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COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

Item 8.1 of the Provisional Agenda

Nineteenth Regular Session

Rome, 17–21 July 2023

REPORT OF THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

Note by the Secretariat

The Commission, at its last session, requested its intergovernmental technical working groups to meet prior to its Nineteenth Regular Session.¹ The Seventh Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources (Working Group) was held in Rome from 7 to 9 March 2023. The Working Group considered, *inter alia*, the preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* and the implementation and review of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources.² The Working Group also explored cross-sectoral issues, such as the role of forest genetic resources in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, access and benefit-sharing, digital sequence information and considered the Draft Strategic Plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture 2023–2031. The report of the Seventh Session of the Working Group is contained in this document, for consideration by the Commission.

¹ CGRFA-18/21/Report, paragraph 122.

² FAO 2014. *Global plan of action for the conservation, sustainable use and development of forest genetic resources*. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3849e.pdf>



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

**COMMISSION ON
GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE**

CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/Report

**Seventh Session of the
Intergovernmental Technical
Working Group on
Forest Genetic Resources**

Rome, Italy, 7–9 March 2023

COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

REPORT OF THE SEVENTH SESSION

OF THE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON

FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

Rome, Italy, 7–9 March 2023

The documents prepared for the Seventh Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture are available on the Internet at the following address:

<https://www.fao.org/forest-genetic-resources/working-group/intergovernmental-technical-working-group-on-forest-genetic-resources/detail/en/c/1628659/>

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Seventh Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources (Working Group) was held in Rome, Italy, from 7 to 9 March 2023. The Members and alternates of the Working Group, as elected by the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Commission) at its Eighteenth Regular Session, are given in *Appendix B*. The list of delegates and observers is available on the FAO website.³

II. OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON, VICE-CHAIRPERSONS AND *RAPPORTEUR*

2. Mr Yongqi Zhen (China), Chairperson of the Sixth Session of the Working Group, opened the session and welcomed delegates and observers.

3. Mr Zhimin Wu, Director of the Forestry Division, welcomed delegates and observers. He noted the crucial role of forests and their genetic resources for sustainable development, biodiversity and human well-being. He also underlined that forests will play a significant role in achieving several targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Finally, he called upon the Members and observers of the Working Group to increase awareness of the importance of genetic resources of forest trees and other woody plants species.

4. Mr Dan Leskien, Senior Liaison Officer, Commission, welcomed delegates and observers. He stressed that cross-sectoral country-driven UN initiatives, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, highlight the need to address forest genetic resources in a broader context. Furthermore, he noted that it is important that sectoral policies on forest genetic resources, such as the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources (Global Plan of Action),⁴ are formulated and implemented in harmony with other policies.

5. In line with Article III of its Statutes,⁵ the Working Group replaced absent Members of the Working Group with other Members of the Commission present at the meeting. Jordan, Panama, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and the Philippines therefore attended the meeting as Members of the Working Group.

6. The Working Group elected Ms Mari Rusanen (Finland) as Chairperson. Ms Marianna Marshall Parra (Brazil), Mr James Mwang'ombe Mwamodenyi (Kenya), Ms Norwati Muhammad (Malaysia), Ms Toral Patel-Weynand (United States of America) were elected as Vice-Chairpersons. Mr James Mwang'ombe Mwamodenyi (Kenya) was elected *Rapporteur*.

³<http://www.fao.org/forest-genetic-resources/working-group/en/>

⁴ FAO. 2014. *Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/i3849e/i3849e.pdf>

⁵ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/1/Inf.1.

7. The Working Group adopted the Agenda, as given in *Appendix A*.

III. PREPARATION OF *THE SECOND REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES*

8. The Working Group considered the document *Preparation of The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources*⁶ and took note of the *Draft Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources*.⁷

9. The Working Group noted that as of January 2023 only 66 countries representing 72 percent of the global forest area had completed the online questionnaire and that only 31 of them had submitted in addition a written report providing complementary information. It recommended that the Commission explore the reasons for the low response rate to ensure that more countries report in the future. The Working Group also noted that completed questionnaires and written country reports, including updated versions, received by FAO before 30 April 2023 would still be reflected in the revised draft *Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* (Second Report).

