



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



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

**Item 6 of the Provisional Agenda**

**TENTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY**

**Rome, Italy, 20–24 November 2023**

**Report of the Secretary**

**Executive Summary**

This document contains the Report of the Secretary of the International Treaty to the Tenth Session of the Governing Body on technical, administrative, and financial activities under his mandate and on other activities delegated by the Governing Body at the past sessions. It provides a summary of some of the relevant intersessional processes, mechanisms, and activities that the Secretary has overseen since the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, as well as policy and operational developments of relevance to the preparation of the Tenth Session.

**Guidance Sought**

The Governing Body is invited to take note of the Report and provide any guidance it considers appropriate on the range of relevant issues raised in this document.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report provides a summary of some of the relevant intersessional processes and mechanisms, and activities that the Secretary has overseen since the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, as well as policy and operational developments of relevance to the preparation of the Tenth Session. It also contains a short update on membership campaign, a synthetic account regarding the implementation of the Communication Strategy of the International Treaty, and the latest developments in relation to the elaboration of the draft Capacity Development Strategy of the International Treaty and its Action Plan. Additionally, the document provides information on other activities undertaken at the request of the Bureau of the Tenth Session of the Governing Body, as well as other recent developments derived from its functions.
2. The report also notifies of the proposal to introduce a different format for presenting the Core Administrative Budget beginning from the Eleventh Session of the Governing, to improve clarity and better address the linkage between budget and Work Programme, while detailed information on the current state of the Treaty's finances is contained in the documents for Agenda Item 18.

## II. MEMBERSHIP OF THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY

3. The Treaty entered into force for the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 5 December 2022, the ninetieth day following the deposit of the instrument of ratification, bringing the total number of Contracting Parties to 150, including the European Union, as of July 2023.
4. The Secretary has been informed of the approval of the law for the ratification of the International Treaty by the National Congress of Colombia, in December 2022. In one of the last important steps in the process, the Constitutional Court, through a ruling, recently declared the enforceability of the law through which the International Treaty was approved. It now remains the relevant administrative steps before the deposit of the Instrument of Ratification. There was significant support from the relevant ministries and major stakeholders during the different stages of the process, with technical support from the Secretariat, in collaboration with FAO Colombia and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT.
5. In the South West Pacific Region, the Secretary has made progress in the interactions with and provision of information to the governments in the region on the occasion of the Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry, held in March 2023. There are several ongoing follow-up activities to continue strengthening the membership campaign and the implementation of the International Treaty in the region, with the ongoing support of Australia, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Community's Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (CePaCT).
6. The Secretary has also enhanced the collaboration with the FAO Sub-Regional Office for the Caribbean to support the membership campaign and strengthen the implementation of the International Treaty. In particular, the collaboration intends to assist countries with the analysis of the current status and trends on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA) conservation, use and distribution and to further identify gaps, needs and opportunities for consideration at the Caribbean Week of Agriculture in October 2023, in collaboration with the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI).
7. The Secretary has continued to follow up on the membership campaign in China through meetings with relevant senior government officials, and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS). Recent interactions with high-level officials of CAAS indicate that the Government has undertaken additional steps in considering adhering to the International Treaty since the last visit of the Secretary in 2019.
8. The Secretary has also made some progress in Azerbaijan in consultation with the Ministry of Science and Education, under which the Genetic Research Institute and the national genebank collections are located.
9. Since the last Session of the Governing Body, the Secretary has followed up in Barbados, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liechtenstein, South Africa and other countries, and has provided information and inputs for cabinet briefs, upon request, and in collaboration with relevant FAO Offices and other regional partners.

