

CGRFA 20 Highlights: Tuesday, 25 March 2025

On Tuesday morning, delegates reviewed implementation progress across three thematic areas: biodiversity, aquatic genetic resources (AqGR), and animal genetic resources (AnGR), including the possible preparation of follow-up State of the World (SOW) reports on these three areas. Informal consultations continued on issues addressed on Monday. In the afternoon, attention turned to microorganisms and invertebrate genetic resources (MIGR).

Biodiversity

Preparation of the Second SOW Report on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (BFA): Following the introduction of document [CGRFA-20/25/5.3](#) on Monday afternoon, many delegates acknowledged the impact of the First SOW Report and expressed support for the preparation of a Second SOW Report, emphasizing the need for a coordinated and non-duplicative approach with other frameworks and processes.

EUROPE proposed the Second Report also address microbial genetic resources and the overall management of BFA. They suggested, and CANADA opposed, requesting the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) to allocate sufficient regular budget for the Report's preparation alongside the invitation to donors to provide extra-budgetary resources.

CANADA noted the yet-undecided continuation of the *Ad Hoc* Expert Team on BFA, as well as other Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) working groups that address aspects of BFA, and recommended the Commission regularly assess the necessity of the Expert Team. They further proposed the Expert Team use virtual means for meetings, with KENYA instead proposing hybrid modalities.

AFRICA urged aligning the Second SOW Report timelines to those of other frameworks, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). MEXICO proposed making a preliminary version of the Second Report available to the 2029 Commission meeting, pointing to the 2030 deadline for the GBF.

The US voiced reservations regarding in-session proposals.

Aquatic Genetic Resources

Report of the Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group (ITWG) on AqGR: ITWG Chair Belemene Semoli (South Africa) introduced the report ([CGRFA-20/25/6.1](#)). He highlighted the ITWG's advice to continue supporting members' use of AquaGRIS through training, technical support, funding, and guidance. Semoli noted the ITWG

endorsed the preparation of the Second SOW Report on AqGR, with its scope including the role of AqGR for mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, and options for identification of new and emerging issues.

Implementation of the Global Plan of Action (GPA) for the Conservation, Sustainable Use, and Development of AqGR: Introducing the report, ([CGRFA-20/25/6.2](#)), the Secretariat highlighted progress in mainstreaming the GPA at FAO and stressed the potential to use AqGR indicators in monitoring Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 2.5 (maintain genetic diversity in food production) and GBF indicators. They also tabled related documents: updated glossary of terms for AqGR ([CGRFA-20-25/6.2/Inf.1](#)); Guidelines for Genetic Management of Stocking Programmes for Aquatic Species ([CGRFA-20/25/6.2/Inf.3](#)); and the draft Practical Guide on *Ex Situ In Vitro* Gene Banking of AqGR ([CGRFA-20/25/6.2/Inf.4](#)), among others. The Secretariat further emphasized the importance of AquaGRIS in standardizing terminologies and harmonizing national registry systems, and reported on the development of a dual monitoring system for monitoring the GPA, based on resource and process indicators ([CGRFA-20/25/6.2/Inf.5](#)).

In the ensuing discussion, many delegates lauded the launch of AquaGRIS and related guidance on sustainable aquaculture. GRULAC called for further efforts to ensure interoperability with similar classification systems, such as FAO's Domestic Animal Diversity Information System (DAD-IS).

Describing AquaGRIS as a "valuable first step," EUROPE encouraged countries to increase efforts to develop national registries, with continued FAO support. ECUADOR stressed that national registries must be developed progressively and require stable, reliable, and regular funding.

AFRICA requested technical and financial support, as well as enhanced capacity-building efforts for the sustainable aquaculture sector. SOUTH SUDAN reiterated the challenge of limited access to digital tools for capacity-building programmes, while THAILAND highlighted challenges linked to the complexity of AquaGRIS and the risk of exposing potentially sensitive information.

EUROPE welcomed FAO's work on breeding for global valuable species, and in the context of climate change, called for its extension to all regions. ECUADOR requested FAO support in developing breeding guidelines for lower-value species, while NEAR EAST suggested extending support to establish gene banks.

REPUBLIC OF KOREA underlined standardization issues and offered to share experiences in breeding programmes with other countries.

Noting their ongoing work on training and awareness raising, the Secretariat welcomed GRULAC's offer to explore alignment with existing tools. Responding to AFRICA's request to include all fisheries data under AquaGRIS, they indicated that the tool's scope was initially limited to cultured species.

