

## CGRFA 20 Highlights: Thursday, 27 March 2025

### *Plant Genetic Resources (PGR)*

**Effect of Seed Policies, Laws, and Regulations:** The Secretariat presented [CGRFA-20/25/9.4 Rev.1](#) and its Annex, containing the concept note on further research on the impact of seed policies, laws, and regulations on the ability of farmers to access seeds and planting materials of diverse, locally adapted farmers' varieties/landraces (FV/LRs). They sought guidance on: recommending the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO), in collaboration with the International Treaty on PGR for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), to engage an external partner; and inviting members to provide extra-budgetary resources for this research, among others.

The EUROPEAN UNION (EU) supported further work in cooperation with the ITPGRFA, contingent on resource availability. NORTH AMERICA opposed mandating further research by the Commission, underlining that previous studies concluded that existing seed policies, laws, and regulations had not significantly impeded farmers' access to FV/LRs.

JAPAN stressed aligning the study's objectives and methodology and called for robust and impartial criteria for case studies. AFRICA urged including case studies on the impact of intellectual property rights on small breeders, and CÔTE D'IVOIRE proposed including biosecurity. BRAZIL, supported by CHILE, called for inclusion of socio-economic considerations, smallholder family farmers that are local seed keepers, women, and youth, as well as regions with high levels of food insecurity.

The EU suggested omitting country case studies to reduce costs and reserved on proposals for additions to the concept note. COLOMBIA stressed the importance of funding and technical support for seed conservation programmes, and of cross-sectoral institutional collaboration for comprehensive PGR management. ALGERIA underlined that seed sovereignty is equivalent to food security, with the RUSSIAN FEDERATION calling on members to consider this aspect when revising national seed genetic resource regulations.

KENYA, NIGER, and CÔTE D'IVOIRE stressed the study's importance for informing recommendations on safeguards, policies, and regulations. They noted that over 80% of seeds used in many African countries originate from informal seed production systems, and that such laws and regulations favor formal systems. NIGER further underlined the study's utility in identifying barriers to implementation of farmers' rights. CÔTE D'IVOIRE called for FAO and ITPGRFA to support the implementation of formalization and cataloging mechanisms in countries requesting such activities.

SWITZERLAND, with NORWAY, supported further research by the Commission and highlighted a proposal for finding an agreeable way forward. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION further suggested following the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group (ITWG) on PGR's recommendations on this matter. CANADA cautioned against introducing work that goes beyond the Commission's mandate and stressed the high estimated cost of the research.

Chair Benoît Girard (Canada) convened an informal Friends of the Chair group to explore consensus around the issues raised.

### *Forest Genetic Resources (FGR)*

**Report of the Eighth Session of the ITWG on FGR:** ITWG Vice-Chair Joukje Buiteveld (the Netherlands) presented the report ([CGRFA-20/25/10.1](#)), noting the ITWG recommended, among others, for the Commission to gather suggestions to improve the country reporting process for the Second State of the World Report on FGR (SOW-FGR); and for FAO to finalize, maintain, and continue developing the global information system on FGR (SilvaGRIS) to facilitate monitoring the Global Plan of Action on FGR (GPA-FGR).

**The Second SOW-FGR:** The Secretariat presented key findings and recommendations from the Second SOW-FGR ([CGRFA-20/25/10.2](#)), noting that it is based on information received from 77 countries, and pointed to the availability of an in-brief version of the report. The Secretariat reported that while the availability of information on FGR has increased, it remains inadequate, and outlined efforts required to improve FGR management and raise awareness on the importance of FGR.

NORTH AMERICA and PERU highlighted the role of SilvaGRIS in assisting countries' assessment of the GPA-FGR, and with EUROPE, ECUADOR, and MEXICO, supported awareness raising by disseminating the Second SOW-FGR. AFRICA underscored the need to conserve, sustainably use, and develop FGR, as these provide essential goods and services.

