



ITPGRFA GB 6 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2015

Delegates to the sixth session of the Governing Body (GB 6) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Treaty or ITPGRFA) met in plenary throughout the day, to hear opening and regional statements, consider reports and organizational issues, and discuss the Multilateral System (MLS) and the Funding Strategy. A lunchtime event presented the proposed vision of the Global Information System (GLIS).

OPENING

Shakeel Bhatti, ITPGRFA Secretary, introduced a video on the GLIS, including interviews with farmers and scientists from the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

Via a video message, FAO Director-General José Graziano da Silva stressed: that FAO's custodian role should go beyond safeguarding crop genetic material to include also related digital information; the importance of the Treaty in bringing together farmers and scientists; and the need to enhance the MLS and the GLIS to face future challenges.

Ahmed Nasser Al-Bakry, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, Oman, provided an overview of efforts during GB 5 and of intersessional progress on enhancing the MLS, sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) and farmers' rights.

Via a video message, Braulio Dias, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), stressed the relationship between the Treaty and the CBD and its Nagoya Protocol on ABS (NP), which entered into force in October 2014. He underlined the importance of implementing both agreements in a mutually supportive manner; and highlighted that joint interests of the CBD and the Treaty extend to broader aspects of PGRFA, including crop wild relatives and forestry.

Michael Keller, Secretary General, International Seed Federation, called for recognition of the seed sector's commitment and in-kind contribution to the Treaty, and noted the need for a more user-friendly system, and for extending Annex I to cover all PGRFA.

Alejandro Argumedo, ANDES, Potato Park, Peru, stressed the contribution of local and indigenous farmers to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, and to the development of local responses to change. He highlighted the recent deposit by the Potato Park, along with partners, of germplasm of local potato varieties in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

Garlich Von Essen, Secretary General, European Seed Association (ESA), highlighted gaps in the material included in the MLS and the Benefit-Sharing Fund's (BSF) lack of income as main challenges, and anticipated a contribution to the Treaty of 300,000 Euros to be made at the ESA annual meeting.

Frank Rijsberman, Chief Executive Officer, CGIAR Consortium, outlined achievements of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, and outlined the process of developing "scuba rice," a new extreme flood-tolerant rice variety.

Robert Zeigler, IRRI Director General, highlighted efforts on creation of varieties to address local needs, information sharing, and co-development and sharing of technologies, including on PGRFA conservation and sustainable use, landscape management and market and policy analysis.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Plenary adopted the meeting's agenda and timetable (IT/GB-6/15/1 and 2); elected Nestor Altoveros (the Philippines) as Rapporteur; and established a credentials and a budget committee.

STATEMENTS

Ireland, for the EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP (ERG), reconfirmed willingness to work for the success of the session. Iran, for G-77/CHINA, stressed the need to: overcome the structural challenges preventing the MLS from achieving its objectives; share the responsibility for PGRFA conservation fairly and achieve targets for monetary support of developing countries; and give equal attention to *ex situ*, *in situ*, and on-farm conservation, by shifting towards greater support for farmers and smallholders.

Australia, for the SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC, said benefit-sharing shortfalls are due to the time lag between accession and commercialization, noting that parties contribute voluntarily to compensate. The Philippines, for ASIA, and Mauritius, for AFRICA, supported exploring the subscription system, and urged enhancing benefit-sharing. ASIA called for practical tools for *in situ* and on-farm conservation. AFRICA urged recognizing farmers' role in facing climate change. Lebanon, for NEAR EAST, called for facilitated access to technologies and enhanced delivery of resources to developing countries through benefit-sharing.

LA VIA CAMPESINA expressed concern about the slow progress in benefit-sharing, noting that farmers feel excluded from research and initiatives to enhance the MLS. The ETC GROUP said GB 6 must resolve a crisis that involves parties that do not yet share their PGRFA, users that do not share benefits, and industry that shares neither PGRFA nor benefits.

REPORTS

GB 6 Chair Matthew Worrell (Australia) reported on activities and major developments affecting the Treaty since GB 5 (IT/GB-6/15/4). He noted ratifications from the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Serbia, Tonga, Swaziland and Iraq in the past biennium, and focused on partnerships and collaborations with other international processes.



Secretary Bhatti presented his report (IT/GB-6/15/5), highlighting the Treaty's role as the internationally agreed framework for ABS for cultivated plants in relation to targets 2.5 (maintaining the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and domesticated animals) and 15.6 (promoting fair and equitable benefit-sharing from and appropriate access to genetic resources) under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He identified challenges for the Treaty regarding the "dematerialization" of genetic resources, BSF financing, and its place vis-à-vis the NP, as well as advances regarding farmers' rights.

On the joint capacity-building programme on farmers' rights implementation with the Global Forum on Agricultural Research, CANADA noted the need for prior GB approval. INDONESIA reported on the third meeting of the Platform for the Co-Development and Transfer of Technologies (IT/GB-6/15/Inf.10); and OMAN on the recent meetings of the High-Level Round Table and the High-Level Task Force on Resource Mobilization.

MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

ENHANCEMENT OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE MLS: Plenary considered relevant documents, including the report of the intersessional Working Group (IT/GB-6/15/6 Add.1 and Rev.1, and IT/GB-6/15/9). Working Group Co-Chairs Modesto Fernández (Cuba) and Bert Visser (the Netherlands) highlighted progress towards developing a subscription system, including agreed elements and major issues for further work.

All regions supported convening a contact group to develop the Working Group's future mandate. AFRICA, GRULAC, NEAR EAST and ASIA said the Working Group should focus on elaborating the subscription system, stressing they will discuss an expansion of Annex I only once user-based payments have increased.

AUSTRALIA and CANADA said the Working Group should discuss a range of technical issues and elaborate concrete proposals for GB 7 consideration, with CANADA noting that the subscription system should complement, not replace, existing payment schemes. The ERG said the Working Group should minimize changes to the Treaty and the SMTA, stressing that non-monetary benefits generated by the MLS already exceed expected monetary benefits by an order of magnitude. Many supported revising the Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA) but opposed amending the Treaty or developing a protocol. BRAZIL suggested revising the SMTA so that payments are mandatory whenever products are marketed for profit, not only when access to material is restricted. She also urged reviewing whether facilitated access should continue for natural legal persons who have not made their materials available.

A representative of civil society and farmer organizations urged: mandatory payments by the seed industry to the MLS; emphasis on access combined with a ban on intellectual property rights (IPRs) on native traits, including from genebanks; and inclusion of private collections into the MLS.

A contact group was established to address the Working Group's mandate and operations in the next biennium. The ERG said the contact group should develop the Working Group's terms of reference and deliverables. NAMIBIA proposed that the Working Group address the issue of genetic information derived from MLS material and the balance between the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the BSF.

MLS OPERATIONS: The Secretariat introduced the relevant document (IT/GB-6/15/8). The ERG called for postponing the reviews under Articles 11(2) (inclusion of private collections) and 13(2)(d)(ii) (payment levels) until GB 7. The ERG and CANADA called for improving information on the availability and accessibility of PGRFA in the MLS.

THIRD PARTY BENEFICIARY: The Secretariat introduced the relevant document (IT/GB-6/15/10). Suggesting that the CGIAR centers explore how to further facilitate use of the

SMTA, the ERG requested ensuring integrity and confidentiality of information submitted by parties through the EasySMTA mechanism.

FUNDING STRATEGY

Many recommended that the review of the Funding Strategy (IT/GB-6/15/11) should be conducted in close collaboration with the Working Group on enhancing the MLS. Developing country regions called for sustainable and predictable levels of funding for all elements of the Strategy.

The NEAR EAST, AFRICA, AUSTRALIA, CANADA and the ERG supported strengthening the programmatic approach for the BSF, with CANADA suggesting that it take into account the second Global Plan of Action on PGRFA. ASIA emphasized support to genebanks in developing countries, in particular in centres of diversity. The ERG called for addressing components beyond the BSF.

The NEAR EAST suggested a body of donors and recipients for more dynamic resource mobilization, whereas AFRICA called for a donor conference. Noting that the MLS must be the main Treaty resource mobilization element, BRAZIL considered establishment of a donor council or revision of the BSF structure premature.

Many supported reconvening the *Ad hoc* Advisory Committee, with AFRICA suggesting its members be experts from regional groups.

The ERG opposed keeping the BSF's annual target. NAMIBIA proposed mention of a specific funding target in the draft resolution.

The ERG drew attention to Sweden's annual contributions as a way to ensure sustainability. The UK noted its Darwin initiative supporting Treaty implementation. SWITZERLAND mentioned its analysis of resource allocation under the BSF. NORWAY stated the deposit to the Svalbard Seed Vault by Andean communities illustrates the BSF impact.

The US suggested countries prioritize PGRFA conservation in their own development strategies and build a strong accountability framework for the BSF. A representative of civil society called for simplifying BSF modalities to allow for project applications by farmers.

A contact group was established to address the draft resolution.

IN THE CORRIDORS

"Busy but exciting times," one participant proclaimed immediately following the GB 6 opening, outlining the meeting's complex and interlinked agenda, which ranges from the revision of the Multilateral System (MLS) and the Global Information System (GLIS) to farmers' rights and on-farm conservation and sustainable use. Indeed, delegates all agreed that GB 6 is facing a hefty workload, but admitted that three special information sessions, two held on Saturday on enhancing the MLS and farmers' rights, and one on Monday on the GLIS, prepared the ground for the deliberations ahead.

Opinions diverged however regarding the current status of the Treaty, depending on the degree of optimism of each and every one. While many lauded the Treaty's achievements citing increasing transfers of material, others spoke of an acute "crisis," pointing to the lack of monetary benefit-sharing through the MLS and the need to strengthen support to farmers on the ground. One participant went so far as to say: "we have to fix the MLS now or kiss the Treaty good-bye." She echoed the sentiment of many who would like to adopt a package of strong measures to enhance the MLS, including an advance payments scheme, sooner rather than later. Others however noted that the (increasingly complex) details of the package remain to be developed; for instance, how the MLS could support the different needs of breeders and farmers in both developed and developing countries remains a challenge to be imaginatively addressed.