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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NETWORK OF *IN SITU* CONSERVATION AREAS

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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NETWORK OF IN SITU CONSERVATION AREAS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present document reviews the Commission's past considerations regarding the *in situ* conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture, as well as the relevant provisions of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*. It then outlines the recent initiative under an FAO/UNDP GEF project,[1] in support of globally important ingenious agricultural heritage systems (GIAHS), showing how these may have a major role to play in establishing effective long-term *in situ* conservation in functional and evolving farming systems. It then seeks the Commission's advice regarding the further development of the GIAHS initiative, and, more specifically, its potential role in the development of a network of *in situ* conservation areas, as requested by the Commission.

II. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY THE COMMISSION OF THE QUESTION OF THE *IN SITU* CONSERVATION OF GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, AND RELEVANT PROVISIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY

2. Since its First Regular Session, the Commission has acknowledged the important role of the *in situ* conservation of plant genetic resources. A number of recommendations have, over the years, been formulated by the Commission related to activities on *in situ* conservation.

3. The Commission, at its Third Regular Session, called for the establishment of networks of *in situ* conservation areas, as an element of FAO's Global System for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which would include provisions for the "on-farm" conservation of crops, and the *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives.

4. At its Fourth Session, the Commission reviewed a report prepared by the Secretariat related to the feasibility and *modus operandi* for the establishment of a "Network of *In Situ* Conservation Areas", as the Third Session of the Commission had recommended.[2] In so doing, the Commission agreed that *in situ* conservation should be based on the efforts of local communities, non-governmental organizations and national institutions, working within an international framework. Moreover, the Commission, at its Fourth Regular Session, agreed that *in situ* conservation was a vital part of the conservation of living organisms and genetic variation, and recommended that "particular emphasis should be put upon promoting economically and socially acceptable land-use options, which included effective *in situ* conservation and use".

5. At its Fifth Regular Session, the Commission noted the considerable number of organizations involved in various aspects of the sustainable management of natural renewable resources, and the conservation of ecosystems and genetic resources, at a global level, and requested FAO to further strengthen its collaboration with other relevant international organizations, with special reference to UNESCO's *Man and the Biosphere Programme* and organizations concerned with the coordination of follow-up to the 1992 Rio de Janeiro UNCED Conference.

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1 UNTS/GLO/001/GEF, Globally Important Ingenious Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS).

2 CPGR/91/6, *Strategies for the establishment of a network of* in situ *conservation areas.*

6. The *Global Plan of Action*, negotiated by the Commission and adopted by 150 countries in Leipzig in 1996, contains a set of specific priority activities for *in situ* conservation and development, which includes, as activity 2, *Supporting on-farm management and improvement of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture*.[3] The *Global Plan of Action* foresees a working strategy that identifies "working examples of conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture that support and maintain the social, economic and cultural values of local and indigenous communities and improve the quality of life".

7. The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture—in Article 5, *Conservation, exploration, collection, characterization, evaluation and documentation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture,* and in Article 6, *Sustainable use of plant genetic resources*—contains a number of substantive provisions regarding *in situ* conservation and sustainable use within farming systems,[4] and Article 9, *Farmers' Rights,*[5] provides for national governments, as appropriate, to take measures of particular importance for *in situ* conservation, which may include:

> "protection of traditional knowledge relevant to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture;
>
> "the right to equitably participate in sharing benefits arising from the utilization of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture; and
>
> "the right to participate in making decisions, at the national level, on matters related to the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture".

Moreover, the Treaty's Funding Strategy provided for in Article 18, which foresees the mobilization, under the guidance of the Governing Body of funding for priority activities, plans and programmes, will take the *Global Plan of Action* into account, and foresees that priority will be given to the implementation of agreed plans and programmes for farmers in developing countries, especially in least developed countries, and in countries with economies in transition, who conserve and sustainably utilize plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

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3 With the following intermediate objectives: "to establish or strengthen programmes and networks for on-farm management of farmers' varieties, wild relatives of food crops, harvested food plants and rangeland genetic resources"; and "to build on-farm and garden programmes based on local systems of knowledge, institutions, and management, ensuring local participation in planning, management and evaluation".

