



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



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

Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda

NINTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING BODY

New Delhi, India, 19–24 September 2022

Report by the DivSeek International Network

Note by the Secretary

Through Resolution 4/2019, the Governing Body took note of progress made with the DivSeek International Network, and requested the Secretary to explore possible arrangements for further engagement with the Network, under the guidance of the Bureau of the Ninth Session. In this context, the Secretary invited the DivSeek International Network to provide a report on its activities of relevance to the International Treaty.

This Information Document contains the report by the DivSeek International Network, as received.

Graham King, Executive Director, DivSeek; June 2022

Since January 2020, DivSeek International Network Inc. has been engaged in the following activities¹:

Overview:

Jan 2020	Annual General Meeting (AGM) and breakout discussions - in person event, San Diego, USA. Identified three Working Groups focused on PGR: <i>Genomics, Phenomics, Policy</i> , and a set of co-leaders.
Aug 2020	11 regional and thematic <i>Hubs</i> established.
2020 –	New website launched at divseekintl.org
During 2020	10 webinars
Jan 2021	AGM and 3 Workshops – online event Draft Strategic Plan presented to Members/Observers for feedback
Mar 2021	Appointment of Prof. Graham King as Executive Director (part-time)
May 2021	Poll of Member organisations for election of 9 Board members, with 6 new to Board, including representation of S. Africa, Morocco, Mexico, Germany, USA. Board elect Steve Visscher (GIFS) as Chair. Launch of <i>Strategic Plan 2021-26</i> with media release. Strategic Plan outlines Mission, Goals and Objectives, and specific activities. Engaged with Traditional Knowledge/BioCultural Labels system
Dec 2021	First edition of <i>DivSeek Connect</i> newsletter
During 2021	6 webinars
Jan 2022	AGM and 3 workshops – online event. Launch of <i>DivSeek Commons</i>
May 2022	FAO on behalf of Treaty sign MOU with DivSeek International Network
June 2022	Media releases from Treaty and DivSeek announcing MOU

¹ during much of this period the pandemic limited opportunities for in-person meetings.

Background:

DivSeek International Network Inc. was established as a not-for-profit company in Canada, supported by an establishment funding from Genome Prairie/Genome Canada and the Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS) in Saskatoon. These two organisations have worked together closely to help establish DivSeek International Network Inc. DivSeek currently benefits from a hosting agreement with GIFS. Due to the covid pandemic, a no-cost extension to the establishment project was secured in early 2022 to run until June 2023.

DivSeek provides a forum for discussion about how data, information and technologies can be used to characterize PGR and acts as a “hub” to connect and promote constructive interactions between its partners, other researchers and diverse organizations interested in generating, exchanging and utilizing information about plant genetic variation to accelerate crop improvement, strategic research, and sustainable production of food and agricultural products around the world.

Strategic Plan and operations:

A five-year Strategic Plan was launched in May 2021. This provided the opportunity to present clear Goals, Objectives and planned Activities.



The Goals of DivSeek are to:

1. Catalyze advanced conservation, management, utilization and traceability of PGR
2. Add value, facilitate wider utilization and accelerate crop improvement
3. Increase awareness and education about the biodiversity and relevance of PGR

DivSeek Working Groups and Task Teams

Three Working Groups were established in 2020 to provide a focus for discussions and development of strategy relating to information flow relating to PGR (broadly: genomics, phenomics, policy). The Working Groups:

- contributed to the definition of Strategic Plan and Objectives, Activities and KPIs, associated with each of the three strategic Goals.

- have been the focus for a series of Webinars and online workshops.
- more direct management effort is now being allocated by to overseeing the work of DivSeek activity-specific Task Teams aligned with each Working Group.
- *DivSeek Commons* was launched in January 2020, as an ‘Ecosystem of Standards, Open Data Resources, Analysis Tools and Best Practices’ for Plant Genetic Resources’.
 - *DivSeek Commons* is tightly aligned with the Strategic Goals. It will provide a forum for encouraging greater interoperability, and help identify gaps in the available tools, resources and standards to support information exchange from PGR to end use.
 - The initial aim is to publish and maintain a comprehensive inventory of available tools, resources, standards and training materials that describe ecosystem associated with the PGR/DivSeek landscape.

Extending the Network

- The DivSeek Board established 11 pilot autonomous *Regional and Thematic Hubs* in 2020 to ensure engagement with a wider global community. Each hub is independent, develops its own governance, but is synergistic with DivSeek International Network. Each hub has dedicated webpage(s) on the DivSeek website, which may be translated into a wide range of languages.
- DivSeek is placing emphasis on growing its interaction with developing country institutions. This includes active regional Hubs for *West Africa, African orphan crops, Latin America* and to *Democratize & Empower PGR Conservation and Use* (led by scientists in Colombia and Mexico).
- DivSeek is actively engaging with institutions to increase representation in the SE Asia/Pacific and southern Asia regions.

Key institutional interactions

DivSeek has established functional working relationships and partnerships with some key national and international organizations. These include:

- Ongoing interactions with the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust) and with One-CGIAR.
- Becoming a supporter of the Sustainable Productivity Growth (SPG) coalition
- An international partner of Agricultural Genomics to Phenomics (AG2P) consortium
- DivSeek has actively engaged with the Traditional Knowledge (TK) and BioCultural (BC) label initiative. **TK Labels** are *digital markers* that establish proper attribution, access, and use rights for traditional knowledge. The TK Labels are designed to be customized by Indigenous communities to reflect ongoing relationships and

authority including proper use, guidelines for action or responsible stewardship and re-use of traditional knowledge. The system recognizes the inherent sovereignty that **Indigenous communities** have over knowledge and data arising from the connection with place.

Engagement & Dissemination:

DIN has developed and continues to expand its active, informative, and authoritative website (www.divseekintl.org). The DIN Strategic Plan was launched in May 2021, and the stakeholder contact list is expanding in consultation with Board and membership. Whilst the webinar series and AGM roundtable workshops have been well attended, the opportunities to include DivSeek-specific content in wider context have been limited by the cancellation of many international conferences etc.

- DivSeek maintains and is extending its mailing list associated with member and observer organisations, a wider range of stakeholder organisations. DivSeek plans to extend its reach considerably, increasing opportunities for wider network interaction and awareness.
- In Dec 2021, DivSeek released the first of its periodic newsletter (*DivSeek Connect*) to members, observers and wider stakeholders.
- DivSeek secured funding from the Co-operative Research Programme: Sustainable Agricultural and Food Systems of the OECD to support a meeting ' *Barcodes to Bushels* '. This will now take place in Oct 2022 at IPK Gatersleben, Germany.
- One of three workshops at successive online AGM in 2021 and 2022 has focused specifically on policy issues around Access and Benefit Sharing, and included the following presentations and community discussion.

2021: Workshop on *International Policies*

Selim Louafi, CIRAD, France

Allison Fish, Centre for Policy Futures, UQ

Amber Scholz, DSMZ, Germany

Background on Nagoya Protocol

Monitoring Nagoya Compliance; lessons from India

Briefing on the WILDSI white paper for the community

2022: Workshop on *Increasing awareness & education about biodiversity and relevance of PGR*

Daniele Manzella, ITPGRFA

Aysegul Sirakaya, Lund U.

Jane Anderson, NYU

Hugh Williamson, Exeter

Frank Michiels, BASF

Dialogue on status of DSI discussions in the CBD and Treaty

Access and Benefit Sharing

Best practices and the use of TK and BC labels for Plant Genetic Resources

Globalising Plant Knowledge through Transnational Data Management

The reality of ABS – breeders' perspective