

## Summary of the Twentieth Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: 24-28 March 2025

“You have inspired me,” Manoela Pessoa de Miranda, Secretary of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA), told members as the 20th session of Commission drew to a close.

During the week, delegates at CGRFA 20 reviewed progress on Commission staples such as plant, animal, aquatic, and forest genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA). It also featured substantive discussions on the relatively new agenda item on microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources (MIGR), addressing topics such as fermentation, edible fungi, or microorganisms relevant to ruminant digestion.

From a “deliverables” perspective, the Commission achieved most of its objectives. Delegates approved the implementation and review of Global Plans of Action (GPAs) covering the core programme areas and launched two flagship “State of the World” (SOW) reports on plant and forest genetic resources. The Commission also agreed to:

- advance the preparation of the second global report on biodiversity for food and agriculture (SOW-BFA), the second global report on aquatic genetic resources (SOW-AqGR), and the third global report on animal genetic resources (SOW-AnGR);
- convene a multi-stakeholder workshop to explore the implications of [Decision 16/2](#) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that established modalities of the Multilateral Mechanism for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of digital sequence information (DSI);
- start a rollout of two new global information platforms on GRFA—AquaGRIS and SilvaGRIS—and calling on countries to create national registries as part of their progress reporting;
- take steps toward establishing a global pollinator platform; and
- explore the possibility of developing a “Red List” of threatened plant genetic resources modeled on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List that could be informed by the third global report on plant genetic resources (SOW-PGR).

Thematic discussions also revealed difficulties in collecting and managing high quality data and ensuring interoperability at country, regional, and global levels. Delegates voiced concerns about low response rates to surveys, as well as data variability due to weak research and technical capacities. This led to lengthy exchanges on

how to strengthen capacity-building efforts, and generate sufficient resources for countries to build up their genebanks and other requisite infrastructure.

Convening shortly after the successful conclusion of the resumed 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (CBD COP 16) “in this same room,” as CBD Executive Secretary Astrid Schomaker noted, CGRFA 20’s discussions considered several newly-agreed CBD decisions relevant to the Commission’s work. These notably included considerations on access and benefit-sharing (ABS) of genetic resources, including those derived from DSI on GRFA. Many welcomed the agreement reached to recognize the role of farmers, including smallholder farmers, fishers, including small-scale fishers, pastoralists, foresters, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as custodians of GRFA.

“We now know that the issues close to our hearts, such as DSI, are actually being discussed in other fora and not just the CBD,” commented a representative of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, participating at the CGRFA for the first time.

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In parallel to the Commission, several side events convened, addressing topics such as developing cross-sectoral action plans at the national level, and enhancing seed production to support agri-food sovereignty.

CGRFA 20 took place from 24-28 March 2025 at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) in Rome, Italy. It was attended by over 200 participants, including scientists and policy experts contributing to different CGRFA programmes, representatives from international organizations involved in GRFA issues, and observers from IPLC networks, civil society, and other stakeholders.

### A Brief History of the CGRFA

The CGRFA is an intergovernmental body focusing on the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from their use. Originally established by FAO in 1983 as the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, the Commission was renamed in 1995 to reflect its broadened mandate encompassing all components of biodiversity for food and agriculture (BFA), including plant, animal, forest, aquatic, and microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources. The CGRFA, which is open to all members of the FAO, currently comprises 179 countries and the European Union (EU).

The Commission produces regular global scientific assessments (State of the World (SOW) reports) of GRFA in agricultural subsectors, as well as cross-sectoral assessments. Based on the trends, gaps, and challenges identified in the SOWs, the Commission then develops consensus on policy measures that are summarized in GPAs and other documents through which governments commit to take action to conserve and sustainably use GRFA.

The Commission follows a ten-year work cycle that includes assessment, policy development, and review of implementation for each of the GRFA subsectors. The CGRFA also facilitates cooperation between FAO and other relevant bodies on GRFA policy issues, including the CBD. The Commission's regular sessions are held every two years and extraordinary sessions are convened when necessary. The Commission has five Intergovernmental Technical Working Groups (ITWGs) on plant, animal, forest, aquatic, and microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources to address specific issues in these sectors. Additional intersessional bodies are set up on an ad hoc basis.

### Key Milestones

**Plant Genetic Resources:** In 1996, the Commission's work on plant genetic resources resulted in the presentation of the first SOW-PGR and the first GPA-PGR, adopted through the Leipzig Declaration at the International Technical Conference on PGR held in Leipzig, Germany. The Declaration comprises a set of activities covering capacity building, as well as *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of PGR. The GPA-PGR also recognized the crucial roles played by farmers, seed curators, and breeders in managing these resources. Together with other guidelines, strategies, and codes of conduct, these measures came to be known as the Global System for PGR. In 2011, the Commission adopted the second GPA-PGR.

In 2023, the Commission requested FAO to convene a virtual expert consultation on the draft practical guides for conservation in genebanks for review at CGRFA 20. The meeting also recommended that FAO, in collaboration with the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), carry out

further work on the effects of seed policies, laws and regulations, including a demand-driven bottom-up approach to seed security, and to report on its progress at CGRFA 20.

**ABS and the ITPGRFA:** In 1983, FAO established the International Undertaking (IU) on PGR, a non-binding instrument aimed at ensuring that PGR are explored, collected, conserved, evaluated, utilized, and made available for plant breeding and other scientific purposes.

In 1993, the CGRFA considered the implications of the newly-adopted CBD and its objective to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources for its work, especially for the IU. Recognizing that the CBD would play a central role in determining policy on PGR, the Commission agreed that the IU should be revised to be in harmony with the CBD.

This resulted in the adoption of the ITPGRFA in 2001, under the auspices of FAO. The Treaty, which entered into force in 2004, is a legally binding instrument that targets the conservation and sustainable use of PGR and equitable benefit-sharing for sustainable agriculture and food security. The ITPGRFA established a Multilateral System (MLS) of ABS, which facilitates access to a specified list of PGR, balanced by benefit-sharing in the areas of information exchange, technology transfer, capacity building, and commercial development. This list of crops defines the scope of the MLS and currently includes 35 crop genera and 29 forage species.

In response to the adoption of the Nagoya Protocol on ABS under the auspices of the CBD in 2010, the Commission developed a set of Elements to Facilitate Domestic Implementation of ABS in the different sub-sectors of GRFA, which were welcomed by the Commission at its fifteenth session in 2015.

In 2023, the Commission requested FAO to assist countries in building the necessary capacities to make use of DSI in research and development related to GRFA, and encouraged members to coordinate future work on DSI, including ABS for DSI.