10. The Working Group recommended that the revised draft Second Report, including a more profound analysis of the data provided by countries, be completed and made available by 1 October 2023. Members and observers should be invited to provide comments on the revised draft Second Report by 30 November 2023. The Working Group noted that FAO would subsequently, based on comments received, finalize and publish the Second Report by 30 June 2024. It recommended that FAO prepare and publish an in-brief version of the Second Report in all official UN languages.

11. The Working Group also recommended that FAO present the Second Report at relevant international meetings and actively disseminate its findings to inform global processes on biodiversity, climate change, forests and ecosystem restoration.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW OF THE GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE CONSERVATION, SUSTAINABLE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

12. The Working Group considered the document *Status of implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources*⁸ and took note of the *Preliminary Second Report on the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources*.⁹

⁶ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/3.

⁷ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/3/Inf.1.

⁸ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/4.

⁹ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/4/Inf.1.

13. The Working Group took note of the progress made in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action. It recommended that the finalized Second Implementation Report be made available to the Nineteenth Regular Session of the Commission, for its information.

14. The Working Group welcomed the development by FAO of a global information system on forest genetic resources and the involvement of National Focal Points and other experts in its development. It noted that the information system will be composed of a public website and a restricted reporting interface accessible only for the National Focal Points to manage the data on forest genetic resources. In this context, it recommended that the Commission consider carefully any issues related to the possible confidentiality, in terms of conservation needs, of certain data provided by countries for the preparation of the State of the World reports or insertion into open-access information systems, in accordance with the data protection policy of FAO.

15. The Working Group recommended that the Global Plan of Action be reviewed and, if necessary and appropriate, be revised in the light of the findings of the Second Report. It also recommended that immediately following the publication of the Second Report, Commission Members and National Focal Points be consulted on the need to revise the Global Plan of Action. It recommended that FAO prepare, based on the outcome of the written consultation, a draft revised Global Plan of Action or any other document, as appropriate, for consideration by the Working Group at its Eighth Session and the Commission at its Twentieth Regular Session.

16. The Working Group also recommended that the Commission encourage donors to support the implementation of the Global Plan of Action and its Funding Strategy.

V. THE ROLE OF FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES IN MITIGATION OF AND ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

17. The Working Group considered the document *Climate change and genetic resources for food and agriculture*¹⁰ and took note of the document *FAO's work on climate change*.¹¹ The Working Group reviewed the *Draft questionnaire on genetic resources for food and agriculture and climate change*,¹² and recommended that, with a view to avoiding duplication of other reporting processes, the questions be further streamlined and simplified, for review by the Commission at its next session. It noted the generic nature of the questionnaire and recommended that the questions, when circulated to National Focal Points, target the different sectors of genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA).

18. The Working Group further recommended that, once the questionnaire has been finalized and responses have been received, the Secretariat prepare a summary of country responses for consideration by

¹⁰ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/5.

¹¹ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/5/Inf.1.

¹² CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/5, *Appendix I*.

the Working Groups and the Commission. The Working Group did not reach consensus on whether the questionnaire should address the mitigation of climate change and Nationally Determined Contributions and recommended that the Commission consider this at its forthcoming session.