ALGERIA lamented that the Second SOW-FGR remained largely descriptive and lacked a deeper analysis of existing policies. They stressed the need to develop participatory FGR governance, highlighting the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in protecting forests, and to develop innovative financing at national and regional levels.

NEAR EAST requested FAO to support regional-level capacity building and promote research programmes to tackle regional knowledge gaps. LIBERIA urged highlighting the crucial role of FGR in enhancing forest resilience and productivity, particularly in climate change adaptation.

The Secretariat noted members' calls to improve the country reporting process and indicated that, following inputs from National Focal Points (NFPs), options will be presented at the ITWG's 9th meeting.

**Implementation of the GPA-FGR:** The Secretariat presented the document on implementation ([CGRFA-20/25/10.3.1](#)) and highlighted FAO activities supporting the GPA, such as SilvaGRIS and the Technical Cooperation Programme on tree seed production.

NORTH AMERICA, AFRICA, EUROPE, and others welcomed the revised GPA-FGR and the guidance proposed. CANADA lauded FAO for the comprehensiveness of the SilvaGRIS platform, noting it strengthens national data collection and reporting standards.

SOUTH AFRICA, with ARGENTINA, requested FAO to provide capacity-building support on SilvaGRIS. EUROPE proposed extending this support to NFPs, noting the training process could serve as a platform for collecting feedback. They further suggested facilitating an information-sharing session for members. EUROPE regretted that there was no FAO-coordinated *ex situ* project focusing on FGR.

The PHILIPPINES lauded the recognition of traditional forest management systems and the principle of free, prior, and informed consent. Among other amendments, they proposed: including country case studies and key performance indicators; considering the conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants to benefit IPLCs; considering making use of biotechnology to foster FGR; and integrating FGR into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and National Action Plans.

In response, the Secretariat noted the launch of regional-level and online training for NFPs in December 2024, highlighting plans to expand this to address *ex situ* conservation.

**Review of the GPA-FGR:** The Secretariat introduced document [CGRFA-20/25/10.3.2](#), describing the review process and revisions to the draft GPA-FGR by the ITWG, and [CGRFA-20/25/10.3.2/Inf.1](#), which contains a compilation of submissions received.

Noting minimal changes to the original GPA, they invited members' views on proposed changes, as well as guidance sought, on: reviewing and revising the draft revised GPA (Appendix I) and the draft Conference Resolution (Appendix II); and inviting the FAO Director-General to bring these to the attention of the FAO Conference.

Most delegates approved the proposed guidance. While supportive, BRAZIL proposed explicitly mentioning capacity building on seed systems to enhance benefits for smallholder and family farmers and IPLCs. EUROPE urged consistency and alignment between the revised GPA-FGR and existing international frameworks and, with AFRICA, supported forwarding the documents to the FAO Council.

The US expressed their reservation.

Chair Girard invited further informal discussions on this matter.

### **Options for the Identification of New and Emerging Issues (NEIs)**

The Secretariat introduced [CGRFA-20/25/11 Rev.1](#), noting it would enhance the relevance of the Commission's Multi-Year Programme of Work by enabling the Commission to identify new scientific, technological, or policy developments in a timely manner. They clarified that the options paper's aim is to introduce a formal and structured procedure, while acknowledging this will increase the workload of the CGRFA Secretariat, Bureau, and subsidiary bodies. They invited members to review and revise the NEI identification procedure contained in the options paper's appendix.

Many members, including NORTH AMERICA, AFRICA, EUROPE, ECUADOR, and MEXICO, welcomed the proposed new procedure. There was also broad support to limit submissions of NEIs to Commission members.

MEXICO noted similarities to the analogous process under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). BRAZIL cautioned against overloading the Commission's agenda with new crosscutting themes, calling for NEIs to first be submitted to subsidiary bodies with a clear procedure for subsequent presentation to the CGRFA.

EUROPE called for submissions to be accompanied by detailed information and offered additional proposals on criteria for identifying NEIs. ECUADOR suggested including funding source information for implementing NEIs as a criterion for approval.