**Animal Genetic Resources:** The Commission's work on AnGR has been guided by the Global Strategy for the Management of Farm AnGR. Initiated by FAO in 1993, the Global Strategy serves as a technical and operational framework for assisting countries. It comprises: an intergovernmental mechanism for policy development; a country-based global infrastructure to help states plan and implement national strategies; a country-level technical support programme; and a reporting and evaluation system to guide the Strategy's implementation and facilitate collaboration. A communication and information tool called the Domestic Animal Diversity Information System assists in the Strategy's implementation.

In 2007, the first International Technical Conference on AnGR presented the first SOW-AnGR and adopted the GPA and the Interlaken Declaration on AnGR. In 2013, the Commission endorsed a set of voluntary guidelines for *in vivo* conservation of AnGR. In 2015, the Commission adopted the second SOW-AnGR. At CGRFA 19, delegates endorsed the outline and subsections for the preparation of the third SOW-AnGR.

**Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) and Strategic Plan:** To enable the Commission to fulfill its mandate in the medium and long term, the Commission at each session revises its MYPOW, a rolling 10-year work plan covering the totality of biodiversity for food and agriculture, including plant, animal, forest, aquatic, and microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources, and major outputs and milestones. The MYPOW also covers a range of cross-sectoral

matters relevant to several or all components of biodiversity for food and agriculture. At its twelfth session in 2009, the Commission adopted its Strategic Plan 2010-2017, identifying processes and cooperation needed to achieve the agreed outputs and milestones.

In 2017 and 2019, the Commission overhauled the Strategic Plan, redefined its goals in light of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and identified new operative principles. At its nineteenth session in 2023, the Commission adopted its Strategic Plan 2023-2031, with adjustments made for alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and to add a new workstream on identifying new and emerging issues (NEIs).

The MYPOW and Strategic Plan outline a 10-year cycle, during which the Commission aims to:

- conduct a global assessment;
- adopt or update a GPA;
- develop guidance for implementation for plant, animal, forest, aquatic, and microorganism and invertebrate GRFA; and
- publish a global assessment of the SOW-BFA after the completion of each cycle.

At its 2023 session, the CGRFA requested the Secretariat to propose options for a procedure for the ad hoc identification of NEIs for inclusion in the MYPOW, for review by the ITWGs and the Commission at their next sessions.

**Forest Genetic Resources:** In 2013, the Commission considered the first SOW-Forest Genetic Resources (FGR) and adopted the first GPA-FGR. In 2019, the Commission endorsed Voluntary Guidelines for Preparing a National Strategy for FGR, and began preparations for the second SOW-FGR.

**Aquatic Genetic Resources:** At its seventeenth session in 2019, the Commission approved the first SOW-AqGR, providing the first comprehensive assessment of the status of AqGR of farmed species and their wild relatives. In 2021, members adopted the first GPA-AqGR.

**Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture:** In 2019, the Commission launched its first SOW-BFA, which was lauded as a major milestone for FAO and the Commission toward achieving several SDGs, especially SDGs 2 (zero hunger) and 15 (life on land). In 2021 the Commission endorsed its Framework for Action on BFA. The SOW-BFA brought agriculture to the fore in the then-ongoing negotiations of the GBF. The Commission also requested the Group of National Focal Points (NFPs) for BFA, and its Working Groups, to assess the GBF, once approved, and to consider the need for adjustments to the Framework for Action on BFA.

The subsequent establishment of an Ad Hoc Expert Team on BFA to support GBF implementation was considered to be one of the successes of CGRFA 19.

**Microorganism and Invertebrate Genetic Resources:** The Commission has periodically considered background studies and reports on MIGR since 2007. In 2019, CGRFA 17 adopted a Work Plan for the Sustainable Use and Conservation of MIGR. Although no SOW or GPA has been produced on the topic to date, MIGR was covered by the 2019 SOW-BFA. At CGRFA 19, an ITWG was established, which met for the first time in September 2024.

CGRFA 19 also established an ITWG on MIGR to deepen members' expertise and facilitate preparations toward the next Commission session.

**Role of GRFA in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change:** At CGRFA 19, the Commission considered a background document on FAO's work on climate change, as well as draft Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Integration of Genetic Diversity into National Climate Change Adaptation Planning. Members agreed to finalize a draft simplified questionnaire for consideration by the next sessions of the ITWGs and the CGRFA; and convene a global multi-stakeholder workshop on climate change and GRFA, with a view to reviewing the Voluntary Guidelines at CGRFA 21.

## CGRFA 20 Report

CGRFA Chair Benoît Girard (Canada) opened CGRFA 20 on [Monday, 24 March](#), stating the meeting's theme, "promoting diversity for world food security and nutrition," was a first for the Commission, and calling for diversity to be understood in its broadest sense.

In a video message, FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu welcomed the launch of two SOW stocktaking reports on plant and forest genetic resources.

Astrid Schomaker, Executive Secretary, CBD, reflected on the successful conclusion of the resumed session of CBD COP 16 "in this same room," saying this confirms that environmental multilateralism "can work and must work."

Kent Nnadozie, Secretary, ITPGRFA, described the Commission's SOW reports as "not just analyses, but calls to action" to strengthen cooperation, bridge gaps, and accelerate efforts to ensure that genetic diversity is available to those who need it the most.

CGRFA Secretary Manoela Pessoa de Miranda stressed that the Commission views food security and nutrition as "a common good, not a privilege," and urged delegates to think of how the CGRFA can be most effective in fulfilling this purpose.

In regional statements, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN welcomed the launch of the Third SOW Report on Plant GRFA. They expressed concern over identifying new and emerging issues, calling for these to be meticulously analyzed in line with the mandate of the Commission.

SOUTHWEST PACIFIC welcomed the launch of the Second SOW Report on Forest Genetic Resource as a milestone for the region. ASIA expressed concern about the spread of pathogens such as avian influenza. NEAR EAST highlighted the threat posed by land degradation and called for stepping up technology transfer and capacity building, including for climate change adaptation.

EUROPE emphasized the opportunities created by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework for strengthening the national implementation of the Framework for Action on BFA and the Global Plans of Action. AFRICA said that GRFA are not only part of the region's cultural heritage but also play a key role in addressing climate change and food insecurity.

Concluding the segment, Chair Girard reported on the Bureau's work in the intersessional period, highlighting a global workshop on biological control agents and several regional workshops on implementing the Framework for Action on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture.

The Commission then adopted the meeting's agenda and provisional timetable ([CGRFA-20/25/1](#) and [CGRFA-20/25/1 Add.1](#).)