The US reserved further comments upon receipt of proposed edits.

Preparation of the Second SOW Report on AqGR

(SOW-AqGR): The Secretariat introduced the document ([CGRFA-20/25/6.3](#)) and outlined steps to prepare the Second SOW-AqGR, including a detailed timeline. They stressed the representativeness of data would depend on the number and depth of country participation.

GRULAC suggested minor amendments to the timeline, while EUROPE called on countries to create and improve national genetic registries in AquaGRIS. PERU, supported by the PHILIPPINES and ALGERIA, called for increased technical support and capacity building for developing countries, including on strengthening local stakeholder involvement.

IRAN stressed that process indicators should not go beyond agreed scientific areas. Querying whether the report could be completed in the event of funding shortfalls, INDIA proposed working towards an addendum to the First SOW-AqGR rather than a full Second Report.

ALGERIA sought clarification on the comparability of the First and Second SOW-AqGR.

Responding to comments, the Secretariat clarified that: the timeline would be adjusted in line with GRULAC's comments; process indicators would not exceed the previously agreed scope; producing a full Report would be possible even with partial funding; various already-funded capacity-building programmes are underway; and information contained within the First and Second Reports would not be directly comparable due to alterations in key definitions and data collection methods.

Noting that these clarifications were satisfactory to members, Chair Girard closed this agenda item.

Animal Genetic Resources

Report of the Thirteenth Session of the ITWG on AnGR:

ITWG Chair Samuel Paiva (Brazil) introduced the report ([CGRFA-20/25/7.1](#)), outlining ITWG recommendations, including for continued financial and technical support, cooperation, and regular data provision for implementing the GPA on AnGR.

Implementation of the GPA on AnGR: The Secretariat outlined the status report ([CGRFA-20/25/7.2](#)) noting developments and guidance sought, including: recommendations to FAO to prepare technical guidance on disaster mitigation and recovery measures related to AnGR; invitations to donors to provide funds to the FAO Trust Account; and invitations to countries to regularly update data in DAD-IS and provide images for the breed recognition tool.

ASIA noted implementation challenges in their region, emphasizing the importance of collaboration with FAO and the Commission to implement the GPA and ensure food security.

GRULAC, supported by BRAZIL, PANAMA, and ECUADOR, proposed amendments, including to request the Secretariat to organize a workshop or training on *ex situ* conservation techniques, considering increasing trends in avian flu risk, and, supported by THAILAND, to underline the importance

of DAD-IS as an effective and flexible tool for information exchange.

CANADA pointed to concurrent work by the FAO Committee on Agriculture (COAG) to produce a GPA on sustainable livestock transformation and, alongside EUROPE and NAMIBIA, proposed collaborative discussions between CGRFA and COAG to avoid duplication of efforts.

EUROPE: welcomed efforts to increase the user-friendliness and responsiveness of tools such as DAD-IS; noted concern with the lack of contributions to the FAO Trust Account; and recommended "proactive" follow-up by FAO with countries on the status of breeds with unknown risk status.

THAILAND emphasized the importance of international cooperation for training and capacity building on the potential role of AnGR in tackling climate change.

BRAZIL noted that the CGRFA was not the appropriate forum to discuss changes to SDG indicators.

SOUTH AFRICA and the PHILIPPINES recognized challenges regarding data consolidation and complexity. NEAR EAST emphasized the need to support countries in establishing national registries, and the PHILIPPINES called for incorporating reasonable safeguards in DAD-IS to ensure accountability.

PERU expressed concern with the lack of update regarding DAD-IS in this session.

AFRICA called for more regional workshops and webinars for the breed recognition tool, and noted that as this tool involves artificial intelligence, national legal frameworks should be considered.

The Secretariat emphasized that the COAG GPA for Sustainable Livestock Transformation will be aligned with existing strategies and refer to the GPA for AnGR on relevant matters. The Secretariat noted other comments would be incorporated in the report of the meeting.

Status of Preparations of the Third SOW Report on

AnGR (SOW-AnGR): The Secretariat introduced the document ([CGRFA-20/25/7.3](#)) and expounded progress in the preparation of the Third SOW-AnGR to be launched in 2027, including the drafting of a synthesis progress report on the implementation of the GPA AnGR ([CGRFA-20/25/7.3/Inf.1](#)). They lamented that GPA implementation had stagnated or deteriorated since 2020. Nonetheless, they lauded the 104 national reports received in response to the country questionnaire and invited members to submit or update their reports by end of April 2025.