NORTH AMERICA stressed establishing clear criteria and timeframes, with the US noting that submitting a NEI should not automatically lead to its inclusion as a recurring agenda item.

The agenda item was concluded as revised.

### **Cooperation with International Instruments and Organizations**

CGRFA Secretary Manoela Pessoa de Miranda introduced documents [CGRFA-20/25/12.1](#), on cooperation with international instruments and organizations, and [CGRFA-20/25/12.2](#), on cooperation with the ITPGRFA. She emphasized the fundamental role of cooperation to the work of the Commission and encouraged members and partners to continue this spirit.

The CBD SECRETARIAT outlined pertinent agreements by the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, including [Decision 16/35](#) on cooperation. They highlighted past collaboration with the Commission and expressed commitment to continue this partnership.

Noting their historical participation under the CBD, and their inaugural participation under the CGRFA, the INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB) invited members to collaborate with IPLCs, noting this can facilitate implementing the Commission's work. IIFB recommended the CGRFA explore avenues for involving IPLCs as rights holders, and urged members and donors to contribute resources to enable their effective participation in CGRFA processes.

The INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OBSERVATORY NETWORK stressed the importance of Indigenous, ancestral, and traditional knowledge for conserving and sustainably using PGR. They urged members to support their Indigenous Peoples' participation in Commission meetings.

CGIAR and the CROP TRUST outlined contributions to CGRFA workstreams and reports, and expressed commitment to continue supporting the Commission's work.

Kent Nnadozie, Secretary, ITPGRFA, emphasized the commitment of both the ITPGRFA and CGRFA Secretariats to continue their close partnership, and sought members' guidance on future collaboration and coordination.

In ensuing discussions, the G-77/CHINA, with BRAZIL, the PHILIPPINES, and PERU, called for strengthened coordination between and amongst international instruments to ensure complementarity, also supported by REPUBLIC OF KOREA. They requested the Secretariat to regularly inform members of collaborations with the CBD and ITPGRFA, and proposed that future Commission meetings also consider the state of international cooperation and implications for members.

COLOMBIA, supported by BRAZIL, urged the Commission to promote greater IPLC participation, and encouraged initiatives to strengthen their role in the conservation, sustainable use, and development of GRFA. They called on other members to appropriately recognize and value the contribution of IPLCs.

EUROPE noted the need for more active collaboration in relevant fora and inputs from other international instruments

and organizations, such as the World Intellectual Property Organization.

SOUTHWEST PACIFIC noted the critical role of the Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees in conserving key food crops in the region, such as yam and aroids.

AFRICA welcomed cooperation among relevant international instruments, with KENYA emphasizing the importance of international collaboration for supporting national programmes. TOGO asked the Secretariat to continue inviting relevant organizations and institutional instruments to provide contributions to priority issues of the CGRFA.

The SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY urged members to do more for PGR characterization and documentation to help IPLCs tackle the effects of climate change.

The Secretariat noted the members' requests.

### Outstanding Issues

**Digital Sequence Information (DSI):** The Chair invited comments on the relevant non-paper. ALGERIA, supported by NIGER and CHILE, but opposed by the US, suggested the DSI workshop address the impact of patent and other intellectual property rights on DSI for peasant rights and their ability to conserve and sustainably use GRFA, as well as adding a reference to corresponding ITPGRFA Article 12.3(d) (access to PGR).

EUROPE, supported by the US, proposed deleting a reference to the integration of gender considerations in the implementation of DSI mechanisms.

The US, opposed by KENYA, requested "taking note of" instead of "welcoming" [CBD Decision 16/2](#), since they are not a party to the CBD.

BRAZIL, supported by CHILE, suggested referring to smallholder fishers and farmers, while REPUBLIC OF KOREA proposed reference to fish breeders.

IRAN requested language emphasizing that the Cali Fund and the Global Biodiversity Fund should be accessible in an indiscriminate manner.