## Cross-Sectoral Matters

### The Role of GRFA in Climate Change Mitigation and

**Adaptation:** On [Monday](#), the Secretariat introduced the relevant document ([CGRFA-20/25/2](#)) and its associated draft baseline report ([CGRFA-20/25/2/Inf.1](#)).

Delegates lamented, among other issues, the low response rate to a survey circulated to members during the intersessional period, and challenges in coordinating national responses, noting that future questionnaires could target specific sectors and sectoral focal points. They further noted that outcomes of the global multi-stakeholder workshop could inform a revision of the [Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Integration of Genetic Diversity into National Climate Change Adaptation Planning](#).

Chair Girard forwarded these issues to a contact group, which convened on [Tuesday](#) evening. On [Thursday](#), the non-paper on this item was discussed in plenary.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission requests the Secretariat to convene a global multi-stakeholder workshop on climate change and genetic resources with a view to:

- exchanging information and experiences;
- considering the need to revise the Voluntary Guidelines, in light of the revised baseline report; and
- discussing a set of questions for inclusion in all SOW country reporting questionnaires.

The Commission further recommends that the Working Groups and the Commission consider outcomes of the global multi-stakeholder workshop, as applicable, and calls on FAO to continue fostering cooperation among its relevant units to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of GRFA.

**ABS for GRFA: Report of the Seventh Session of the Team of Technical and Legal Experts on ABS:** On [Monday](#), Expert Team Co-Chair Lamis Chalak (Lebanon) introduced the report ([CGRFA-20/25/3.1](#)). She underlined the low survey response rate and a potential bias toward the negative effects of ABS measures in the literature. Chalak pointed to recommendations for the Commission to consider further work on developing and monitoring indicators for ABS for GRFA, including on non-monetary benefit-sharing. A regional group requested reflecting ongoing negotiations by the ITPGRFA Open-ended Working Group on Enhancing the Functioning of the MLS.

The Commission endorsed the report.

**Implementation of ABS Country Measures:** On [Monday](#), the Secretariat introduced [CGRFA-20/25/3.2](#) on the impact of ABS country measures on GRFA and associated traditional knowledge, and Brad Sherman, University of Queensland, presented the associated draft report ([CGRFA-20/25/3.2/Inf.1](#)). In addition to a low survey response rate, Sherman noted a literature bias towards PGR, and insufficient information about traditional and local knowledge.

Among other things, delegates: deliberated finalizing and publishing the report; considered exploring ways to improve questionnaire response rates; highlighted challenges arising from incomplete data in the ABS Clearing-House; and considered relevant work on ABS indicators, including on monetary and non-monetary benefit-sharing.

On [Tuesday](#), Chair Girard announced a Friends of the Chair group, co-chaired by Elzbieta Martyniuk (Poland) and Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico). On [Thursday](#) morning, Benítez reported the group had reached common understanding that the draft report

was not ready for finalization due to limitations that were yet unaddressed, such as the difficulty of gathering information on ABS from different institutions. In the afternoon, Chair Girard tabled proposed draft language, and delegates discussed options to revise the report and consider it at CGRFA 21.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, members are invited to provide inputs and updates to the draft report, with the Secretariat requested to revise the report based on these inputs for review by the ABS Expert Team and the Bureau, for review by CGRFA 21.

The Commission also requests the Secretariat to continue monitoring developments regarding ABS in other relevant fora, and report on these at CGRFA 21; and to continue contributing to the development and monitoring of indicators on ABS for GRFA, particularly for non-monetary benefit-sharing.

The Commission further recommends that FAO continue to support countries in developing and implementing ABS measures that accommodate the distinctive features of GRFA.

**DSI and GRFA:** On [Monday](#), the Secretariat introduced the report ([CGRFA-20/25/4](#)), noting it draws on ongoing monitoring of developments regarding DSI in other fora. They highlighted the establishment of a multilateral mechanism on benefit-sharing in CBD [Decision 16/2](#) on DSI, and further noted that submissions on domestic ABS measures applying to DSI on GRFA were received from three members, as contained in document [CGRFA-20/25/4/Inf.1](#).

Many delegates welcomed CBD Decision 16/2 and the establishment of the Cali Fund, with several calling for a mechanism that guarantees the rights of providers in the use of DSI. Others requested further submissions on domestic ABS measures applying to DSI.

Diverging views arose on references to key stakeholders and targeted capacity-building activities. Delegates converged on inviting the Commission to continue monitoring DSI-related developments in other fora, although they could not agree on modalities for co-convening a workshop with the CBD and ITPGRFA Secretariats on the impacts of CBD Decision 16/2.

Chair Girard established an informal group to find consensus on these issues.

On [Tuesday](#), the meeting considered proposed compromise language on the list of stakeholders as well as capacity-building modalities to facilitate their access, use, and exchange of DSI. The Commission also reviewed modalities for the proposed multi-stakeholder workshop on the implications of CBD Decision 16/2.

On [Wednesday](#), divergence remained on the list of stakeholders and the workshop modalities. An observer called for, and some members supported, the full and effective participation of the key stakeholders under focus in Commission processes that concern them. On [Thursday](#), delegates considered the revised non-paper and proposed further amendments to the stakeholder list and the workshop.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission recognizes the role of farmers including smallholder farmers, fishers including small-scale fishers, pastoralists, foresters, and IPLCs as the custodians of GRFA. It also notes the need for building their capacity to support the effective implementation of DSI mechanisms, including through GRFA exchange and access, and fair and equitable benefit-sharing arising from their utilization.

The Commission further notes the role of plant and animal breeders, including fish breeders, and of collection managers in the conservation and sustainable use of DSI on GRFA and their capacity-building needs for DSI use.

The Secretariat is requested to continue monitoring developments on DSI in other fora, and to convene an open-ended multi-stakeholder workshop in partnership with the CBD and ITPGRFA Secretariats, preferably using hybrid modalities, on the implications of CBD Decision 16/2.

### ***Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture***

On [Monday](#), BFA Expert Team Co-Chair Desterio Nyamongo (Kenya) introduced the report (CGRFA-20/25/5.1). He highlighted the Expert Team's recommendation to develop a limited number of process indicators, primarily addressing Strategic Priority Area 3 of the Framework for Action on BFA (institutional frameworks for BFA).

The Commission endorsed the BFA Expert Team's report.