4 Article 5.1 foresees amongst other things, that each Party shall, subject to national legislation, and in cooperation with the Parties where appropriate: "promote or support, as appropriate, farmers and local communities' efforts to manage and conserve on-farm their plant genetic resources for food and agriculture", and "promote *in situ* conservation of wild crop relatives and wild plants for food production, including in protected areas, by supporting, *inter alia*, the efforts of indigenous and local communities".
Article 6.2 is in its entirety of importance for the development of *in situ* conservation, which may include such measures as: "pursuing fair agricultural policies that promote, as appropriate, the development and maintenance of diverse farming systems that enhance the sustainable use of agricultural biological diversity and other natural resources"; and "strengthening research which enhances and conserves biological diversity by maximizing intra- and inter-specific variation for the benefit of farmers, especially those who generate and use their own varieties and apply ecological principles in maintaining soil fertility and in combating diseases, weeds and pests".

5 Parties "recognize the enormous contribution that the local and indigenous communities and farmers of all regions of the world, particularly those in the centres of origin and crop diversity, have made and will continue to make for the conservation and development of plant genetic resources which constitute the basis of food and agriculture production throughout the world".

III. *IN SITU* CONSERVATION AS PART OF FAO'S PROGRAMME OF WORK

8. FAO has for many years supported the *in situ* conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture through technical advice, on request, to member countries, including in the context of the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action.* Through work on improved land management and farming systems—in which the conservation and sustainable use of agricultural biodiversity is an integral part—countries have been assisted in establishing and implementing sustainable development strategies and approaches. Document CGRFA-9/02/6, *Country progress report on the implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources*, confirms the high priority that countries are giving to *in situ* conservation and development in their national programmes, but concludes that additional work is required at all levels to implement activities related to *in situ* conservation and development.

IV. *IN SITU* CONSERVATION THROUGH THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF GLOBALLY IMPORTANT INGENIOUS AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE SYSTEMS (GIAHS)

9. Agricultural genetic resources are the result of co-adaptation among plants, animals and humans, under specific agro-ecological conditions. The conservation *in situ* of genetic resources for food and agriculture cannot be achieved outside dynamic farming systems and local human cultures in which these resources were developed. Following years of international consultations, with a view to protecting some of the most relevant farming systems that hold important genetic resources, including some that are particularly at risk, FAO in 2002 launched an FAO-UNDP GEF project to support globally important ingenious agricultural heritage systems (GIAHS). The project seeks to promote the international recognition, conservation and sustainable management of these systems—including where necessary their revitalization—and the outstanding role these systems play in the maintenance of agricultural biodiversity, as well as their contribution to natural and cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge systems.

10. GIAHS, and their associated landscapes, have been created, shaped, maintained and passed between generations of farmers, herders, forest dwellers and fisher-folk. Based on diverse species and their interactions, and the use of locally adapted, distinctive and often ingenious combinations of management practices and techniques, they have contributed, and continue to contribute, to enriching and sustaining globally significant agricultural biodiversity, resilient ecosystems, and valuable cultural heritage. Moreover, such systems ensure the sustained provision of multiple goods and services, food and livelihood security, and quality of life for people.

11. GIAHS throughout the world testify to the inventiveness and ingenuity of people in their use and management of biodiversity, inter-species dynamics, and the physical attributes of the landscape, codified in traditional but evolving knowledge, practices and technologies. This ingenuity has resulted in well-balanced agro-ecological systems in marginal or extreme ecologies, which could not otherwise have sustainably supported human life and agro-biodiversity at its present high level. These systems are organized and managed through highly adapted social and cultural practices and values.

12. They, however, often face great challenges in evolving and adapting to economic change and new policy environments, particularly in the context of climate change and globalization. To survive they must also develop their productive capacity to meet the rising expectations of their members, in terms of food security and quality of life.

