFI, RBI.

6. Reports from United Nations and other Inter-governmental Organizations are contained in document CGRFA-8/99/11.1, and reports from the International Agricultural Research Organizations of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research are contained in document CGRFA-9/99/11.2.

THE ASSOCIATED COUNTRY WOMEN OF THE WORLD (ACWW)

1. The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) has held Consultative Status with FAO since 1947. Its membership of 365 societies represent over nine million rural women in 71 countries. The majority of the membership is involved in farming and/or agriculture and at present there is much debate on the subject of genetics. The implications are such that no conclusions have been drawn but Resolutions have been made at the last three ACWW Triennial Conferences as follows:

i. "In order that as consumers we know what we are eating, we demand comprehensive marking of food products, not only for additives and allergens, but also descriptions of methods of production which must include, for instance, details of gene modification and radiation treatment." ACWW Twenty-second Triennial Conference, 1998.

ii. "That ACWW Member Societies urge their governments to support Farmers' Rights by contributing to the International Fund on Plant Genetic Resources." Twenty-first Triennial Conference, 1995.

iii. "That ACWW Member Societies, recognising the necessity for women to participate in decision-making on plant genetic resources, urge their governments to provide adequate and sustained support to plant genetic resource conservation, both national and international." Twentieth Triennial Conference, 1992.

THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR ANIMAL PRODUCTION (EAAP)

1. A report on the activities of the European Association for Animal Production (EAAP) for the conservation and utilization of animal genetic resources (AGRs) was presented to the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture for the first time at its Seventh Session (15-23 May 1997). A standing working group charged with coordinating such activities has existed under the EAAP Study Commission on Animal Genetics since 1980. A survey of the status of animal breeds in Europe conducted by this group led to the establishment of a computerized databank in 1988 since when it has been managed by the Veterinary University of Hanover in Germany. Activities in this area have been pursued in close collaboration with FAO. The EAAP has always expressed its support for the principles underlying FAO's Global Strategy for the Management of Farm Animal Genetic Resources and notably in 1995 helped set up the European Network of National Focal Points (NFPs) as part of this Strategy. The EAAP's animal genetic resource activities for the period 1997-1998 are reported below.

2. The NFP network has continued to meet in parallel with the EAAP Annual General Assembly, thus benefiting from its logistical support. Since the NFP meeting in Vienna in 1997, the preparation and organization of these meetings has been jointly conducted by the French and Polish focal points, now responsible for issuing their detailed reports: see the reports of the meetings of Vienna (1997) and Warsaw (1998), available at the Bureau des Ressources Génétiques (Paris) and the Centralna Stacja Hodowli Zwierzat (Warsaw).

3. In the period 1997-1998, the EAAP coordinated joint action funded by the European Union under its regulation 1467/94 on genetic resources in agriculture. This action, which focused on a permanent inventory of European animal genetic resources and of activities for their characterization, conservation and utilization, has resulted in:

- the adoption of a protocol for the regular updating of the EAAP database in Hanover and the transfer of these data to FAO's Domestic Animal Diversity-Information System (DAD-IS), which should now assure the logical onforwarding of national data to a European database, in a position to meet the needs of Europe, and thence to the global database operated by FAO.
- the listing of 160 experts, from a wide range of geographical and institutional origins, able to provide scientific and technical advice on the conservation and utilization of AGRs and related methodologies.

4. As a result of this action, the EAAP working group decided to promote the EAAP database in Hanover as a **regional database** for the whole of Europe, in close collaboration with FAO. This inventory activity needs to be placed in a broader context of coordination of European actions by reinforcing the NFP network and creating a **Regional Focal Point** (**RFP**) under the FAO Global Strategy for AGRs. The EAAP provides support and scientific expertise for this RFP, which became active in 1997 when France offered its coordination services on a provisional basis. It was in this spirit that, together with FAO, it formulated a proposal for concerted action, which was submitted to the European Union in 1998 under the framework of its regulation 1467/94.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PLANT BREEDERS (ASSINSEL)

1. ASSINSEL, the International Association of Plant Breeders, and its Members, representing more than 1000 breeding companies from 29 industrialized and developing countries[1], consider that it is crucial to maintain genetic resources for food and agriculture, to organize access to these genetic resources, and to find a way to share equitably benefits arising from their use.