#### **Implementation of the Framework for Action on**

**BFA:** On [Monday](#), the Secretariat introduced the document (CGRFA-20/25/5.2) and the annexed draft questionnaire on implementation, as well as elements of the draft voluntary guidelines for implementing the Framework for Action on BFA (CGRFA-20/25/5.2/Inf.1).

In discussions, delegates addressed the need for funding to support countries' coherent implementation of the Framework for Action on BFA, GPAs, and the GBF. Some stressed the voluntary nature of the guidelines, with others calling for mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors, building capacities for monitoring, and avoiding overlaps with other relevant processes.

On [Thursday](#), the Secretariat presented the outcomes of informal consultations and recommended requesting FAO to allocate regular programme funding for the implementation of the Framework for Action on BFA. Following initial discussions, Chair Girard convened a contact group to address both this agenda item and the following one on preparation of the Second SOW-BFA.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission requests the BFA Expert Team, at its second session, to review and finalize the voluntary guidelines for implementing the Framework for Action on BFA. The Commission further requests the Secretariat to circulate the draft questionnaire on implementing the Framework for Action on BFA to NFPs, for completion by 1 November 2025, and to closely follow FAO activities on the Agri-National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) Support Initiative.

The Commission recommends FAO continue supporting members in the coherent implementation of the Framework for Action on BFA, GPAs, and GBF, including by implementing the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors.

The Commission invites members to make use of the Framework for Action on BFA, GPAs, and other FAO tools, instruments, and resources, in the review, development, and/or implementation of relevant national policies or legislation, including NBSAPs.

**Preparation of the Second SOW-BFA:** On [Monday](#), the Secretariat presented document [CGRFA-20/25/5.3](#), recalling the high impact and successful outcomes of the First SOW-BFA published in 2019, and pointed to the evolving policy landscape and increased awareness of biodiversity since then.

On [Tuesday](#), many delegates acknowledged the First SOW-BFA's impact and expressed support for the preparation of the

Second SOW-BFA. In discussions, they emphasized the need for a coordinated and non-duplicative approach with other frameworks and processes, and proposed additional focal areas to be considered, including microbial genetic resources.

Views diverged on allocating funds from the regular programme budget for the Report's preparation, with others preferring to invite donors to provide extra-budgetary resources. Deliberations also addressed the modalities of future BFA Expert Team meetings, and adjusting the timeline for the Second SOW-BFA to account for the concurrent timeframes of the GBF, among others.

On [Thursday](#), the Secretariat noted that informal consultations had yielded agreement on holding meetings of the BFA Expert Team on the SOW-BFA in hybrid format. Following further discussions, Chair Girard convened a contact group to address both this agenda item and the one on implementing the FA BFA.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission recommends that the Second SOW-BFA:

- focus on approaches, information, and practices that support the coherent implementation of various frameworks in a non-duplicative manner, including the Framework for Action on BFA, GPAs, the GBF, and the SDGs;
- address interlinkages between the Commission's sectoral work streams and overall BFA management, including ecosystem services; and
- make use of information from the monitoring of the Framework for Action on BFA, the GPAs, and other existing monitoring and reporting processes.

The Commission requests the Secretariat to prepare a simplified draft country reporting questionnaire for review by the BFA Expert Team for discussion at CGRFA 21, as well as preparing a draft analysis of responses for CGRFA 22.

The Commission further requests the BFA Expert Team to convene its second session preferably in hybrid format, to undertake preparatory work towards the Second SOW-BFA.

The Commission further recommends that the FAO Conference consider relevant Commission outcomes in its budget allocations.

### ***Aquatic Genetic Resources***

**Report of the Fifth Session of the ITWG-AqGR:** On [Tuesday](#), ITWG-AqGR Chair Belamane Semoli (South Africa) presented [CGRFA-20/25/6.1](#), noting the ITWG's advice to continue supporting members' use of AquaGRIS and endorsing the preparation of the Second SOW-AqGR.

The Commission endorsed the report of the ITWG-AqGR.

**Implementation of the GPA-AqGR:** The Secretariat introduced the report [CGRFA-20/25/6.2](#) on [Tuesday](#), tabling related information documents. Many members lauded the launch of AquaGRIS and related guidance on sustainable aquaculture, and called for continued efforts to develop national registries with capacity building and reliable financing.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission recommends that FAO continue providing technical support for the use of AquaGRIS, emphasizing the need to ensure interoperability with existing information systems. FAO is also called on to continue supporting the establishment of regional genebanks. The Commission also welcomes:

- the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture;
- finalization of the Glossary for AqGR, recommending its publication and wide dissemination; and

- the Guidelines on genetic management in stocking programmes for aquatic species and the practical guide on *ex situ* in vitro genebanking of AqGR, recommending its finalization and publication.

**Preparation of the Second SOW-AqGR:** The Secretariat introduced the document [CGRFA-20/25/6.3](#) on [Tuesday](#), outlining the steps and timeline to prepare the Second SOW-AqGR. Delegates suggested adjustments to the timeline and called for increased technical support and capacity building for developing countries.

**Final Outcome:** The Commission approves the proposed timelines for the preparation of the Second SOW-AqGR, and the completion of the process indicator questionnaire. The Commission encourages resource partners and donors to provide extra-budgetary resources to support the preparation of the Second SOW-AqGR.

### Animal Genetic Resources

**Report of the Thirteenth Session of the ITWG-AnGR:** On [Tuesday](#), ITWG Chair Samuel Paiva (Brazil) introduced the report ([CGRFA-20/25/7.1](#)), outlining recommendations, including for continued financial and technical support, cooperation, and regular data provision toward implementing the GPA-AnGR.

The Commission endorsed the ITWG-AnGR's report.

**Implementation of the GPA-AnGR:** On [Tuesday](#), the Secretariat outlined the implementation status report ([CGRFA-20/25/7.2](#)).

In discussions, delegates stressed, among others: the lack of contributions to the FAO Trust Account; the need for capacity building, including training on *ex situ* conservation techniques; the importance of cooperation to avoid duplication of efforts, including with concurrent work by the FAO Committee on Agriculture's GPA on sustainable livestock transformation; and challenges in consolidating data.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission invites countries to strengthen efforts to implement the GPA-AnGR, and to update FAO regarding relevant, new national projects and policies, further requesting FAO to synthesize this information for consideration by CGRFA 21.

The Commission recommends that FAO continue supporting countries' GPA-AnGR implementation, including through the Technical Cooperation Programme, and to prepare an evidence- and science-based guidance document exploring the range of disaster mitigation and recovery measures as they relate to AnGR.

Regarding concurrent GPA development by the FAO Committee on Agriculture's Sub-Committee on Livestock, the Commission requests members to participate in this process and calls for collaboration between both Secretariats with a view to fostering synergies.

