

## High Level Political Forum 2023

### **International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**

#### **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

#### **Background information**

International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) promotes and facilitates the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use for sustainable agriculture and food security, in harmony with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

It is a legally binding international agreement that deals with the management of PGRFA. Conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA are essential to achieving sustainable agriculture and food security, for present and future generations, indispensable for crop genetic improvement to adapting to unpredictable environmental changes and human needs. Because countries are interdependent in their reliance on PGRFA and the management of PGRFA is at the meeting point between agriculture, the environment and commerce, the ITPGRFA has established a multilateral system that facilitates continuous exchange of PGRFA (Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing).

**Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs.**

Both consumers and producers of food crops rely on plant genetic resources and seeds for food, nutrition, agriculture and livelihoods, as our food systems depend on the availability of diverse seeds.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was significant impact occurred at the level of access to seeds and, in particular, demand in developing countries, which was brought about by lower-income and weaker support programmes (e.g. subsidies, financial services, extension, insurance). On-farm systems and availability, supply and distributions of quality seeds for the next cropping season required critical interventions.

While certain level of resilience of seed systems was observed, sustaining such resilience requires long-term complementary interventions by all actors, i.e. genebanks, researchers and breeders, farmers, and seed companies, within the framework and the existing normative processes of the ITPGRFA.

Governments, international organizations, private sector, farmers and NGOs all work hand in hand would be the key strategy to building more robust seed systems at the local, national and regional levels for farmers of all sizes, especially smallholder farmers, to access high-quality seed. This collaborative strategy should include capacity development for collaborative research and breeding, building new flexibility within existing normative instruments for all the stakeholders.

**Examples of specific actions taken to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that also accelerate progress towards multiple SDG targets, including actions identified by your intergovernmental body, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving SDGs.**

- In collaboration with the Global Crop Diversity Trust, the Secretariat of ITPGRFA organized an international panel of experts in September 2020, to bring together all key actors working on cryo-conservation and discuss potential elements of a global strategy for advancing cryo-conservation to support the ITPGRFA implementation, including by developing a global network of cryobanks. The outcome of the panel was presented to the Governing Body at its Ninth Session in September 2022. The Governing Body noted positive developments from the COVID-19 response, including the increased digitalization of capacity building and training materials, and the strengthening of local sourcing of seeds for communities. It also stressed the importance of developing and including contingency plans and digital solutions for genebank operations as well as of supporting the production of quality seeds at local level.<sup>1</sup>
- In November 2021, the Secretary launched the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk, jointly established with the Global Crop Diversity Trust. The Emergency Reserve is designed to provide rapid, short-term and urgent support to collections of PGRFA in the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing of ITPGRFA, in cases of emergency and exposure to threats, such as COVID-19 pandemic, and where no alternative financial support is available.<sup>2</sup>
- Some Benefit-sharing Fund projects set in place some mitigation measures and contingency plans to address the impacts of the COVID-19: strengthening or establishing government acquisition or procurement plans for quality seeds from farmer-producers and subsequent distribution; integrating PGRFA management in programmes to strengthen local crop diversification strategies; addressing gaps in local seed supply systems.<sup>3</sup>

**Assessment of the situation in the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body, and policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.**

The implementation of the ITPGRFA contributes in particular to SDG Targets 2.5 and 15.6 relating to conservation, access and benefit-sharing of plant genetic resources. The COVID-19 pandemic reminded the global community of the importance of the availability of diverse and quality seeds for food security and gave further impetus to the effort to conserve and make available PGRFA, which include:

- Integrate international and national genebanks into seed system restoration in emergency situations
- Accelerate the development of a global network of cryobanks through the ITPGRFA to safety-duplicate field and *in vitro* plant collections that are at risk and are a particular challenge during the crisis

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<sup>1</sup> [www.fao.org/3/ni821en/ni821en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ni821en/ni821en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.fao.org/3/cb7732en/cb7732en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/cb7732en/cb7732en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.fao.org/3/cc1619en/cc1619en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/cc1619en/cc1619en.pdf)

- Prioritize availability, supply and distributions of quality seeds of locally adapted plant varieties within food/seed security interventions, in particular for vulnerable small-scale farmers
- Accelerate integration of digital solutions for farmers and field workers (e.g. agricultural research organizations, extension workers, genebank curators)