2. To confirm this willingness, ASSINSEL Members in 1998 adopted a position paper on "Access to Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Use" which was submitted for consideration to the Fifth Extraordinary Session of the CGRFA. That proposal, which was welcomed by most delegations, is a significant contribution by the plant breeders' community to a constructive negotiation process. (As requested by several delegations, a more detailed explanation of the ASSINSEL proposal has been prepared, which is available to the Commission as document CGRFA-8/99/Inf. 9).

3. In 1998, FIS[2] and ASSINSEL Members from developing countries met to adopt "Recommendations by the Seed Industry of Developing Countries on the Revision of the International Undertaking". They warned delegates to the Fifth Extraordinary Session of the Commission that, in absence of a multilateral agreement, plant breeding activities in developing countries would be endangered. They particularly pointed out the need to: (i) promote the use of modern technologies, including biotechnologies, (ii) create incentives for plant breeding whilst protecting intellectual property, (iii) favour access to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and (iv) set up a simple and efficient system of benefit-sharing.

4. In practical terms, ASSINSEL Members are actively involved in:

- Plant genetic resources conservation, spending about US$ 50 million per year to maintain genetic resources. In addition, ASSINSEL Members are involved in bilateral and multilateral programmes aimed at (i) improving plant genetic resources conservation and sustainable use, and (ii) facilitating technology transfer.
- Increasing the genetic diversity available to farmers: in 1998, about 1000 varieties of field crops were removed from the OECD List of Cultivars Eligible for Certification, while at the same time, about 3200 varieties were added to the list, resulting in an increase in the number of varieties available to farmers of over 2000. It must be noted that these listed varieties are all distinct, thus representing a true increase in the genetic diversity available to farmers.
- Steadily increasing yield potential and stability, and resistance to biotic and abiotic factors, thus improving food security, and preserving fragile ecosystems from over-exploitation.

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[1] Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Norway, New Zealand, Poland, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA.

[2] FIS, the International Seed Trade Federation, is an NGO representing the seed industry, with members spread over 62 industrialized and developing countries of all continents.

THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR UNDERUTILIZED CROPS (ICUC)

1. ICUC has started a small project to study the diversity of homestead farms in Bangladesh. The objectives of this project are (a) to identify superior types of individuals through farmer survey and evaluation and (b) to rehabilitate elite types in home-farm systems.

2. A collaborative project on indigenous vegetables in South Africa and Tanzania has started as part of SEANUC (Southern and Eastern Africa Network). The project is funded by the UK national Charities Board and the crops include Cucurbits, Plectranthus and Amermaths. The objective of the project is to assess the genetic diversity and rehabilitate potential elite lines in the existing farming system.

3. ICUC has received a fund from DFID, UK to promote Underutilized Tropical Fruits. The information on the genetic diversity and status of conservation and use of plant genetic resources is an important part of this project.

4. The project on the assessment of genetic diversity of Pummelo and Jackfruit in Nepal and Bangladesh respectively has been completed. Germplasm Catalogues of Pummelo in Nepal and Jackfruit in Bangladesh have been published.

5. ICUC, in collaboration with FAO has organized the first regional meeting on the Conservation and Use of Tropical and Sub-tropical Fruits in West Africa and the proceedings of this meeting is in printing at present. ICUC in collaboration with the Commonwealth Science Council and the Plant Genetic Resources Institute, Pakistan, has organized a national meeting of medicinal plants in Pakistan. The status of the conservation and use of medicinal plants germplasm has been highlighted in the meeting.

6. ICUC in collaboration with FAO and their partners has continued its efforts to expand UTFANET and SEANUC activities. ICUC in collaboration with FAO has planned a regional meeting this year on the “Status of Conservation and Use of Traditional Vegetables in Asia and the Pacific”.