In ensuing discussions, ASIA suggested that FAO and the CGRFA invite national coordinators to request resource mobilization support to complete the preparation of the Third SOW-AnGR.

GRULAC requested that the Commission grant members reasonable time to inspect draft elements of the Third Report as they become available. EUROPE noted that despite best efforts, significant data gaps remain. They also supported awareness-raising activities to promote the Third Report upon publication.

CANADA suggested alternative language regarding resource mobilization, while TANZANIA requested extending the deadline for country report submission to July 2025.

Noting no objections to the Secretariat's proposal to extend the deadline to the end of May 2025, Chair Girard concluded deliberations under this item.

Microorganism and Invertebrate Genetic Resources (MIGR)

Report of the First Session of the ITWG on MIGR: ITWG Chair Scott Miller (US) introduced the report ([CGRFA-20/25/8.1](#)), noting that the ITWG emphasized the urgency of advancing work and research on biological control agents and biostimulants, considering the sector's rapid development. Miller outlined the ITWG's recommendations, including to address MIGR in an integrated way, beyond sector-specific strategies and workstreams, and an invitation for FAO to review the state of global human resources and physical infrastructure needed for taxonomic and characterization work.

Edible Fungi and Invertebrates Used as Dietary Components of Food/Feed: The Secretariat outlined the document ([CGRFA-20/25/8.2](#)) and the guidance sought, to publish the associated draft study ([CGRFA-20/25/8.2/Inf.1](#)) and to invite countries to strengthen work on this functional group.

Eric Boa, University of Aberdeen, presented the draft study. He highlighted, among others: challenges in conserving genetic resources of fungi; the need for coordinated research to fill data gaps; and the importance of balancing conservation and sustainable use and avoiding protectionist approaches that negatively impact livelihoods when implementing regulations.

Many supported the publication and broad dissemination of the study's findings. EUROPE, with ECUADOR and the REPUBLIC OF KOREA, called for sharing the results with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Global Soil Partnership (GSP). REPUBLIC OF KOREA favored limiting collaboration with the GSP to areas of thematic alignment. Several delegates highlighted health risks linked to gathering of wild species and the need to address the impacts of overharvesting and habitat destruction.

Several countries favored less prescriptive language on the role of universities in MIGR research. NAMIBIA called for careful consideration on commercialization, in view of protecting traditional knowledge and fair and equitable access and benefit-sharing (ABS). KUWAIT encouraged FAO to convene more regional capacity-building workshops to enhance knowledge exchange.

Chair Girard noted comments would be incorporated into revised text.

Microorganisms Used in Food Processing and Agro-industrial Processes: The Secretariat introduced a background document ([CGRFA-20/25/8.3](#)) outlining the ITWG's work on this functional group. They noted that previous background studies focused on the use of microorganisms in nutrient cycling, biological control, and biostimulation, leading to FAO commissioning a study on microorganisms used in food processing and agro-industrial processes. Rodrigo Ledesma-Amaro, Imperial College London, presented a draft study ([CGRFA-20/25/8.3/Inf.1](#)) on the sustainable use and conservation of fermentation-associated microorganisms within the agrifood system.

Several delegates expressed support for finalizing and publishing the draft study. EUROPE stressed the "great untapped potential" for public-private partnerships in this area and proposed alternative language to strengthen the characterization and conservation of fermented foods and associated traditional knowledge. ECUADOR, supported by AFRICA, called for enhanced infrastructure and technical capacity building to integrate fermentation into agrifood systems, stressing the need

for "clear and flexible normative frameworks." AFRICA further highlighted the importance of legal and policy frameworks that safeguard the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities over fermentation processes, including digital sequence information (DSI) deriving from MIGR.

The Chair closed deliberations on this agenda item.

Informal Discussions and Contact Group

DSI: In the afternoon, delegates heard a proposal for compromise language on guidance sought under the agenda item on DSI following informal deliberations. CANADA presented language reached with Brazil, to recognize key stakeholders requiring capacity-building to access, use, and exchange DSI as: "farmers including small-holder farmers, fishers including small-scale fishers, pastoralists, plant and animal breeders, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and collection managers."