19. The Working Group took note of the Commission's request "to review and revise, as appropriate, the *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Integration of Genetic Diversity into National Climate Change Adaptation Planning*,¹³ taking into account the need to address the vulnerabilities of GRFA to climate change, in line with relevant international agreements, for consideration by the Commission at its next session."¹⁴ In response to the Commission's request, the Working Group recommended that the Commission convene a global multi-stakeholder workshop on climate change and GRFA to exchange information and experiences, in particular on breeding programmes directed towards adaptive traits, and to consider possible changes to the Voluntary Guidelines. It recommended that the Secretariat review and, as appropriate, revise the Voluntary Guidelines, in light of the outcomes of the global workshop and taking into account the responses received to the questionnaire. The draft revised Voluntary Guidelines should then be considered in regional consultations and subsequently by the Working Group and the Commission at their next sessions.

20. The Working Group recommended to continue strengthening capacity-building and training programmes on climate change and GRFA. In addition, the Working Group recommended that the Commission invite Members to make use of the FAO tools and guidance on climate change adaptation and mitigation when developing or updating their National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions.

VI. ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING FOR FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

21. The Working Group considered the document *Access and benefit-sharing for genetic resources for food and agriculture*¹⁵ and took note of the documents *Access and benefit-sharing and genetic resources for food and agriculture: Typology of country measures*¹⁶ and *Draft questionnaire on the implications of access and benefit-sharing measures for the use and exchange of genetic resources for food and agriculture and for benefit-sharing*.¹⁷

22. The Working Group welcomed activities that raise awareness about the distinctive features of GRFA relevant to access and benefit-sharing (ABS) measures and recommended that the Commission continue its work in this regard.

¹³ FAO. 2015. *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Integration of Genetic Diversity into National Climate Change Adaptation Planning*. Rome. <http://www.fao.org/3/i4940e/i4940e.pdf>

¹⁴ CGRFA-18/21/Report, paragraph 20.

¹⁵ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6.

¹⁶ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6/Inf.1.

¹⁷ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6/Inf.2.

23. The Working Group took note of developments under other international agreements and instruments relevant to ABS and recommended that the Secretariat continue to follow these developments and report back to the Working Group and the Commission.
24. The Working Group welcomed the overall structure of the typology of ABS country measures¹⁸ demonstrating the variety of approaches and the wide range of options countries have in accommodating the distinctive features of GRFA in ABS legislative, administrative and policy measures. It recommended clarifying, in the introduction to the document, that ABS country measures mentioned in the document were examples only and in no way meant to be exhaustive. It further recommended visualizing some of the elements of specific ABS country measures, for example by adding figures or diagrams to the document.
25. The Working Group reviewed the draft questionnaire¹⁹ and noted the need to simplify it and to reconsider, as necessary, and clarify the appropriate respondents for the different types of questions. It recommended directing some of the questions related to the granting or denying of access permits to national ABS authorities. It recommended that the questionnaire address the experiences of stakeholders with obtaining access to GRFA, monitoring and benefit-sharing and, in addition, explore if or to what extent ABS measures influence the choice of GRFA for research and development. It noted that Members and observers of the Working Group could provide comments on the questionnaire in writing by 1 April 2023 for further consideration by the Team of Technical and Legal Experts on Access and Benefit-sharing and the Commission at their next sessions.
26. The Working Group recommended that, based on the responses to the questionnaire and other available sources of information, a report be prepared addressing the implications of ABS country measures for the use and exchange of GRFA, associated traditional knowledge and the sharing of benefits.
27. The Working Group supported continued close collaboration of the Commission with relevant international organizations and instruments, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Treaty), to coordinate awareness-raising among key stakeholders and provide capacity development and training programmes addressing ABS for GRFA, with a view to avoid duplication of work.

VII. DIGITAL SEQUENCE INFORMATION AND FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

28. The Working Group considered the document *Digital sequence information and genetic resources for food and agriculture*.²⁰

¹⁸ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6/Inf.1.

¹⁹ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6/Inf.2.

²⁰ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/7.

29. The Working Group noted that there is neither agreement on the term digital sequence information (DSI), nor its definition, and that there is a multiplicity of terms that have been used in this area, including “genetic sequence data”.