### III. UPDATE ON INTERSESSIONAL MEETINGS, MAJOR PROCESSES AND OTHER RELEVANT ACTIVITIES

10. Since the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, the Secretary has served several intersessional meetings and related processes. Some of them will continue their work after the preparation of this report:

- The Seventh and the Eighth meetings of the Ad Hoc Technical Committee on Conservation and Sustainable Use (ACSU) were both held virtually in March and July 2023. The Committee agreed on its report to the Governing Body, which contains proposals for future activities and programmes on conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA.
- The Fifth meeting of the Compliance Committee (CC-5) was held on 28 and 29 March 2023. The Committee prepared the draft report to the Governing Body and continued its work through electronic means to finalise the outstanding sections, as contained in the relevant document.
- The Sixth meeting of the Standing Committee on the Funding Strategy and Resource Mobilization (SFC-6) was held virtually on 17 and 18 January 2023 and the Seventh meeting (SFC-7) was held in-person on 3 and 5 May 2023. The Committee continued its work virtually from 18 to 20 September 2023, at its Eighth meeting.
- The Fifth meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on the Global Information System of Article 17 (GLIS-SAC-5) was held on 8 and 9 May 2023, in hybrid mode. The Committee provided inputs for the preparation of the relevant documentation for the Governing Body.
- The Secretary supported the work of the Co-Chairpersons of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group to Enhance the Functioning of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing with several regional and stakeholder briefings, and informal consultations during the first quarter of the year. The formal face-to-face meeting of the Working Group was held from 12 to 14 July 2023, back-to-back with the Nineteenth Regular Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA).
- The Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights was held from 12 to 15 September 2023, in New Delhi, hosted by the Government of India, with the support of the FAO India Office.

11. Since the last Session, the Secretary has supported direct actions to facilitate exchange of information and improve the interrelations between the various committees. The reports from all the intersessional committees and bodies have been made available to the Tenth Session of the Governing Body.

### IV. UPDATE ON OTHER ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY THE SECRETARY

12. This section illustrates some of the major milestones and provides some valuable references to understand the implementation of the Work Programme adopted by the Ninth Session of Governing Body and the documentation that has been produced.

#### **The Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF)**

13. At its seventh meeting, the Standing Committee on the Funding Strategy and Resource Mobilization approved a portfolio of twenty-eight projects for funding under the fifth project cycle (BSF-5), based on the screening and appraisal process and the Final Report of the Panel of Experts – Fifth Call for Proposals.<sup>1</sup>

14. The approved BSF-5 portfolio, published online, includes projects from all regions, with several countries and institutions due to receive support from the Fund for the first time.<sup>2</sup>

15. The BSF-5 is the first funding cycle to implement the new programmatic approach set out in the BSF Operations Manual, with significant emphasis on the need to enhance learning and knowledge exchange between BSF projects and within the BSF programme, and a new modality of funding allocation to second phases of successful projects from previous BSF cycles. The selected second-phase projects are intended to

<sup>1</sup> IT/GB-10/SFC-7/23/Inf.3, Final Report of the Panel of Experts: Fifth Call for Proposals of the Benefit-sharing Fund, available at [www.fao.org/3/cc5745en/cc5745en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/cc5745en/cc5745en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharing-fund/projects-funded-new/en/](http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharing-fund/projects-funded-new/en/)

leverage promising achievements and innovations on PGRFA of strategic importance to the International Treaty and the BSF programme.

16. The portfolio represents an investment of over USD 11 million. Contributors to BSF-5 include the European Union, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland. Further contributions have been made by SEMAE (formerly, Groupement National Interprofessionnel des Semences), ProSpecieRara Hauptsitz and the Norwegian initiative to contribute a percentage of the value of their annual national seed sales to the BSF. In addition to these voluntary contributions, the BSF-5 includes user-based payments from the International Treaty's Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (MLS or Multilateral System).

17. During the biennium, the BSF-4 has also been fully operative and by mid-2023, a total of 35 percent of projects concluded their activities. Highlights and main results from the BSF-4 portfolio implementation are available in the document, IT/GB-10/23/10/Inf.1, *Benefit-sharing Fund: 2022–2023 Report*.