The Commission stresses the importance of the Domestic Animal Diversity Information System (DAD-IS) as the international Clearing-House Mechanism for AnGR, invites countries to regularly update their national data in DAD-IS, and recommends FAO to provide necessary technical support.

In other recommendations, the Commission asks FAO to:

- proactively follow-up with countries on the status of breeds with unknown risk status;
- report in greater detail the data on cryoconserved material in DAD-IS; and
- develop a new index combining existing information in DAD-IS on cryoconserved material, demographic risk status, and existence of breeding and *in situ* conservation programmes.

**Status of Preparations of the Third SOW-AnGR:** On [Tuesday](#), the Secretariat introduced [CGRFA-20/25/7.3](#). Delegates considered inviting additional resource mobilization to complete the Third SOW-AnGR, stressed the persistence of significant data gaps, and supported awareness-raising activities to promote the Third SOW-AnGR upon publication. Following a request to adjust the deadline for country report submission, the Secretariat confirmed this would be extended to the end of May 2025.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission encourages countries to continue data and information collection to update their country questionnaires before 31 May 2025. It also requests FAO to publish elements of the Third SOW-AnGR online as they become available for review by members, and to organize dedicated workshops for each element of the report.

### Microorganism and Invertebrate Genetic Resources

**Report of the First Session of the ITWG-MIGR:** On [Tuesday](#), 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. He outlined the ITWG's recommendations, including addressing 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.

The Commission endorsed the report.

**Edible Fungi and Invertebrates Used as Dietary Components of Food/Feed:** On [Tuesday](#), the Secretariat outlined the document ([CGRFA-20/25/8.2](#)), inviting countries to strengthen work on this functional group. Eric Boa, University of Aberdeen, presented a draft study ([CGRFA-20/25/8.2/Inf.1](#)) on the subject.

Many supported the publication and broad dissemination of the study's findings. Several delegates highlighted health risks linked to the gathering of wild species and the need to address the impacts of overharvesting and habitat destruction. Countries further discussed: less prescriptive language on the role of universities in MIGR research; a cautious approach to commercialization to protect traditional knowledge and fair and equitable ABS; and convening more regional capacity-building workshops.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission, among others, requests the Secretariat to finalize, publish, and publicize the draft study, and invites members to promote research, monitoring, conservation, and sustainable use of edible fungi and invertebrates.

**Microorganisms Used in Food Processing and Agro-Industrial Processes:** On [Tuesday](#), the Secretariat introduced a background document ([CGRFA-20/25/8.3](#)) outlining the ITWG's work on this functional group. 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. Discussions touched upon: public-private partnerships; enhanced infrastructure and technical capacity building to integrate fermentation into agrifood systems; and the importance of legal and policy frameworks that safeguard the rights of IPLCs over fermentation processes, including DSI derived from MIGR.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission recommends finalizing and publishing the draft study. It further invites members to:

- strengthen the characterization, conservation and documentation of fermentation-associated microorganisms and associated traditional knowledge; and
- improve the integration of fermentation processes into agrifood systems.

**Follow-up on Other Functional Groups of MIGR:** On [Wednesday](#), the Secretariat presented the document ([CGRFA-20/25/8.4](#)) as well as two progress reports ([CGRFA-20/25/8.4/Inf.1](#) and [CGRFA-20/25/8.4/Inf.2](#)) on international initiatives for the conservation and sustainable use of pollinators and soil biodiversity, respectively.

In the ensuing debate, various delegates welcomed progress toward a global pollinator platform, although some stressed the need for proper resource mobilization and the involvement of IPLCs. Countries further discussed: gaps in MIGR information systems and ex situ collections; and strengthening fair and equitable benefit-sharing in relation to MIGR.

On [Thursday](#), delegates discussed a non-paper, to which various countries proposed minor amendments.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission, among others:

- recommends that FAO invite relevant stakeholders to a meeting to consider next steps for establishing a global pollinator platform;
- requests the Secretariat to engage in establishing the global pollinator platform and to report on progress made;
- recommends that FAO conduct a review of policy, normative, and institutional frameworks related to the monitoring, conservation, and sustainable use of microbial and invertebrate biological control agents and microbial biostimulants, for consideration by the ITWG at its next session; and
- agrees to amend the model terms of reference of NFPs to apply to MIGR.

### Plant Genetic Resources

**Report of the Twelfth Session of the ITWG-PGR:** On [Wednesday](#), ITWG Chair William John Wigmore (Cook Islands) introduced [CGRFA-20/25/9.1](#) and outlined key issues such as the finalization of the Third SOW-PGR and progress on the review of the Second GPA-PGR.

The Commission endorsed the report of the ITWG-PGR.

**Third SOW-PGR:** On [Wednesday](#), the Secretariat introduced [CGRFA-20/25/9.2](#) on the finalization of the [Third SOW-PGR](#), which was launched on [Monday](#). Many delegates welcomed this report as an important milestone for the CGRFA and requested that an in-brief version of the report be made available in all UN languages.

**Final Outcome:** The Commission requests the Secretariat to present the Third SOW-PGR and disseminate its key findings among stakeholders, including at relevant international meetings, to promote the conservation and sustainable use of PGR and inform global and regional processes. The Commission recommends that FAO: facilitate print-on-demand of the Third SOW-PGR; produce and publish an in-brief version in all UN languages; and publish the thematic background studies.

The Commission invites countries to respond to the findings of their country reports through adequate policies, programmes, and activities at national and regional levels, as appropriate.

**Implementation and Review of the Second GPA-PGR:** The Secretariat introduced the relevant document ([CGRFA-20/25/9.3.1](#)) on [Wednesday](#), together with two draft practical guides on species

producing non-orthodox seeds ([CGRFA-20/25/9.3.1/Inf.1](#)) and cryopreservation ([CGRFA-20/25/9.3.1/Inf.2](#)) to assist countries in the application of the Genebank Standards for PGR.

Delegates urged making genebanks more accessible to the public and farmers, with others calling for better integration of the World Information and Early Warning System into the Commission's work. Some members lamented the difficulties in conserving and accessing PGR due to unilateral sanctions and geopolitical considerations.

The Secretariat also introduced [CGRFA-20/25/9.3.2](#), which contains an appendix on key issues for the review of the Second GPA for PGR. Delegates called for simplifying the reporting format, pointing to difficulties with the current format.