30. The Working Group commended the Commission for organizing, in collaboration with the CBD, the Treaty, CABI and the CGIAR Initiative on Genebanks, the *Global Workshop on Digital Sequence Information and Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*,²¹ held virtually on 14 and 15 November 2022. It recommended that the Commission hold further open-ended workshops or webinars to inform Commission Members and observers about issues related to DSI, including technological and policy developments, and to facilitate dialogue at national, regional and global levels. The Working Group further supported the continuation of the close collaboration between the Commission and other fora dealing with DSI.

31. The Working Group took note of the draft study on *The role of digital sequence information for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture: opportunities and challenges*²² and recommended that the information on the application of DSI for use and development within the different sectors of GRFA be more balanced. The Working Group recommended that the Commission invite Members to submit information to the Secretariat on domestic ABS measures applying to DSI and their actual or potential implications for the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA, including exchange, access to and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their use. It recommended that the submissions be compiled for information of the Commission at its Twentieth Regular Session.

32. In addition, the Working Group recommended that the Commission request the Secretariat to continue monitoring developments regarding DSI in other fora, including by participating in relevant intergovernmental meetings with a view to consider their potential implications, including potential opportunities and challenges for the Commission and its Members. It furthermore recommended that the Commission request the Secretariat to report regularly to the Commission on these developments.

VIII. STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

33. The Working Group considered the document *Strategic plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: review and update*²³ and noted the progress made in the implementation of the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) since the Sixteenth Regular Session of the Commission.

34. The Working Group reviewed the draft Strategic Plan 2023–2031 and stressed that the Commission should remain focused on its core mandate that are GRFA, notwithstanding the Commission’s work on

²¹ https://www.fao.org/cgrfa/meetings/dsi_workshop_2022/en/

²² CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/7/Inf.1.

²³ CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/8.

biodiversity for food and agriculture. The Working Group recommended that the Strategic Plan 2023–2031 refer to “genetic resources for food and agriculture and other components of biodiversity of relevance to food and agriculture,” rather than “biodiversity for food and agriculture, including genetic resources.”²⁴ It also recommended to delete, in the Rationale, proposed paragraph 3*bis*.

35. The Working Group recommended to review the work on biotechnologies only at the Commission’s Twenty-first Regular Session, the work on climate change only at the Commission’s Twenty-second Regular Session and to consider the follow-up to the report on *The State of the World’s Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture* only at the Commission’s Twenty-third Session. It recommended that the Commission consider agreeing on a procedure for the identification of new and emerging issues for inclusion into the MYPOW, and that the procedure recognize the role of the intergovernmental technical working groups in identifying relevant issues.

36. The Working Group recommended that the Commission invite donors to contribute to the Commission’s multi-donor trust fund for the implementation of the MYPOW.

IX. ANY OTHER MATTERS

37. The Working Group stressed the need to announce its upcoming sessions long in advance, including to the National Focal Points, in the interest of stimulating increased participation in the meetings of the Working Group. It recommended that the Secretariat facilitate, subject to the availability of the necessary resources, regional consultations or meetings of all National Focal Points, to consider regional positions and concrete proposals prior to the Working Group sessions. It further invited donors to provide extra-budgetary resources to support the attendance of delegates from developing countries and countries with economies in transition in Working Group sessions and preceding consultations.

X. CLOSING STATEMENTS

38. Mr Thomas Hofer, Senior Forestry Officer, Forestry Division, congratulated the Working Group on its accomplishments. He noted that the guidance provided by the Working Group is essential for the finalization of the Second Report and the preparation of the follow-up based on its findings. He encouraged countries to use the data and information collected to advance the management of their forest genetic resources. He also re-iterated the commitment of the Forestry Division to provide technical support for the implementation of the Global Plan of Action and continue collaborating with the National Focal Points, the regional networks on forest genetic resources and international partners.

²⁴ Through FAO Conference [Resolution 3/95](#), paragraph 1, the FAO Conference decided to broaden the mandate of the then Commission on Plant Genetic Resources “to cover all components of biodiversity of relevance to food and agriculture”.