### **Implementation and operations of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing**

18. The Secretary continued to support the regular operations and activities of the Multilateral System. As of 30 June 2023, the Data Store recorded more than one hundred thousand Standard Material Transfer Agreements (SMTAs), transferring more than 6.6 million accessions. According to the records, more than 20 650 distinct recipients have received material from the MLS since 2007, and Easy-SMTA reached 18 023 users.

19. The Secretariat continued to assist users transferring material through the MLS helpdesk and has updated the list of frequently asked questions. The Secretariat is also developing an online course on the Multilateral System, in collaboration with the FAO E-learning Academy. In close collaboration with the Alliance of Biodiversity International and CIAT, the Secretary has been and will continue to assist Contracting Parties and other relevant stakeholders with the implementation of MLS through various workshops.<sup>3</sup>

### **Support for the relocation of Ukraine's national seed collection**

20. The Secretariat collaborated with the Crop Trust and relevant FAO units to relocate a major collection of unique plant genetic material from Kharkiv, an active conflict zone in the east of Ukraine, to a safer location in the west of the country, over 1 000 km away, under a project funded by the European Union (EU). Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen) and the Novo Nordisk Foundation also provided early emergency support to the Ukraine's national genebank.

21. The collection contains several thousands of unique genetic samples of crops of global importance, notably wheat, triticale, barley, pea, chickpea, temperate forages, and sunflower.

22. The move was a complex operation, including the cataloguing of the accessions and the logistic preparation for the transportation. Its development and execution involved several national authorities such as the Ukraine's Academy of Agrarian Sciences, and in collaboration with the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust).

23. Further support will include the development and operationalisation of a plan for the long-term conservation and safe regeneration of the genetic resources, including a future backup deposit in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. In parallel, the construction of an additional depository in the west of Ukraine has also commenced.

24. The initiative is part of an international effort to ensure coordinated action to safeguard Ukraine's agricultural heritage. In this context, the Crop Trust and the Secretariat co-organised a workshop under a European Union funded project, in May 2023, in Bonn, Germany, which was attended by the representatives of the Ukrainian PGRFA system, FAO, as well as international experts from NordGen, Germany, Canada and the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR). The United States of America contributed co-funding to support the development of the Plan for the rehabilitation and long-term safety of the Ukraine PGRFA system.

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<sup>3</sup> Additional information is provided in document IT/GB-10/23/9.1, *Report on Implementation and Operations of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing*.

## Celebration of the International Year of Millets

25. The Secretary has been collaborating with the FAO Secretariat for the International Year of Millets 2023 (IYM 2023) through various initiatives and events to celebrate this international observance. The collaboration includes the provision of information, promotional materials, technical expertise, and the organization of joint webinars and events.

26. One of the events was organized in collaboration with the FAO Sub-regional Office for Southern Africa and the Government of Italy to launch the observance in Zimbabwe, in March 2023. The event also involved one of the projects funded by the Benefit-sharing Fund, whose main focus is on the participatory evaluation and selection of sorghum, pearl millet and other local millet varieties, and implemented with the support of the Community Technology Development Organisation.

27. Furthermore, the Secretary organized an international expert panel discussion, *Unlocking the Power of Diversity: The Role of Sorghum and Millets Genetic Resources in Sustainable Agriculture*, on 14 June 2023. The online event, organized in collaboration with the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), highlighted the importance of the genetic diversity of sorghum and millets for food security and nutrition.

28. Several BSF partners showcased their work on the conservation and sustainable use of a diversity of millets.<sup>4</sup> A field mission to the BSF project in Zimbabwe was conducted in March 2023 with senior officials from the Italian Ministry of Agricultural Food and Forestry Policies and representatives of Italian research institutions and civil society organizations.<sup>5</sup> The mission focused on the Community Technology Development Trust project funded by the BSF in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi and that had millets among the target crops.<sup>6</sup>

## Funding Facility for short-term support of International Collections – Operational Framework

29. In response to the invitation of the Governing Body,<sup>7</sup> the Secretary continued collaborating with the Crop Trust to develop an operational framework for a Funding Facility. The initiative will support relevant international collections to receive limited short- and medium-term funding for essential operations. The operational framework stipulates the disbursement principles and eligibility criteria. Subject to the availability of adequate funds, disbursements will be made annually once an agreement has been reached with the recipient institution.

