



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



The International Treaty
**ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

Item 18 of the Provisional Agenda

NINTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

New Delhi, India, 19–24 September 2022

Implementation Report of the Work Programme for the 2020-2021 Biennium

Executive Summary

This document provides a summary report on implementation of the Work Programme and Budget for the 2020–2021 biennium, as adopted by the Governing Body in Resolution 14/2019. It highlights major activities undertaken and key outputs produced by the Secretary and the Secretariat during the last biennium, in support of implementation of the WPB 2020–2021.

Guidance Sought

The Governing Body is invited to take note of this report and provide any advice and recommendations relevant to improving future programming and implementation of the core work programme, as necessary.

FAO-ITPGRFA documents can be consulted at: www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/1259571/

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This document provides a summary report on the implementation of the Work Programme and Budget for the 2020–2021 biennium, as adopted by the Governing Body at its Eighth Session through Resolution 14/2019.¹ It provides a succinct account of the work undertaken, as the detailed outcomes and outputs achieved during the intersessional period have been presented or reported in the other documents submitted to the Governing Body, for consideration under the relevant agenda items, at this session. The report therefore presents an overview of major activities carried out and key outputs produced by the Secretary and the Secretariat, in support of implementation of the WPB 2020–2021.

2. A financial report related to implementation of the WPB 2020–2021 is presented in document IT/GB-9/22/18.2, *Financial and Progress Report of the Work Programme and Budget for the 2020–2021 Biennium*, and is to be read in conjunction with this report. Together, they serve as a useful reference for the Governing Body in considering and deciding the Work Programme and Budget for the 2022–2023 biennium.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK PROGRAMME 2020–2021

3. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the work of most of the subsidiary bodies during the past intersessional period.² Due to the extraordinary circumstances arising from the pandemic, the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, originally scheduled for December 2021, was postponed to 2022. Consequently, the First Special Session of the Governing Body was held in December 2021 to adopt the interim budget for 2022. The aim was to enable continued functioning of the International Treaty and its Secretariat, until the Governing Body adopts the work programme and budget for the 2022–2023 biennium at the Ninth Session.

4. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the Secretariat conducted various activities, pursuant to the 14 Resolutions adopted at the Eighth Session,³ to support the Governing Body in implementing the WPB 2020–2021 and achieving the expected deliverables and outcomes. Core functions include arranging and providing necessary support for the policy and intergovernmental processes of the Governing Body, implementing programmes of work, maintaining smooth and effective operations of the main systems of the International Treaty, providing capacity-building support to Contracting Parties, and maintaining and enhancing cooperation with relevant partners to achieve the objectives of the International Treaty.

5. The detailed outcomes of the policy and technical processes, as well as the implementation of programmes of work and operations of the key systems, are presented respectively in the relevant documents submitted to the Ninth Session. The Report of the Secretary (IT/GB-9/22/6) also provides additional information regarding major activities undertaken by the Secretary.

Compliance

6. The Compliance Committee held its fourth meeting in February 2021, continued its work by electronic correspondence throughout 2021 to finalize its report, and met informally in May 2021 to discuss a request for advice by a Contracting Party. The Secretary serviced all meetings and prepared the relevant documentation to facilitate the work of the Committee. The report of the Compliance Committee to the Governing Body is contained in the document, IT/GB-9/22/14, *Report of the Compliance Committee*.

7. In order to assist Contracting Parties with their reporting obligation under the Compliance Procedure, the Secretary held a series of regional webinars in 2022, to strengthen the national

¹ [Resolution 14/2019 Work Programme and Budget 2020-2021](#)

² [IT/GB-9/22/6.2, Report on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Implementation of the International Treaty](#)

³ www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/1111365/

reporting mechanism, with more than 120 participants from all FAO regions. The Secretary also updated the Compliance section on the Treaty website and added a new “frequently asked questions” feature (www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/compliance/faqs/en/) to explain the compliance work and national reporting mechanism in a user-friendly manner and easy-to-understand language. A dedicated help desk on compliance has been also established to assist in the reporting process. As a result, additional support is now more readily and comprehensively available for the national reporting mechanism. Throughout the biennium, the Secretary issued notifications and letters, to remind Contracting Parties about the national reporting mechanism, relevant deadlines and available support.

