



## Annex 6

### International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture inputs to High-level Political forum 2019

*“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”*

**Goal 4.** Quality education; **Goal 8.** Decent work and economic growth; **Goal 10.** Reduced inequalities; **Goal 13.** Climate action; **Goal 16.** Peace, justice and strong institutions; **Goal 17.** Partnerships for the Goals.

Adopted by the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in November 2001 and entering into force in June 2004, the **International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture** (ITPGRFA) is the only legally binding international agreement that specifically deals with the **conservation and sustainable management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture** (PGRFA).

The objectives of the International Treaty are the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity, for sustainable agriculture and food security.

The functions of the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA is to promote its full implementation, keeping in view of its objectives.

#### I. Progress and challenges

Plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) are essential to ensure food security, promote sustainable agriculture and adapt to climate change. PGRFA are critical for the continued development of new plant varieties, to adapt crops to changing climate and ever-evolving pests and diseases, as well as to reduce agriculture’s pressures on the environment.

The degree of countries’ dependence on crop genetic diversity originating from outside their borders is around 70 percent as a global average, and this interdependence will increase throughout the 21st century. Increased and continuous exchange of crop genetic material will therefore be crucial for agricultural research and the breeding of adapted crop varieties.

In order to support the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, the International Treaty established the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (Multilateral System) to facilitate exchanges of plant genetic materials for agricultural research, training and breeding. Under the Multilateral System, countries grant each other facilitated access to their plant genetic resources, while users of genetic resources from the Multilateral System share benefits that they derive from the use of these genetic materials, especially with



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farmers in developing countries. Important collaboration is therefore happening under the International Treaty on exchange of information, access to technologies and capacity-development, while monetary benefits are shared through the International Treaty's Benefit-sharing Fund.

As of March 2019, there are 145 Contracting Parties to the International Treaty, and the Multilateral System contains more than 2.5 million of plant genetic materials of the most important food crops. Since January 2007, over 4.6 million genetic resources samples have been transferred globally through over 68,000 Standard Material Transfer Agreements (SMTAs) that set out the conditions of genetic material exchange under the Multilateral System, including obligations for benefit-sharing by those receiving material.

Payments derived from the use of crop genetic resources are critical in order for the Multilateral System to continue working effectively. In June 2018, the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF) received the first user-based payment on income derived from the use of material from the Multilateral System. A Dutch seed company paid to the BSF the set amount in the SMTA from its seed sales of ten varieties of vegetables commercialized using germplasm made available through the Multilateral System.

To date, the Benefit-sharing Fund has invested more than USD 20 million in 61 projects in 55 developing countries over three project cycles, positively impacting the lives of about 1 million people. BSF projects have supported the development, testing and use of climate ready crops, resulting in more than 1,000 accessions with adaptive traits that are now available to the international scientific and breeding community under the Multilateral System. The 4th project cycle of BSF was launched in December 2017 and is currently being implemented. All projects focus on the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture with the overall objective of enhancing farmers' resilience in the face of climate change and improving their food security situation.

Another distinctive feature of the International Treaty is that it formally recognizes the enormous contribution of local and indigenous communities and farmers of all regions of the world in conserving, improving and making available crop genetic resources. Farmers, since the advent of agriculture, have been the custodians and innovators of crop genetic resources, which formed the basis of the modern plant breeding, and underpins our ability to produce food. The Governing Body of the International Treaty, at its Seventh Session in November 2017, established a technical expert group to provide advice on experiences gained in implementing farmers' rights and develop options for promoting and guiding their realization at the national level.

## **II. Key messages and policy recommendations for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda**



### **Full implementation of the International Treaty**

The full implementation of the International Treaty contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, relating to conservation, sustainable use and access and benefit-sharing of plant genetic resources. Conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources is necessary to develop climate resilient crops and at the same time to reduce adverse impacts of agriculture to the environment. Yet, conserving plant genetic resources and using them for sustainable agriculture production relies on the willingness of countries to share and exchange those resources.