MEXICO supported the proposal, though they queried the exclusion of language on ABS. On the proposed joint workshop addressing the implications of [CBD Decision 16/2](#), CANADA proposed this be a multi-stakeholder workshop, "preferably in virtual modalities, and subject to the availability of resources."

EUROPE noted they also had amendments to the guidance on DSI, and Chair Girard postponed deliberations until all proposals were received.

ABS: Regarding ongoing discussions on ABS, Chair Girard indicated the Bureau convened a Friends of the Chair group, to be co-chaired by Elzbieta Martyniuk (Poland) and Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico), scheduled to meet on Wednesday.

Climate Change Contact Group: A contact group to address the role of GRFA in the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change convened in the evening, co-chaired by Kim van Seeters (Netherlands) and Tesfu Tujuba (Ethiopia). The contact group focused on considering options for the finalization of the baseline report (or reports) and for the modalities of the proposed global multi-stakeholder workshop.

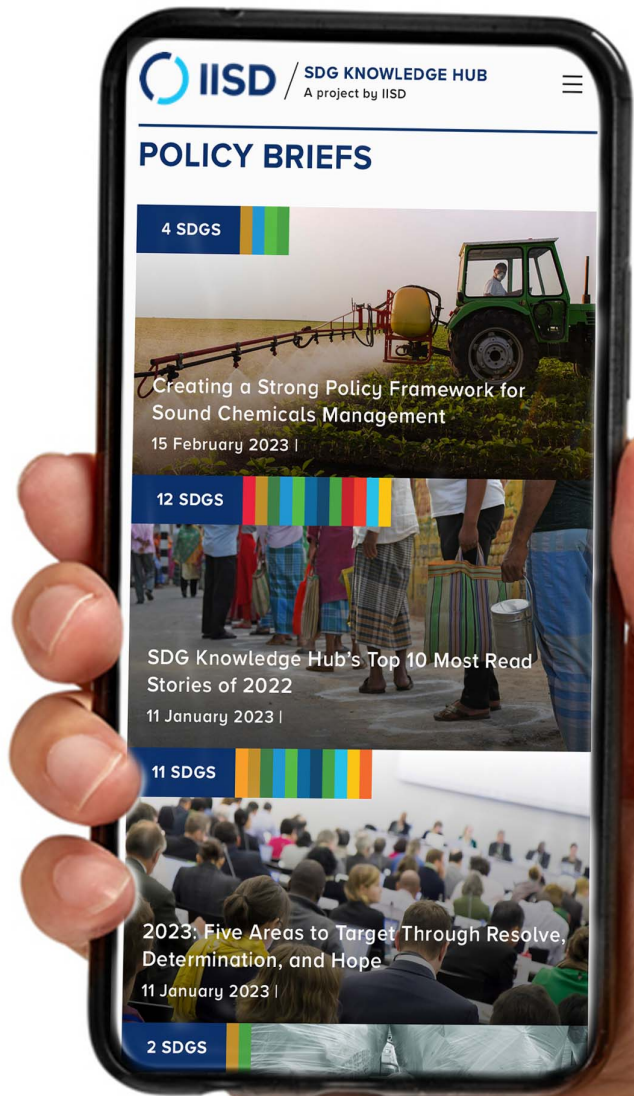
In the Corridors

"I'm glad things are going swimmingly today," Chair Girard quipped, as delegates dived into the agenda item on aquatic matters, steering the Commission into more familiar waters after Monday's turbulent discussions on access and benefit-sharing. Indeed, delegates noted with satisfaction the speed and scale of progress, including the operationalization of the Commission's flagship AquaGRIS platform and the roadmap towards a new sectoral report by 2029.

But not all matters enjoyed such smooth sailing – the US repeatedly reserved on in-session proposals and comments, effectively preventing the Chair from closing agenda items that otherwise enjoyed widespread support. One African delegate's frustrated query as to the reasons behind this obstruction went unanswered.

During the afternoon, delegates delved underground to hear presentations about a frequently overlooked source of food and nutrition – edible fungi, insects, and fermentation microbes. This area of work is still new for the Commission, and delegates marveled at the "fascinating" world of microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources. One observer was optimistic that this workstream could play a crucial role going forward. "These tiny creatures might hold the key to food security," they said, noting that the Commission is well positioned to take a lead in exploring and promoting this cutting edge of food policy.

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