8. Through these outputs, the capacity of Contracting Parties to prepare and submit their national reports has been enhanced. The number of national reports received (34) and the increased total number of Contracting Parties that reported (79) resulted in the Compliance Committee being able to produce a more comprehensive synthesis and analysis.

Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing

9. As of June 2022, the Data Store recorded an increase of 20 percent of Standard Material Transfer Agreements (SMTAs), compared to the previous biennium (90 690 SMTAs), from providers located in 56 countries and distributing material to recipients in 181 countries.

10. The Secretariat further improved Easy-SMTA with new functions that enhance documentation of the transfer of materials by users. It collaborated with a wide range of providers to improve connections for automated reporting. Further information is found in the document, IT/GB-9/22/9.1.3, *Report on the Operations of the Third Party Beneficiary*.

11. Users of the Multilateral System continued receiving assistance through the help-desk, e-mail and videoconference, online training sessions, and in workshops organized with other units of FAO and external partners, such as the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, the SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre, the Global Crop Diversity Trust (GCDT), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Secretariat of the African Union Commission (AUC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), among others.

12. In February 2022, the Secretariat finalized and published the Educational Module on the Multilateral System, with the support of FAO’s Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism. The Module provides an initial overview of the legal and historical perspectives that led to the development of the Multilateral System and the list of Annex I crops. The Module illustrates the Articles of Section IV of the Treaty and clarifies the principles and standards underpinning the Multilateral System.⁴

13. In May 2022, the Secretariat launched a revised website section on the Multilateral System in the six FAO official languages. The new section contains the revised frequently asked questions that reflect the guidance provided so far by the Governing Body, as well as extensive background information on the Multilateral System.⁵

14. The collaboration with the CGIAR Centers and other institutions under Article 15 as well as with other organizations that make material available in the Multilateral System has continued in accordance with the guidance provided by the Governing Body. Information on the materials held and distributed by the CGIAR Centers and other Article 15 institutions is available in the reports submitted to this session. The summary of the CGIAR report is referenced in the document, IT/GB-9/22/9.1, *Report on the Implementation and Operations of the Multilateral System*.

15. The Secretariat collaborated with partners to undertake analyses and research projects on the Multilateral System. This includes the study, *The Plants That Feed the World: Baseline Data and*

⁴ FAO. 2021. The Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing – Module IV. Rome, available at www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb7984en

⁵ www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/the-multilateral-system/landingmls/en/

Metrics to Inform Strategies for the Conservation and Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, jointly developed by The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, the GCDT and the Secretariat of the International Treaty; and the *Thematic Background Study on Germplasm Exchange*, for the Third Report on the State of the World's Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA).

16. Since April 2020, the Secretariat has been interacting with Contracting Parties and genebanks stakeholders to gather information on how COVID-19 measures affected the distribution of material and the operations of genebanks. A summary of these interactions, including surveys, is available in sections II and III of the document, IT/GB-9/22/6.2, *Report on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Implementation of the International Treaty*.

17. The Secretary co-created, with the Crop Trust, and operationalised the Emergency Reserve for germplasm collections under threat or at imminent risk.⁶

18. The Secretary handled two potential cases for the Third Party Beneficiary and provided the Governing Body with related information in the document, IT/GB-9/22/9.1.3, *Report on the Operations of the Third Party Beneficiary*.

Information Systems for PGRFA – Global Information System

19. The Global Information System (GLIS) is consolidating its role as the reference point for users of the Multilateral System to find material, at the accession level, available from genebanks and plant breeding collections in the Multilateral System. As of 15 May 2022, the GLIS Portal had provided information on 1 095 707 accessions available in the Multilateral System.⁷

20. Following the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee, the Secretary updated the homepage of GLIS to provide more useful information and added a directory of links, information and knowledge services provided by third-party organizations and projects.⁸ Other improvements have included the advanced search function, integration of the documentation components with Easy-SMTA, the further development of the statistics section, and the possibility of downloading search results in standardized formats.

