



CGRFA 15 HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 21 JANUARY 2015

CGRFA 15 delegates met in plenary throughout the day to consider: plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (plant GRFA), including the review of implementation of the second Global Plan of Action for Plant GRFA (GPA-PGR 2) and preparation of the third report on the State of the World's Plant GRFA (SoW-PGR 3); aquatic genetic resources (aquatic GR), including preparation of the first SoW report on aquatic GR and the establishment of an *Ad hoc* Intergovernmental Working Group (ITWG) on Aquatic GR; and micro-organisms and invertebrates. Delegates also considered the composition of ITWGs and reconsidered outstanding issues relating to ABS with regard to GRFA.

PLANT GRFA

Luis Salaiques Sanchez (Spain), Chair of the ITWG on Plant GRFA, presented the report of the group's seventh session (CGRFA-15/15/14). The EU, with the US, noted the importance of technical support for the implementation of genebank standards for PGRFA, with the US underscoring their voluntary character. The US welcomed the recommendation regarding on-farm management of plant GRFA, stressing the need to consider related costs and technical demands.

REVIEW OF GPA-PGR 2: The Secretariat introduced documents CGRFA-15/15/15 and Inf. 21-25. On GPA-PGR 2 implementation, several developing countries called for FAO to build countries' capacities for implementation. The US stressed that implementation is a national responsibility not that of FAO. CANADA noted duplications with ITPGR work.

In situ conservation and on-farm management: CANADA suggested addressing *in situ* conservation and on-farm management separately, while ensuring complementarity and balance between both strategies. The EU said it is premature to decide whether these strategies should be supported by a single or two different networks. AFRICA highlighted the role of smallholders in *in situ* conservation. ARGENTINA highlighted that *in situ* conservation networks should respect countries' sovereignty. The IPC called for strengthening support to on-farm activities.

Ex situ conservation: CANADA, the EU, BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, CHILE and ETHIOPIA said that gene bank standards should be voluntary. On collaboration, delegates decided that the Commission should work synergistically with "relevant international organizations, especially the ITPGR."

Sustainable use: CANADA and BRAZIL said the draft technical guidelines on national conservation of landraces and wild relatives should be further revised by the ITWG-

PGR. BRAZIL stressed the discussion should include relevant stakeholders, in particular small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples and local communities.

CANADA proposed endorsing the draft guide on national seed policy formulation. BRAZIL proposed stating that farmers' rights should be acknowledged and respected. CANADA cautioned against renegotiating the ITPGR and suggested inserting reference to ITPGR Article 9 (farmers' rights). The US, with CANADA, the EU and JAPAN, cautioned against renegotiating the draft guide. ARGENTINA suggested that the ITWG-PGR further consider the draft guide.

After informal consultations, delegates agreed to adopt the draft guide without changes, while noting in the CGRFA 15 report that nothing in the guide should be interpreted as limiting farmers' rights to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed.

Building sustainable institutions and human capacities: CANADA endorsed the guidelines for developing national plant GRFA strategies and, with the EU and BRAZIL, proposed that they be "voluntary," and that extra-budgetary funding for their implementation be "invited" rather than "called for."

PREPARATION OF THE THIRD SOW- PGR:

The Secretariat introduced the proposed outline, timeline, thematic studies and budget for preparation of the third SoW-PGR (CGRFA-15/15/16). The EU proposed waiting for the assessment of the GPA-PGR 2 before determining what thematic studies to conduct, and recommended that priorities for extra-budgetary support focus on global-level activities.

CANADA said the SoW-PGR should focus on providing information needed for the GPA, but not engage in measures for implementation. CANADA and the US noted the difficulty of reporting on the extent of plant GRFA use in crop improvement and the relationship between access to germplasm and national crop and variety diversity. The US proposed that report preparation and GPA monitoring be fully integrated and that sections on intellectual property rights be authored by recognized specialists.

AFRICA called on FAO to support the organization of meetings, data collection and assessment.

AQUATIC GR

PREPARATION OF THE SOW-AQGR: The Secretariat introduced CGRFA-15/15/17. EUROPE said the report should complement the FAO's regular assessment of aquatic resources and improve implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. AFRICA requested support for establishing harmonized information systems, relevant benchmarks and translation.



Regarding a proposal to develop elements related to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries to maintain a broad genetic basis, the US preferred referring to “follow-on activities, which could include development of elements related to the Code of Conduct.”

ITWG-AQGR: The Secretariat presented document CGRFA-15/15/18, including: the terms of reference for the Advisory Working Group on Aquatic Genetic Resources and Technologies to be established under FAO’s Commission on Fisheries (COFI’s Advisory Group) and draft statutes for a proposed ITWG-AqGR under the Commission.

Responding to questions raised, the Secretariat clarified that COFI’s Advisory Group has no specific mandate to contribute to the SoW –AqGR Report. He added that if the Commission decided that the SoW –AqGR Report should draw on advice by COFI’s Advisory Group it would be able to do so only at CGRFA 16. He also explained that COFI’s Advisory Group will address COFI’s urgent concerns, including on invasive alien species, modern biotechnology and aquatic GR databases.