The International Treaty provides a governance framework and operational mechanisms to support the sustainable management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. It also emphasizes the importance of national commitments and encourages international cooperation in this effort.

It is also a call to non-Contracting Party countries to join the International Treaty, so that more and diverse plant genetic material would be available under the Multilateral System to farmers, breeders and researchers in the world to develop climate resilient crops.

### **Enhancement of the functioning of the Multilateral System**

Contracting Parties of the International Treaty are currently seeking to develop measures to improve the functioning of the Multilateral System by making it more attractive to users, both providers and recipients of plant genetic material, and to increase the level of income to the Benefit-sharing Fund generated from user-based payments. This is critical for the Multilateral System to continue to facilitate access and exchange of plant genetic material around the world in support of development of climate resilient crops.

Several years of experience in the operations of the Multilateral System by many different stakeholders, not only governments but also farmers, academia, private sector, civil society, contribute to this process. They look into a package of measures that includes a review of the SMTA, including a Subscription System as an access and benefit-sharing option, and a possible expansion of the crops covered by the Multilateral System. Rapid finalization of these measures is essential to enhance the functioning of the Multilateral System, so that it would continue and better support conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

### **Cooperation across sectors**

The International Treaty, through its Preamble, recognizes that questions regarding the management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) are at the meeting point of agriculture, the environment and commerce. Management of PGRFA is not only an issue of the agricultural community, but also for the environment and trade sectors,



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especially to ensure global food security in the context of climate change in a sustainable and fair way. It not only contributes to making agricultural production more sustainable, but also supports environmental protection and improvement of rural livelihoods through mechanisms to share benefits arising from the use of PGRFA.

### III. **Successful experiences and lessons learned on HLPF theme**

One of the most important impacts of the International Treaty has been the direct benefit to farmers and researchers in developing countries provided through the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF). Through the BSF projects, women and men farmers and scientists have been trained on how to conserve, manage and use plant genetic diversity, and new technology has been developed and made available to help discover new adaptive traits and speed up the breeding programmes. Farmers have been able to adapt their crops to the effects of climate change, pests and diseases which has had immediate benefits for their livelihoods, and longer-term benefits for the world's food security.

#### Successful project

A multi-country project implemented in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe builds on the complementarity between *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation practices to ensure that climate ready and resilient crop varieties are made available in farmers' fields.

More than 400 accessions of sorghum, millet, and beans have been exchanged through SMTAs among the national genebanks of the target countries and, as a result, climate resilient crop varieties has been introduced in farmers' fields.

This project puts forward participatory and community based on-farm management systems and promotes the enhancement of locally adapted varieties through the established 159 farmer's field schools. This is a cheap, wall free, interactive and inclusive learning tool that empowers farmers to control their own seeds and engage in Participatory Variety Enhancement (PVE), Selection (PVS) and seed multiplication. To date, 4,800 people (63% women) have directly benefited from the project and around 24,000 people are expected to be indirectly reached through seed and food fairs, field days and capacity building.

The role of farmers and especially women farmers in securing access to and control over their biological diversity is broadly emphasized in all phases of this project, thus allowing the local communities to exercise their rights, to decide what they need and what they want and to use and share the benefits of their seeds. In addition, institutions involved in this project, through seed policy advocacy workshops, have contributed to the development of the draft National Seed Policy and Seed Bill in Malawi that intends to provide for an integrated seed system and recognition of Farmers' Rights.



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BSF funded projects approach the issue of crop genetic resources in a holistic manner, addressing different elements of the International Treaty under the overall vision of conserving and sustainably using crop biodiversity for global food security. BSF projects show that farmers are fundamental in conserving and developing plant genetic resources, which are essential to promote sustainable agriculture and adapt crops to climate change. With this recognition, BSF supports farmers and breeders in developing countries in their effort and contribution to these objectives.

The 4th project cycle of the BSF also emphasizes new partnerships, bringing technology and knowledge to the community and farm level, and highlights the important role of women in biodiversity management, farming and rural development.