21. The Secretary developed and published a globally agreed List of Descriptors for Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) conserved *in situ* (CWRI v.1) in February 2021. The list was the result of an online consultation organized from February to April 2020, involving more than 100 experts.⁹

22. With support from the Government of Germany, the Secretariat tested descriptors in selected countries and identified gaps and needs for the documentation of CWR. With the advice of international experts, the project also undertook an analysis of gaps and possible options for providing support to countries through the development of national inventories on CWR *in situ*. This analysis and the options are contained in document IT/GB-9/22/11/Inf.1, *Towards a more strategic approach to the development and implementation of national databases of CWR*, which is available in the six FAO official languages.

23. During the last biennium, the Secretariat supported national genebanks and other PGRFA holders in non-Contracting Parties, who were interested in the voluntary application of the digital object identifiers (DOI) standards and in updating the workflow of their information systems. As of 15 May 2022, a total of 1 228 000 PGRFA had been identified and linked with the related datasets in other systems through the registration of DOIs on the GLIS Portal – an increase of 32 percent since the last report. Further information and figures can be consulted through document IT/GB-9/22/11, *Report on the Implementation of the Global Information System*.

⁶ IT/GB-9/22/16.2.3, *Report on the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk*

⁷ Statistics available at ssl.fao.org/glis/stats/index

⁸ The new GLIS Portal is available at ssl.fao.org/glis/

⁹ *Descriptors for Crop Wild Relatives conserved in situ* is available at www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb3256en/

24. Following the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee, the Secretary has continued to develop and cultivate new partnerships, which include the European Search Catalogue for Plant Genetic Resources, Genesys, and the World Information and Early Warning System (WIEWS).¹⁰ In 2022, it also concluded a memorandum of understanding with the DivSeek International Network, which is available in document IT/GB-9/22/11/Inf.3.

25. On the occasion of the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables (2021), and in close collaboration with World Agroforestry, the Secretariat developed six strategic sets of characterization and evaluation descriptors for multipurpose tropical fruit tree species conserved *in situ*.¹¹

Funding Strategy and Standing Committee on the Funding Strategy and Resource Mobilization

26. Considerable progress has been made in the implementation of the Treaty's new Funding Strategy. The Funding Committee has held five meetings since the Eighth Session of the Governing Body, all of which were conducted in virtual mode.

27. Some highlights of the Committee's work are listed below and further detailed in its report.

- Operational Plan for the Funding Strategy developed and implemented by the Funding Committee to take forward its work related to resource mobilization, Benefit-sharing Fund operations and monitoring, review and learning for the 2020-2025 period;
- Draft strategy to mobilize funds from food processing industries developed for the Governing Body's consideration, with inputs from FAO, external experts and other stakeholders;
- Food Processing Industry Engagement Plan developed for the implementation, monitoring and review of the Food Processing Industry Engagement Strategy;
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework for the Benefit-sharing Fund developed and implemented¹², including to inform the design of the Fifth Cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund program;
- Fifth Cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF-5) program finalised and launched with at least USD 9.3 million dollars available for its implementation¹³;
- independent evaluation of the Third Cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund finalised with inputs by the Funding Committee through a special webinar¹⁴;
- External experts and active observers regularly engaged to inform the Funding Committee's work, including from the European Union, the Global Crop Diversity Trust, agribusiness research and analysis sector, FAO's Resource Mobilization and Private Sector Partnerships Division, FAO's GEF Unit, and from the Secretary in relation to the Compliance Committee so as to coordinate and streamline future reporting.

Implementation of Articles 5 and 6 and related provisions – Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA

¹⁰ More information on partnerships is available at ssl.fao.org/glis/static/en/partners.html

¹¹ The six descriptor lists include: (1) [Dacryodes edulis](#), (2) [Docynia indica](#), (3) [Irvingia spp.](#), (4) [Sclerocarya birrea](#), (5) [Strychnos cocculoides](#) and (6) [Ziziphus mauritiana](#)

¹² IT/GB-9/SFC-4/21/Proceedings, Appendix 3: MEL framework is available at: www.fao.org/3/cb7281en/cb7281en.pdf

¹³ Fifth Call for Proposals of the Benefit-sharing Fund is available at www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharing-fund/fifth-cycle/en

¹⁴ IT/GB-9/22/10/Inf.1, *Report of the Evaluation of the third project cycle of the Benefit-sharing Fund of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* is available at www.fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/1259571/

28. The Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Committee) met twice, in virtual mode, for its fifth and sixth meetings.¹⁵

29. The Committee identified examples and opportunities to support and assist Contracting Parties in implementing Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty. Since the Committee highlighted the opportunity to develop country-/region-specific studies to address the poor implementation of Articles 5 and 6, the Secretary prepared a preliminary assessment for consideration by the Committee, which is presented in the document, IT/GB-9/22/12/Inf.2, *Background study on the bottlenecks and challenges to the implementation of Articles 5 and 6*.