39. Mr Dan Leskien, Senior Liaison Officer, thanked the Working Group for the contributions to the discussions. He noted that the Nineteenth Regular Session of the Commission, which also marks its fortieth anniversary, would take place in Rome, Italy, from 17 to 21 July 2023, and encouraged all delegates to attend the meeting. He further stressed the importance of continuing the implementation of the Global Plan of Action while the Second Report is being finalized. Finally, he thanked the Governments of Canada, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway and Switzerland for supporting the work of the Commission and its working groups.

40. The Chairperson thanked all delegates and the *Rapporteur* for their contributions to the success of the session. She also thanked the Secretariat on behalf of the Working Group, along with the interpreters, translators and other staff.

APPENDIX A**AGENDA OF THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE
INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP
ON FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES**

1. Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson(s) and *Rapporteur*
2. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable
3. Preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources*
4. Implementation and review of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources
5. The role of forest genetic resources in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change
6. Access and benefit-sharing for forest genetic resources
7. Digital sequence information and forest genetic resources
8. Strategic Plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
9. Any other matters
10. Adoption of the Report

APPENDIX B
**MEMBERS OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON
FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES ELECTED AT THE EIGHTEENTH REGULAR
SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND
AGRICULTURE**

| <i>Composition (no. of countries per region)</i> | <i>Country</i> |
|--|--|
| Africa (5) | Cameroon Kenya Malawi Uganda Zambia <i>First Alternate: Eritrea</i> <i>Second Alternate: Namibia</i> |
| Asia (5) | Bhutan China Japan Malaysia Republic of Korea <i>First Alternate: Indonesia</i> <i>Second Alternate: India</i> |
| Europe (5) | Finland Italy Norway Poland Russian Federation <i>First Alternate: Netherlands (Kingdom of the)</i> <i>Second Alternate: Spain</i> |
| Latin America and the Caribbean (5) | Argentina Brazil Ecuador Peru Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) <i>First Alternate: Costa Rica</i> <i>Second Alternate: Cuba</i> |
| Near East (4) | Iran (Islamic Republic of) Lebanon Oman Syrian Arab Republic <i>First Alternate: Sudan</i> <i>Second Alternate: Egypt</i> |
| North America (2) | United States of America Canada |
| Southwest Pacific (2) | Papua New Guinea Vanuatu <i>First Alternate: Solomon Islands</i> <i>Second Alternate: Samoa</i> |

APPENDIX C
LIST OF DOCUMENTS

| Document symbol | Title |
|----------------------------|---|
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/1 | Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson(s) and <i>Rapporteur</i> |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/1/Inf.1 | Statutes of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources, and Members and alternates elected by the Commission at its Eighteenth Regular Session |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/1/Inf.2 | Information note for participants |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/2 | Provisional agenda |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/2 Add.1 | Provisional annotated agenda and timetable |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/2/Inf.1 | List of documents |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/3 | Preparation of <i>The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources</i> |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/3/Inf.1 | Draft <i>Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources</i> |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/4 | Implementation and review of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/4/Inf.1 | Preliminary second report on the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/5 | Climate change and genetic resources for food and agriculture |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/5/Inf.1 | FAO's work on climate change |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6 | Access and benefit-sharing for genetic resources for food and agriculture |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6/Inf.1 | Access and benefit-sharing and genetic resources for food and agriculture: typology of country measures |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/6/Inf.2 | Draft questionnaire on the implications of access and benefit-sharing measures for the use and exchange of genetic resources for food and agriculture and for benefit-sharing |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/7 | Digital sequence information and genetic resources for food and agriculture |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/7/Inf.1 | The role of digital sequence information for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture: opportunities and challenges |
| CGRFA/WG-FGR-7/23/8 | Strategic Plan for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: Review and update |