**Final Outcome:** On implementation, the Commission recommends that FAO support countries in, among others:

- strengthening efforts to conserve PGR, both in situ and ex situ, maintain PGR on-farm, and strengthen complementarity between ex situ and in situ conservation;
- developing or revising national plans for the conservation and sustainable use of crop wild relatives, wild food plants, and farmers' varieties/landraces (FV/LRs);
- closely coordinating with ITPGRFA, strengthening their crop improvement capacity; and
- strengthening national seed systems, as well as offering support in the development or revision, and implementation, of their national seed policies and legislation.

The Commission also recommends that FAO finalize, translate, publish, and disseminate the two practical guides for the Genebank Standards for PGR implementation, and annually report on the status of implementation of SDG target 2.5 (maintain genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants, farmed and domesticated animals, and their related wild species).

The Commission further recommends that FAO, in consultation with its members, revise and simplify the reporting format and present a proposal for the process and key issues for such revision and simplification to the ITWG at its next session.

**Effects of Seed Policies, Laws, and Regulations:** On [Thursday](#), 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 FV/LRs.

Diverging views emerged on whether to continue this stream of research, and on its scope and methodology. Chair Girard convened an informal Friends of the Chair group to explore consensus.

In the afternoon, Deidré Januarie (Namibia) reported the agreement reached by the Friends of the Chair group, including that the aim of the revised concept note on further research 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.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission recommends FAO, in collaboration with the ITPGRFA, to carry out the desk study, as referenced in the concept note in Annex X.2 of the report, for review by the ITWG-PGR, and subsequent submission for consideration by CGRFA 21.

The Commission invites members and relevant stakeholders to provide the necessary extra-budgetary resources to conduct the study.

## Forest Genetic Resources

**Report of the Eighth Session of the ITWG-FGR:** On [Thursday](#), ITWG Vice-Chair Joukje Buiteveld (the Netherlands) presented the report ([CGRFA-20/25/10.1](#)), highlighting recommendations for the Commission to gather suggestions to improve the country reporting process for the Second SOW-FGR; and for FAO to finalize, maintain, and continue developing SilvaGRIS to facilitate monitoring the GPA-FGR.

The Commission endorsed the report.

**Second SOW-FGR:** On [Thursday](#), the Secretariat presented key findings and recommendations from the Second SOW-FGR ([CGRFA-20/25/10.2](#)) launched on [Wednesday](#), and outlined efforts required to improve FGR management and awareness. Delegates welcomed the report and its wide dissemination, and highlighted the role of SilvaGRIS in assisting countries' assessment of the GPA-FGR.

**Final Outcome:** The Commission requests the Secretariat to widely disseminate the Second SOW-FGR and its in-brief version in all UN languages, communicate key messages to relevant stakeholders, and increase international awareness of the importance of FGR.

The Commission also requests the Secretariat to gather suggestions for improving the reporting process for future global assessments on FGR from NFPs, regional networks of FGR, and relevant international organizations, and to present options at the next session of the ITWG.

The Commission invites countries to respond to the findings of the Second SOW-FGR, through relevant policies and actions at national and regional levels.

**Implementation and Review of the GPA-FGR:** The Secretariat presented the document ([CGRFA-20/25/10.3.1](#)) on [Thursday](#), highlighting FAO's activities supporting the GPA-FGR. Members called for more capacity-building support on SilvaGRIS, and extending trainings to ex situ conservation of FGR.

**Final Outcome:** The Commission requests the Secretariat to continue providing training to NFPs on the use of SilvaGRIS and strengthening their technical capacity for reporting FGR data.

The Commission reminds members of the possibility of requesting support through FAO's Technical Cooperation Programme for the implementation of the GPA and invites them to include relevant activities in their Country Programming Frameworks. The Commission further invites members to integrate activities related to FGR conservation and sustainable use into project proposals for multilateral financing mechanisms, to enhance sustainable forest management and forest-based adaptation and mitigation measures for climate change.

The Commission invites the FAO Director-General to bring the draft revised GPA and draft Conference Resolution, as revised, to the attention of the FAO Conference, with a view to their possible adoption.

## Commission's Mode of Operation

**Options for the Identification of New and Emerging Issues (NEIs):** The Secretariat introduced this item ([CGRFA-20/25/11 Rev.1](#)) on [Thursday](#). They noted the aim was to enhance the relevance of the Commission's MYPOW by enabling the Commission to identify new scientific, technological, or policy developments in a timely manner.

Delegates debated the various options proposed, including on the length of the notification period and the subsequent process of assessing and tabling proposed issues to members for their review. Concern was expressed about overloading the Commission's agenda with new cross-cutting themes, with broad support for ensuring clear selection criteria and a structured process.

**Final Outcome:** The meeting report adopts the procedure for the identification of NEIs, as contained in Appendix X.5.

**Cooperation with International Instruments and Organizations:** On [Thursday](#), CGRFA Secretary 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.

Representatives from international fora, instruments, and organizations, as well as from IPLC networks, highlighted ongoing collaborative work, and expressed general commitment to continuing this work and enhancing partnerships in the future.

Among other things, delegates urged increased IPLC participation and called for the Secretariat to regularly inform members of ongoing collaboration.

**Final Outcome:** In the meeting report, the Commission requests the Secretariat to continue collaboration with relevant instruments and initiatives, including by raising awareness of its work.

The Commission recognizes that Indigenous, ancestral, and traditional knowledge are essential for the sustainable use and conservation of genetic resources, and requests the Secretariat to facilitate the participation of IPLCs in the Commission's work, with donors invited to provide resources to this end.

The Commission requests the Secretariat to continue strengthening collaboration and coordination with the ITPGRFA, to promote coherence in the development and implementation of the CGRFA and ITPGRFA's respective programmes of work.

## Organizational Issues

**Any Other Matters:** On [Thursday](#), 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 for CGRFA 21.

**Election of Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons, and Rapporteur:** The Commission elected Paz Benavidez II (the Philippines) as Chair of CGRFA 21. Fadilah Ayes Al Salameen (Kuwait), Benoît Girard (Canada), Fabio Ramos Ariston (Brazil), Savenaca Cuquma (Fiji), Issa Zakari Mahaman Mourtala (Niger), and Svanhild-Isabelle Batta Torheim (Norway) were elected as Vice-Chairs. Batta Torheim was also elected as Rapporteur.

## Closing Plenary

In the closing plenary on Friday, the Commission elected members and alternates to the ITWGs by acclamation. The EU, UK, JAPAN, and CANADA dissociated themselves from the election of the Russian Federation as alternates or members of various ITWGs. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION lamented the "unacceptable politicization" of FAO bodies and dissociated themselves from the election of EU member states, the UK, Japan, and Canada as alternates or members to various ITWGs.