30. The Committee also made concrete recommendations to enhance the use, relevance and effectiveness of the Toolbox on Sustainable Use of PGRFA. Based on such recommendations, a new prototype of the Toolbox has been developed and is presented in the document, IT/GB-9/22/12/Inf.1, *New prototype of the Toolbox on Sustainable Use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture*.

31. The Secretary cooperated with the Secretariat of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in organizing the International Symposium on on-farm management and *in situ* conservation of PGRFA in March 2021.¹⁶

Implementation of Article 9 and related provisions – Farmers’ Rights

32. The Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (Expert Group) held two meetings in the past biennium, in virtual mode. The Expert Group finalized the *Options for encouraging, guiding and promoting the realization of Farmers’ Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty* (the Options), with the exception of Category 10,¹⁷ and encouraged Contracting Parties and stakeholders to submit examples of measures, best practices and lessons learned from the implementation of Farmers’ Rights.

33. The Secretary has updated the Farmers’ Rights section on the International Treaty website. A dedicated page for the Inventory of national measures that may be adopted, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers’ Rights has been created, as a new information resource available to Contracting Parties and other stakeholders of the International Treaty.¹⁸ The updated version of the *Educational Module on Farmers’ Rights* has also been published on the International Treaty’s website.¹⁹

Benefit-sharing Fund operations

34. During the last biennium, the Secretariat continued its operation of the Benefit-sharing Fund, managing different project cycles in parallel, as well as updating relevant statistics biannually.²⁰

35. The third cycle (BSF-3) was concluded and necessary actions were undertaken to close the cycle, including preparing the Final Report on the portfolio.

36. Implementation of the fourth cycle (BSF-4) has continued, with 7 new Letters of Agreement (LoAs) concluded, 9 LoAs amended, 19 projects monitored through correspondence with the executing partners to review and approve progress and financial reports. The Secretariat also

¹⁵ The report of the Committee to the Governing Body is available in document IT/GB-9/22/12.2, *Report of the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*

¹⁶ “First International Multi-Stakeholder Symposium on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: Technical Consultation on *in situ* conservation and on-farm management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA)” The outcome of the Symposiums is presented in IT/GB-9/22/12/Inf.3

¹⁷ The report of the Expert Group is provided in document IT/GB-9/22/13.2, *Report of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers’ Rights to the Ninth Session of the Governing Body*.

¹⁸ Available at: www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/farmers-rights/overview-inventory/en/

¹⁹ See www.fao.org/3/cb5497en/cb5497en.pdf

²⁰ For further details, see IT/GB-9/22/10/Inf.2 *The Benefit-sharing Fund: 2020-2021 Report*

conducted an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the BSF-4 projects.²¹ In addition, regional webinars on Knowledge Management and Visibility were carried out with BSF-4 partners.

37. The Secretariat is currently facilitating and supporting the launch and operationalisation of the fifth cycle (BSF-5), including in the reconvening of the Independent Panel of Experts by the Bureau of the Ninth Session.

Capacity building

38. While Contracting Parties have made substantial progress over the years in implementing the International Treaty, there remains a growing need for capacity development regarding the Treaty's various provisions and mechanisms. In particular, national implementation of the Treaty continues to require wide-ranging capacity building at different technical, policy and administrative levels.

39. In 2022, the Secretariat organized five regional webinars on the BSF, Farmers' Rights, and the Conservation and Sustainable Use of PGRFA, to assist Contracting Parties and other stakeholders in preparing for the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, providing an update on the following issues:

- launch of BSF-5;
- platforms, tools and resources aimed at promoting and guiding implementation of the sustainable use of PGRFA and Farmers' Rights; and
- bottlenecks and challenges in the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the International Treaty.