AUSTRALIA and the US opposed the establishment of the proposed ITWG-AqGR under the Commission, noting concerns over duplication of work and budgetary considerations. JAPAN considered its establishment premature. EUROPE, BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, AFRICA and the NEAR EAST supported establishing the ITWG-AqGR, noting the field’s special features, complexity and social importance. The NEAR EAST underscored the practicality of having a single forum deal with aquatic GR.

Responding to a concern raised by Australia and Japan noting that the proposed statutes for the ITWG-AqGR’s extend beyond providing input to SoW-AqGR Report, he explained that while the Report would be the ITWG-AqGR’s immediate task, any follow-up action would be the Commission’s prerogative.

A Friends of the Chair Group was formed to further discuss the issue.

MICRO-ORGANISMS AND INVERTEBRATES

The Secretariat presented document CGRFA-15/15/19 on how microbial and invertebrate diversity is being considered in the preparation of the report on the State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SoW-BFA), as well as document CGRFA-15/15/Inf.28 on progress on the international initiative for the conservation and sustainable use of pollinators.

EUROPE noted that bacteria, yeast and fungi should be included in future work. BRAZIL suggested portraying the ecosystem functions of pollinators, especially bees, and reflecting them in the SoW-BFA Report. AFRICA requested technical and financial support, especially for culture collections.

The guidance was adopted with these changes.

COMPOSITION OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS

The Secretariat introduced document CGRFA-15/15/23. The NEAR EAST requested an increase in the number of representatives from his region. AFRICA and BRAZIL supported the proposal, but cautioned against compromising the number of members from their own regions.

CANADA, AUSTRALIA, the US, and EUROPE supported maintaining the current composition of regional representation in the WGs. CANADA suggested that decreasing the number of representatives per region could result in improved efficiency and effectiveness. EUROPE said representation, as addressed in an *ad hoc* manner in each WG’s terms of reference, had been effective and provided flexibility. Many developed countries requested information on financial implications of possible changes. KUWAIT suggested that adding one representative from the Near East would not have financial implications because participation is not financially supported by FAO.

On the participation of alternates, delegates discussed two options: option 1 providing for the ITWG to select an alternate member from the same region, provided that the ITWG members from the same region agree; and option 2 providing for the Commission to elect a list of alternates at each regular session, which would replace ITWG members in the order in which they appear on the list. AFRICA, CANADA, AUSTRALIA and the US supported option 1. ASIA, BRAZIL and ARGENTINA supported option 2.

BRAZIL added that once the Commission’s list of alternates has been exhausted, the ITWG members could choose a member among countries participating as observers. IRAN proposed notifying the Secretariat through the Bureau member of the relevant region, who would be able to identify a replacement.

On observers, BRAZIL, supported by the IPC, called for increasing stakeholder engagement in the Commission’s work and creating a funding mechanism for stakeholder participation in ITWG meetings. ARGENTINA said observer admission should be subject to the consensus of member countries, noting that this issue is under consideration in the FAO Council.

Negotiations continued in an informal group into the evening.

CROSS-SECTORAL ISSUES

ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING: Bert Visser (the Netherlands) presented revised text on the draft elements to facilitate ABS implementation in GRFA subsectors, noting no consensus on whether to forward the information to the FAO Conference as a regular report or in the form of a resolution.

GRULAC, AFRICA and the NEAR EAST, opposed by CANADA and ASIA, said that it is premature to present a resolution to the FAO Conference, as the issue is still being discussed. They proposed welcoming the draft elements on facilitating domestic implementation of ABS for different subsectors of GRFA in the CGRFA 15 report instead.

After further informal consultations, delegates agreed to reflect the ABS elements in the CGRFA 15 report. CANADA then explained that the Commission welcoming the ABS elements as a milestone in its work on ABS for GRFA implies that they are no longer “draft” elements and that the FAO Conference can therefore be advised of future work to be done in specific sub-sectors.

Delegates agreed to this interpretation and adopted the ABS elements.

IN THE CORRIDORS

“Let a hundred contact groups bloom,” could have been the motto on Wednesday, as new informal groups were established to resolve sticky issues around national seed systems and ITWG participation, and previously established groups reported their results. The long-standing discussion on geographical representation in the working groups and the Commission’s possible launch of technical work on aquaculture fisheries were among the issues that kept delegates working late into the evening.

On the bright side, the two groups that met the previous day achieved “some” consensus, even if the outcome did not go as far as some had hoped: the informal group on ABS had to go back into retreat several times before it was literally saved by the gavel, with an end-of-the-day decision to “welcome” the ABS elements in the Commission’s report. “You can say that the Commission is definitely in full swing,” reflected a delegate, while others observed that despite the long list of issues remaining to be tackled, the Commission may have found its own “*modus operandi*” to continue making modest but steady progress.