CGRFA 20 Rapporteur Ariston presented the draft meeting report and its appendices (CGRFA-20/25/DR Rev.1). Several delegates proposed minor amendments and additions to the report.

On the implementation of ABS country measures, GERMANY requested reaffirming the importance of considering the distinctive features of GRFA in the implementation of the CBD's Nagoya Protocol.

On AqGR, CANADA and SOUTH AFRICA proposed acknowledging the contribution of outgoing ITWG Secretary Graham Mair and inviting FAO to fill the vacancy as soon as possible.

Similarly, on PGR, CANADA requested encouraging FAO to ensure a smooth transition in filling the positions of two retiring Secretariat officers.

On the implementation of the second GPA-PGR, GERMANY requested: further information on collaboration with the ITPGRFA in implementing the second GPA-PGR; and addressing *in situ* conservation of wild PGR and on-farm management of FV/LRs separately. AFRICA suggested calling on donors to supply extrabudgetary funding to aid Commission members in implementing the second GPA-PGR, including for developing and implementing national implementation strategies.

The US requested that their additional dissociations on any matters related to climate change, the CBD, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and FAO work on gender considerations, be annexed to the report, with footnotes added to relevant agenda items within the report.

The Commission adopted the report as amended.

**Regional Statements:** Many regions lauded the collaborative spirit shown throughout the week's deliberations, and extended their thanks to outgoing Secretariat officers Bonnie Furman and Stefano Diulgheroff, and ITWG-AqGR Secretary Graham Mair. Several lauded the establishment of the global pollinator platform and the launches of the SOW Reports on PGR and FGR.

EUROPE emphasized the threat of climate change to BFA and called on members to respond to the upcoming questionnaire on GRFA and climate change. LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN stressed the importance of continued collaboration between the CGRFA and ITPGRFA, as well as other international institutions and organizations.

SOUTHWEST PACIFIC noted the significance of the Commission's work, citing improved knowledge about pollinators and microorganisms in nutrient-cycling. NORTH AMERICA noted the meeting's milestone achievements, including the publication of the SOW reports.

NEAR EAST reaffirmed their commitment to work with the international community to conserve, sustainably use, and develop GRFA. ASIA noted that countries have different understandings and approaches in achieving common desired outcomes, and thanked members for exercising "maximum wisdom" to overcome these differences.

AFRICA underscored the critical importance of CGRFA 20 in shaping global food security and sustainable agriculture.

CGRFA Secretary Pessoa de Miranda thanked members for their outstanding spirit of compromise and collegiality to successfully complete the twentieth session's agenda.

Chair Girard noted that the choice to have a theme for the first time had served the meeting well, and thanked members for using "sweet kindness to get out of sticky situations."

Chair Girard declared the meeting closed at 6:04 pm.

## A Brief Analysis of CGRFA 20

### *"Diversity in the Broadest Sense"*

For the first time in its forty-two-year history, the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) hand-picked a theme for its twentieth session: "Promoting diversity for world food security and nutrition." In doing so, it sought to spotlight the genetic variability within and across species that determines the quantity and quality of the food that ends up on our plates. As the newly appointed Commission Secretary Manoela Pessoa de Miranda insisted, biodiversity holds the key to a world in which food security is a "common good, not a privilege." CGRFA 20 Chair Benoît Girard (Canada) also hinted at another meaning of diversity: countries' different priorities, needs, opportunities, and challenges, which generate a shared knowledge pool that constitutes "a resource in its own right."

More than mere promotional gestures, these remarks point to the Commission's role in an increasingly important, yet often-overlooked niche of the multilateral landscape. Over the decades, the CGRFA has developed a unique profile at the intersection of biodiversity conservation and food systems governance. Despite its close ties to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), it is not a treaty body. In fact, it predates both of these treaties. As part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the Commission is the only intergovernmental forum tasked with reviewing the entire breadth of biodiversity for food and agriculture. It has become a much-valued hub for states to review the latest science and coordinate their policies.

In line with this distinct mandate, delegates had a full agenda to work through in Rome, featuring both established items and emerging issues. This analysis reflects on the meeting and assesses the Commission's achievements in three key areas: scientific evaluation and exchange; policy development and implementation; and ensuring that the benefits of genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA) are shared equitably. While CGRFA 20 underscored the Commission's outstanding contributions in the first area, it also showed protracted logistical, political, and institutional challenges in the second and third ones. In this sense, the meeting once again highlighted the various hurdles standing in the way of attaining food sovereignty for all—and the Commission's limited leverage to overcome those obstacles.

### *Mapping the Ground*

Genetic diversity is fundamental to food systems but surprisingly tricky to capture and systematize. One of the Commission's core tasks involves surveying and summarizing the state of GRFA across five sectors in regular State of the World (SOW) reports. CGRFA 20 saw the launch of two such reports, one on plant genetic resources (PGR) and another focusing on forest genetic resources (FGR). Long in the making, these major stocktaking reports were greeted with acclaim, although they also revealed some uncomfortable truths.

Noting an alarming loss of PGR, one delegation proposed the creation of a "Red List" to identify and better conserve species and varieties at the risk of extinction. Another stressed the importance of "backing up" national genebanks to safeguard the invaluable information contained therein in case of an emergency. These

calls underline the urgency of a world in which food-related biodiversity—and the cultural practices and identities that build on it—is disappearing rapidly.

Alongside the all-important SOW reports, delegates celebrated the launch of two new information systems, AquaGRIS for aquatic genetic resources and SilvaGRIS for FGR. These platforms are expected to harmonize reporting, and significantly improve access to and exchange of information on GRFA in these fields. Representatives from developing countries were hopeful that such tools could help them catalogue and formalize the immense wealth of GRFA that is currently held and shared informally.

The Commission's four established workstreams have been complemented by a fifth, relatively new and understudied sector—microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources (MIGR). Long dwelling at the periphery of the Commission's work, an Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on MIGR was established at CGRFA 19 and convened for the first time in 2024.

At the twentieth session, delegates heard presentations about the enormous variety and importance of microbes, fungi, and invertebrates in improving soil health, fighting pests, providing pollination services, or as a direct source of nutrition. Despite their crucial functions, however, very little is known about these creatures, and delegations demonstrated a keen interest in further exploring this cutting edge of agrifood science. Following a presentation on the role of microbes in fermentation, even Chair Girard outed himself as a major fan of kimchi, the world-famous Korean fermented dish.