7. ICUC is preparing its second edition of the Global Newsletter on Underutilized Crops and will be distributed soon.

THE RURAL ADVANCEMENT FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL (RAFI)

1. The Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) is an international non-profit Civil Society Organization devoted to the socio-economic and political analysis of new technologies as they impact upon rural societies, food security, and agricultural biodiversity. Based in Winnipeg, Canada, RAFI has an international staff in several locations and is governed by a Board of Trustees with representation from every region of the world. RAFI has NGO liaison status with FAO, ECOSOC, and UNCTAD. Since RAFI staff began their work in 1977, the organization has focused on the wide range of practical and political concerns associated with plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. In this role, RAFI participated in the various FAO meetings that led to the creation of the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in 1983 and have attended every subsequent session of that Commission.

2. RAFI is pleased to report that, since the last extraordinary session of the Commission in 1998, it has provided a detailed report on the progress of that meeting and has followed closely the related, formal and informal, meetings concerning plant genetic resources in the CGIAR, WTO, CBD, and elsewhere. As a founding member of the Community Biodiversity Development and Conservation Programme (CBDC), a network of institutional and community-based agricultural biodiversity research activities in 15 countries and five continents, RAFI is assisting with the evaluation of the first four years of this unique multi-disciplinary experiment and is participating in the development of a second phase.

3. Following the last Commission meeting, RAFI has undertaken a careful analysis of inducible promoter technologies including Terminator (seed sterilization) technology and the wider "Trait-or" technology. Also, following upon the Commission session, RAFI completed its analysis of 147 possible abuses of Plant Breeders' Rights and patents around the world. That report, *Plant Breeders' Wrongs*, is available on RAFI's website at www.rafi.org along with its inducible promoter report, *Trait-or Tech*. RAFI will be preparing additional information on these issues for the upcoming Commission session.

THE WORLD CONSERVATION MONITORING CENTRE (WCMC)

1. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) is an independent organization, supported by IUCN, UNEP and WWF providing information on global biodiversity issues. WCMC has access to data from a wide range of expert sources throughout the world, and acts as an information clearing house. Users of our data include policy makers, planners and industry world-wide. They share a common need for accurate information on global biodiversity if effective environmental protection is to be achieved.

2. WCMC provides information on the status of species and their habitats, and the role of protected areas, with a current major focus on forests, marine and freshwater habitats. Information is disseminated through a multi-media information service, which includes access to our web site: http:/www.wcmc.org.uk

3. Species databases detailing the world's threatened animals and plants are central to our work, and have been built up over many years, allowing ready access to information on species threat status and species distribution. From these databases, publications, which have become industry standards, have been produced. These include the *1996 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals* and the first ever listing of the world's globally threatened plants, the *1997 IUCN Red List of Threatened Plants* listing over 33,000 species. A recent major data gathering exercise on tree information has been completed, culminating in publication in 1998 of *Threatened Trees of the World* both in book format and as a CD-ROM. In addition to information on distribution and conservation status, information was also gathered on the use of each tree species and type of threat facing them. For the first time it is now possible to analyse the relevant importance of different threats to different species.

4. Data from each of these books are also available in searchable database format on the Internet. Currently more data are being put on the web, with an interactive system that allows direct feedback to WCMC by email, to threatened.plants@wcmc.org.uk for each species.

5. Our current aim is to bring all our plant data up to the standard of the tree data. In particular we aim to identify nationally and globally threatened wild crop relatives of importance to food and agriculture, and the threats facing these species. We also aim to identify existing protection measures - for example inclusion in national legislation or location within the protected areas system. In the first instance we are focussing on plants of Central and South America, Europe and South East Asia, with visiting staff from Mexico, the Czech Republic and Indonesia responsible for communicating with people from their region of the world, and managing the data. The continued growth in use of the Internet around the world should ensure that comments and information can be easily fed back to WCMC and then, once verified, these can be incorporated into the data on the web. Full credit will continue to be given to the experts supplying information according to the procedure that can be viewed on the current plant red list pages http://www.wcmc.org.uk/species/plants/red_list.htm

6. Your comments on our plant conservation information service are welcome. We are always interested in hearing from users of the data we provide so that needs can be met as accurately as possible.