30. The Secretariats of the International Treaty and the Crop Trust will jointly prepare periodic reports, both financial and technical, on the operations of the Funding Facility, which will be made available to the individual donors to the Funding Facility, the Bureau of the Governing Body, and the Donor's Council and Executive Board of the Crop Trust.

## V. UPDATES ON CROSS-CUTTING MATTERS

### Capacity Development Strategy

31. Since the last Session of the Governing Body, the Secretary has worked on the further development of the Capacity Development Strategy of the International Treaty 2023–2030 (CDS or Strategy) under the guidance of the Bureau.

32. The recent adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) brings new opportunities for collaboration in various areas of work, including in areas of capacity development related to the International Treaty. In this context, the Secretary presents for this Session a revised proposal for finalizing the Capacity Development Strategy and Action Plan for the International Treaty in the next biennium, in the light of the GBF and its Long-term Strategic Framework for Capacity Building and

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<sup>4</sup> BSF and International Year of Millets: Story of Patrick Mutepeya, Zimbabwe available at [www.fao.org/millets-2023/my-story/detail/patrick-mutepeya/en](http://www.fao.org/millets-2023/my-story/detail/patrick-mutepeya/en) and video available at [app.box.com/s/ncoybt9eb5y1f00e2r7x6t3b30f68ywa](https://app.box.com/s/ncoybt9eb5y1f00e2r7x6t3b30f68ywa)

<sup>5</sup> A press release on the celebration of the IYM in Masvingo is available at [www.fao.org/plant-treaty/news/news-detail/en/c/1635442/](http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/news/news-detail/en/c/1635442/)

<sup>6</sup> More information on the project “Policies and Practices to Facilitate the Implementation of Developed Strategies Actions for Plant Genetic Resources Conservation and Use for the Improvement of Food and Nutrition under Changing Climatic Conditions” is available at [www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharing-fund/projects-funded/bsf-details/en/c/359522/?iso3=ZWE](http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/benefit-sharing-fund/projects-funded/bsf-details/en/c/359522/?iso3=ZWE)

<sup>7</sup> Resolution 12/2022, paragraph 8, [www.fao.org/3/nk248en/nk248en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/nk248en/nk248en.pdf).

Development,<sup>8</sup> for consideration by the Eleventh Session of the Governing Body. The new timeframe will afford sufficient time to continue consulting the relevant stakeholders.<sup>9</sup> The Secretariat also presents the *Results of the Security on Capacity Development Initiatives, Gaps and Needs*.<sup>10</sup>

### Update on Advocacy and Communication

33. The Secretary has continued to implement the Communication Strategy for the International Treaty adopted by the Governing Body. In 2023, the Secretariat has invested efforts in refreshing messaging and developing new communication products, including targeted material for specific events. The Secretary has developed, and shared with the Bureau, a detailed communication plan for the Tenth Session of the Governing Body that builds on previous successes and lessons learnt.

34. Ongoing communication activities include regular updating of the International Treaty website, including adding new and updated materials, e.g., toolboxes, publications, meetings, short videos, press releases and other news items of interest to Contracting Parties and other stakeholders. The Secretariat has also made more web content available in all six UN official languages (i.e., English, Arabic, French, Spanish as well as some content now also available in Chinese and Russian).

35. The International Treaty's social media channels are increasingly important channels for communication and require regular posting and maintenance. This includes Twitter (@Planttreaty, with over 4 700 followers), LinkedIn (with over 6 000 connections), and Facebook (with more than one thousand followers). In this regard, the Secretariat is also initiating the development of a social media calendar with messaging and posts for critical events.