Cooperation with Other Organizations

40. During the past biennium, the Secretariat has continued collaboration and partnerships with other international bodies and organizations to support and advance implementation of the International Treaty. Such cooperation and collaboration have taken place in various forms and modalities at different levels, ranging from capacity building for implementation at national level to supporting policy processes at global level.

41. Regarding international institutions under Article 15, the Secretary supported a new signatory with SMTA operations and DOIs, which resulted in the first detailed report being submitted to the Governing Body. The Secretary completed the formal transition of the responsibilities of the International Coconut Genetic Resources Network to the International Coconut Community. The Secretary also liaised with the International Olive Council, which is expected to formally consider the Article 15 agreement at its autumn meeting.²²

42. A detailed report on the cooperation and collaborative activities that took place, together with the relevant international instruments and organizations, is provided in the documents submitted under Agenda Item 16, *Cooperation with International Instruments and Organizations*.

Others

43. As part of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary co-organized three international online panels with partner organizations, bringing together key actors in the conservation and use of plant genetic resources, to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on implementation of the International Treaty.²³

²¹ IT/GB-9/22/6.2, *Report on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Implementation of the International Treaty*, paras 20–25

²² IT/GB-9/22/16.4.2, *Reports from Institutions that have Concluded Agreements with the Governing Body under Article 15 of the International Treaty*

²³ IT/GB-9/22/6.2, *Report on the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Implementation of the International Treaty*

44. In partnership with research organizations and relevant FAO units, the Secretariat facilitated the development of one independent white paper on Post COVID-19 Implications for Genetic Diversity and Genomics Research & Innovation,²⁴ and one study on Ownership, Control and Governance of the Benefits of Data for Food and Agriculture, which addresses emerging themes related to COVID-19, genomics governance and agricultural data policy (publication expected in September).

Communication

45. Communication and outreach remain critical for informing, updating and raising awareness of the importance of the International Treaty, together with its mission and ongoing activities, among Contracting Parties and other stakeholder groups. Implementation of the Communication Strategy of the International Treaty has continued apace, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁵

46. During this biennium, a number of communication and outreach materials were developed, including visibility products showcasing the Benefit-sharing Fund and the Funding Strategy; new publications, including on Farmers' Rights, the Global Information System, International Descriptors, and the Multilateral System; numerous media interviews and articles; news items; visually attractive graphics and video materials; online seminars on topical issues, such as the impact of COVID-19 on PGRFA; social media messaging; youth-oriented communication; infographics; the launch of a podcast; and continuous updating of the website. All these activities have been conducted in close cooperation with the FAO Office of Corporate Communications.

47. In addition, the Secretariat has continued to build on its partnerships within FAO and with other biodiversity-related conventions, to amplify International Treaty messaging and activities of common interest. Particular cases in point included partnerships with the Convention of Biological Diversity, the United Nations Development Programme, NordGen and the Global Crop Diversity Trust. More detailed information can be found in document IT/GB-9/22/6/Inf.1, *Report on the Implementation of the Communication Strategy of the International Treaty*.

III. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

48. As has often been the case over the years, a large part of the work described above, including the intergovernmental policy processes, has been made possible and conducted as a result of extra-budgetary financial resources provided by a few generous donors. These additional funds have become indispensable if the Governing Body is to achieve the expected outcomes of its Core Work Programme.

49. It should, however, be recalled that moneys contributed to the Special Funds for Agreed purposes (either on a multi-donor basis or as individual accounts) are not fungible with the Core Administrative Budget. The funds in the Core Administrative Budget are contributed by Contracting Parties to the collectively agreed biennial Core Work Programme, whereas individual donors provide special funds for specific activities agreed between them and the Secretary, outside the Core Work Programme. Those additional voluntary contributions are managed based on the individual agreements made between respective donors and the Secretary, including developing and implementing specific projects.

²⁴ www.fao.org/plant-treaty/tools/toolbox-for-sustainable-use/details/en/c/1415245/

²⁵ IT/GB-7/17/23, *Communication Strategy of the International Treaty*

IV. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

50. The Governing Body is invited to take note of this report and provide any guidance and recommendation relevant to improving future programming and implementation of the core work programme, as necessary.