13. The project concept recognizes and is centred on the profound inter-relatedness of biodiversity, agriculture, ecology, culture and social organization, local livelihoods and food security. This integrated ecosystem approach builds on existing indigenous knowledge, practices, customs and

institutions for the management of agricultural systems, in ways that are socially, economically and culturally appropriate to the identity, needs and aspirations of farming communities

14. The underlying strategy of the project is to avoid or reverse the loss or degradation of essential features and attributes of these systems—especially their biodiversity—while allowing their necessary evolution and at the same time enhancing the socio-economic development of resource users and national benefits. The project firstly attempt to mitigate threats to the resilience of GIAHS, by supporting farmers and their communities' capacities to continue to manage these systems, with the involvement of national governments, scientists and other stakeholders. It also seeks to support these communities and their governments in developing appropriate legal and policy environments, conducive to their continued existence, and which allow for their evolution and development. The project offers an opportunity to build, in a step-by-step way, cooperation amongst communities that effectively manage their rich *in situ* heritages, in a sustainable development context, including through the exchange of experience, knowledge and technologies.

15. In order to mobilize international recognition and support for GIAHS and their associated biodiversity and knowledge systems throughout the world, the possibility is being investigated of UNESCO creating a new category of World Heritage Sites for GIAHS. This would be supported, in a first phase, by specific action programmes in approximately six pilot sites.

16. Through participatory activities, the project will further develop and apply multi-stakeholder approaches to the management and conservation of agricultural heritage systems, adapted to the local and national stakeholder communities. Stakeholder categories likely to participate include national governments, indigenous peoples and local farming communities, NGOs, local government, universities, museums, and scientific institutes.

17. The project can contribute to the implementation of Farmers' Rights, in support of the International Treaty, by protecting and developing the traditional knowledge that is crucial in GIAHS; by assisting communities to develop, and obtain the maximum benefits from their resources; and by further developing participatory approaches that provide for their effective participation in making decisions, at the national level, on matters related to the conservation and sustainable use of their resources. In so doing, it can provide a model and develop tools for the *in situ* conservation of agricultural biodiversity, within dynamic and functional systems.

18. GIAHS can serve as "lighthouses" for integrated and innovative approaches to *in situ* conservation, in the context of sustainable development. They can serve as examples of how communities can be supported in the maintenance of their agricultural biodiversity, and productive and resilient agro-ecosystems.

V. NEXT STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GIAHS PROJECT

19. A preliminary stakeholder workshop has been organized by FAO for August 2002, with GEF-UNDP support, to identify partners, review the project concept and illustrative case studies, and agree on further development of the project and criteria for the identification of the initial sites. Cooperation and partnerships will be established with other international efforts in service of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and agricultural systems, in line with the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture as well as with the Convention on Biological Diversity, UNESCO's World Heritage Convention and its Man and the Biosphere Reserve Programme, FAO's ongoing assessment of the *State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources* and the *State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources,* the implementation of Agenda 21, the Conventions on Desertification, Climate Change, and the Ramsar Convention. In particular, close linkages are envisaged with the process of the implementation of the *Global Plan of Action*. Close co-operation is also foreseen with relevant FAO programmes and partners, in all sectors.

VI. ADVICE SOUGHT FROM THE COMMISSION

20. Because of the potentially path-breaking nature of the GIAHS project in the development of *in situ* conservation, the Commission may wish to provide advice on:

- The role of the GIAHS project as a working example, which may provide a basis for a network of *in situ* conservation areas, in line with previous requests and recommendations of the Commission, and the priorities established in the *Global Plan of Action*;
- The GIAHS concept and project activities, as one of the means for the conservation and sustainable *in situ* management of genetic resources for food and agriculture, which support and maintain the social, economic and cultural values of local and indigenous communities, and improve their quality of life;
- How international recognition and support can be mobilized for Globally Important Ingenious Agricultural Heritage Systems; and
- How the project can promote international recognition and support for *in situ* conservation activities.