36. To increase the visibility of the BSF projects, the Secretariat has made efforts to gather updated visual material (i.e., videographic and photographic material) from the field through specific missions undertaken in close coordination and cooperation with FAO regional and national offices, as well as national (e.g., Zimbabwe) and international implementation partners. Additional information is provided in the documentation for the Session.<sup>11</sup>

## VI. FINANCIAL UPDATE

37. The provisional sum envisaged to be contributed by FAO to the 2022–23 Core Administrative Budget (CAB) was USD 2 million, while the total sum actually received in the current biennium's CAB is USD 1 939 518, as reported in the relevant documentation for the Session.<sup>12</sup>

38. As of May 2023, the contributions from Contracting Parties amounted to approximately 54 percent of the contributions expected from Contracting Party sources, including contributions to the Working Capital Reserve and Third-Party Beneficiary Operational Reserve. The Secretary regularly publishes the state of contributions to the Core Administrative Budget and the amounts received from respective Contracting Parties on the Treaty's website.<sup>13</sup>

39. As requested through Resolution 17/2022, Work Programme and Budget 2022–2023, the Secretary will update and review the structure of the financial report to further improve the provision of financial information. In this regard, it has also been considered and discussed with the Bureau of the Tenth Session that a clearer budget structure would further facilitate the review and consideration of the Work Programme and Budget by the Governing Body.

40. The Secretary will propose an updated format for presenting the Budget to the Governing Body to improve the budget structure, introduce more clarity and better address the linkage with the Work Programme in the draft budget for the 2026–2027 biennium. The proposal will be presented in the Budget Committee and for consideration by the Governing Body.

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<sup>8</sup> CBD COP 15 decision 15/8.

<sup>9</sup> IT/GB-10/23/6.1, *Draft Capacity Development Strategy of the International Treaty 2023–2030*.

<sup>10</sup> IT/GB-10/23/6.1/Inf.2, *Results of the Survey on Capacity Development Initiatives, Gaps and Needs*.

<sup>11</sup> IT/GB-10/23/6/Inf.1, *Report on the Implementation of the Communication Strategy of the International Treaty*.

<sup>12</sup> IT/GB-10/23/18.2, *Financial Report on Progress of the Work Programme for the 2022–2023 biennium*.

<sup>13</sup> [www.fao.org/plant-treaty/countries/status-of-contributions/en/](http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/countries/status-of-contributions/en/)

## VII. FUTURE ISSUES

41. The Secretary expresses gratitude to the Bureau of the Tenth Session for their valuable advice and guidance in relation to the execution of the Work Programme. The Secretary particularly acknowledges the brief yet intensive intersessional period which necessitated expeditious consultations and swift coordination of calendars and actions across various regions.

42. The aim of the GBF is to secure the life-support systems of the planet by halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030 and fully restoring species and ecosystems by 2050. In this scenario, and in collaboration with the biodiversity-related conventions and other international partners, priority should be given to uniting and galvanising all governments and stakeholders to scale up all types of conservation actions, increase the use of the diversity of PGRFA, multiply synergies, and work in coordinated and cooperative ways. The Governing Body, the Bureau, and the committees and subsidiary bodies will contribute to these efforts.

43. The Secretary of the International Treaty recommends that all Contracting Parties extend their full support towards the enhancement process of the MLS. Despite the brief period since the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, the consultations conducted by Co-Chairpersons of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group to Enhance the Functioning of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing have highlighted the willingness of Contracting Parties to re-engage in negotiations and give it their best efforts. At the first meeting in July 2023, the Co-Chairpersons of the Working Group called on Contracting Parties to contemplate subsequent actions and further efforts in the negotiation to conclude the process by the Eleventh Session in 2025. Some of the studies the Secretariat is making available at this Session may help to understand better some of the gaps in the Multilateral System and the benefits that an enhanced mechanism could bring to increase use and income for the benefit of the International Treaty's community.

## VIII. GUIDANCE SOUGHT

44. The Governing Body is invited to take note of the information and updates provided, and to provide any guidance it considers appropriate on the range of relevant issues raised in this document.