The Secretariat assured Algeria that the proposed discussion of patent and intellectual property rights was already addressed by the non-paper's current formulation. They confirmed the US' request, and noted that Iran's proposal was beyond the Commission's mandate.

**Follow-up on Other Functional Groups of Microorganism and Invertebrate Genetic Resources:** Delegates discussed the non-paper, for which BRAZIL, INDONESIA, CANADA, and QATAR proposed minor amendments.

**Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) for GRFA:** In the morning, Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico), Co-Chair of the Friends of the Chair group on ABS, reported that common understanding was reached on Wednesday, including on the draft report being incomplete and not ready for finalization, due to yet-to-be addressed limitations.

In the afternoon, Chair Girard read out the draft text agreed in Bureau consultations. GERMANY expressed their discomfort with not publishing the report on ABS measures. They proposed providing countries the opportunity to submit corrections to be reflected in a revised report, for further consideration by the ABS Expert Team. BRAZIL suggested considering the revised report at CGRFA 21.

**The Role of GRFA in Mitigation of and Adaptation to Climate Change:** Discussing the non-paper, EUROPE suggested removing a reference to including the revised voluntary guidelines to support the integration of genetic diversity into national climate change adaptation planning in the Climate Toolbox of

the Nationally Determined Contributions Partnership. The US dissociated themselves from any reference to climate change.

**Implementation of the Framework for Action on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (FA BFA):** The Secretariat summarized the status of informal consultations on this agenda item, which included considering requesting FAO to allocate regular programme funding for the implementation of the FA BFA. They also highlighted agreement that meetings of the Expert Team for the SOW-BFA would be held in a hybrid format.

The US requested adjusting text on allocating FAO regular programme funding to reflect language used during CGRFA 19, when developing budget allocations.

CONGO, supported by INDIA, raised procedural concerns on text revisions, and the Secretariat provided clarifications. Chair Girard established a contact group for this agenda item.

**Effects of Seed Policies, Laws, and Regulations:** Reporting the outcome of the informal Friends of the Chair group on this item, Deidre Januarie (Namibia) outlined the recommendation to request FAO and the ITPGRFA to collaborate and present progress to the CGRFA Bureau, with a view to completing the document by the following ITWG-PGR meeting. She clarified that the aim of the revision is to understand if and how seed policies, laws, and regulations that aim to support the registration, commercialization, and use of FV/LRs have reduced or enhanced access to and use of diverse locally adapted FV/LRs. Januarie further outlined the revised outputs, methods, and guidance.

**Review of the GPA-FGR:** The US tabled, and EUROPE amended, compromise language based on Brazil's earlier proposal to specify the modalities for and recipients of support for the tree seed supply system.

### Organizational Matters

**Any Other Matters:** NEAR EAST requested not holding Commission sessions during Ramadan.

**Date and Place of CGRFA 21:** The Secretariat stated that no firm dates have yet been set.

### In the Corridors

"Are you ready for battle?" This remark by a seasoned observer set the scene for Thursday's busy agenda, where yet-unresolved "zombie" items on climate change, ABS, and DSI returned to the floor.

Strong disagreements emerged on whether to conduct further research on the effects of seed policies, laws, and regulations on farmers' access to seeds and planting materials. One frustrated delegate opined "we've already completed similar studies that found no significant effects – why are we using more funds on this?"

Others were emphatic on the importance of continuing this research stream, highlighting issues of food sovereignty, much-needed support to formalize seed production systems, and upholding farmers' rights. Similarly, the impact of patents and intellectual property on DSI for peasants and farmers was a source of concern for developing countries and civil society participants alike, the latter fearing an "invasion of corporations crowding out the rights of biodiversity's real guardians."

Spirits were not dampened for too long by the rain outside, as discussions turned to the newly launched SOW-FGR. Most members commended the work behind the report and SilvaGRIS, with one observing how uplifting it is to see so many important platforms being launched this meeting.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of CGRFA 20 will be available on Monday, 31 March 2025 at <https://enb.iisd.org/un-fao-commission-genetic-resources-food-agriculture-20>



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