A collegial and collaborative atmosphere allowed delegates—many of whom have a background in agricultural sciences—to smoothly sail through these sectoral agenda items, showing that the Commission shines brightest when it can function as a hub of scientific and technical expertise. This unrivaled reputation was further underscored by the applause and accolades countries heaped upon retiring Secretariat staff who have allowed the Commission to maintain its widely praised efficiency and scientific quality.

### ***Ploughing the Field***

As became clear throughout the week, various anthropogenic threats to GRFA across the world call for swift and effective response measures. Unfortunately, progress on this front has been less than stellar. Implementation of the Commission's groundbreaking Framework for Action on Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture, sectoral global plans of action, and various voluntary guidelines remains patchy and incomplete. Delegates spent much time mulling over the causes of and potential remedies for this situation.

Developing countries repeatedly voiced the need for capacity building, technical assistance, and knowledge sharing to enable them to effectively preserve and use their GRFA. Techniques such as cryopreservation, for instance, require a high level of expertise, skills, and resources that are not accessible to all. Responding to this call, members agreed on the need for training webinars and workshops—including a multi-stakeholder workshop on GRFA in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change—as well as urging FAO to continue providing technical support to countries upon request. Whether this will be sufficient to bridge the enormous national disparities in capacity and knowledge remains to be seen.

Relatedly, members also expressed disappointment over a general paucity of national reporting and low response rates to Commission surveys. Without this crucial national-level information, deciding

on international policy measures becomes increasingly difficult. Some blamed complex reporting procedures for this, while others singled out a lack of coordination at the national level. Whatever the reasons, frustration with the low rates of response was tangible and members pledged to both simplify questionnaires and increase their circulation going forward, with the goal of ensuring decisions by the Commission are based on sound and geographically representative information.

In response to the dwindling health of pollinator populations around the globe, CGRFA 20 saw further steps toward the establishment of a global pollinator platform. Operating in close cooperation with the International Pollinators Initiative set up under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2000, the platform will serve as a hub to collect information on and enhance effective governance of pollinators. Some observers were concerned that this may be too little, too late, criticizing the long timelines and lack of concrete resource mobilization. “If countries don't walk their talk, and if they don't do so soon, this will be little more than a greenwashing platform,” one participant shared.

The difficulties in implementing the various policy initiatives on GRFA laid bare one of the Commission's core weaknesses—it lacks the teeth to enforce the normative guidance it issues.

### ***Sharing the Harvest***

Squeezed in between the ITPGRFA and the CBD, the CGRFA has increasingly seen its work impacted by developments elsewhere. The discussions on access and benefit-sharing as well as digital sequence information (DSI) clearly demonstrated this dilemma. Delegates debated at length the impacts of the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD's decision 16/2 on DSI, and on the impacts of policy frameworks on access to seeds and planting materials—revealing deep divides about questions of sovereignty, identity, ownership, and benefit-sharing. While some developed countries insisted on the importance of open sharing of DSI for food and agriculture, for instance, many developing countries were adamant that any access be accompanied by adequate benefit-sharing measures.

Yet, the Commission's limited mandate makes resolving such debates difficult, if not impossible. Despite its wide substantive scope extending to all biodiversity for food and agriculture, the CGRFA does not adopt legally binding decisions, but can only monitor and study the impacts of decisions reached by the ITPGRFA and the CBD. In light of such constraints, strengthening the Commission's cooperation with and outreach to these fora emerged as one area of common ground.

Precisely because the question of access to and sharing is so central to the rights of the real custodians of GRFA—Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs)—the general lack of civil society participation in the process was another recurring topic. Receiving the opportunity to speak on the meeting's penultimate day, one IPLC representative reminded delegates that they had “long been silent observers to this process,” and now invited the Commission and its members to step up and engage with IPLCs, to “share our knowledge and work together for our common goals.”

In this regard, too, the Commission's work over the next biennium will continue to be intertwined with what happens in other fora. The ITPGRFA is expected to reach agreement on reforming its Multilateral System in the coming months, and the CBD will convene the first meeting of its newly established Subsidiary Body

on Article 8(j) on matters related to IPLCs in October 2025. These developments are expected to generate massive impacts on the rights of farmers, Indigenous Peoples, and other key stakeholders.

Ultimately, CGRFA 20 served as a reminder that most of the genetic diversity that sustains our food system is managed and conserved not only by centralized authorities, but also through a decentralized network of peasants, small-scale fishers and farmers, community genebanks, and Indigenous Peoples. Heeding their wisdom, knowledge, practices, needs, and concerns is imperative if the global community is to retain any hope at achieving the goal it set itself in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—a world without hunger.

Upcoming Meetings

**ITPGRFA Open-ended Working Group on the Multilateral System (MLS):** The thirteenth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of the ITPGRFA will continue discussing the enhancement of the Treaty’s MLS of ABS, set to be finalized by the eleventh meeting of the Governing Body of the ITPGRFA (GB 11). **dates:** 1-4 April 2025 **location:** Rome, Italy **www:** [fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/1712761/](https://fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/meetings-detail/en/c/1712761/)

**UNFF 20:** The UN Forum on Forests will review progress in implementation of the UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030, progress in implementing mid-term review outcomes, and other international forest-related developments. **dates:** 5-9 May 2025 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** [un.org/esa/forests](https://un.org/esa/forests)

**International Agrobiodiversity Congress:** Addressing the theme, “Agrobiodiversity for People and Planet,” and hosted by the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Bioversity Alliance, the Congress will gather policymakers, scientists, producers, entrepreneurs, and farmers with a shared interest in the conservation and sustainable use of agrobiodiversity around the world. **dates:** 20-22 May 2025 **location:** Kunming, China **www:** [alliancebioversityciat.org/events/3rd-international-agrobiodiversity-congress](https://alliancebioversityciat.org/events/3rd-international-agrobiodiversity-congress)

**Global Agrifood Biotechnologies Conference:** Taking place as part of FAO’s 80th Anniversary celebrations, and building on the 2024 Science and Innovation Forum, the conference aims to provide a neutral platform to examine how biotechnological tools can drive transformation to sustainable agrifood systems, ensuring equitable access, and delivering meaningful impacts at all levels. **dates:** 16-18 June 2025 **location:** FAO headquarters, Rome, Italy **www:** [fao.org/events/detail/fao-biotech-conference-2025/en](https://fao.org/events/detail/fao-biotech-conference-2025/en)

**ITPGRFA Working Group on the MLS:** The fourteenth meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group of the ITPGRFA will continue discussing the enhancement of the Treaty’s MLS of ABS, set to be finalized by ITPGRFA GB 11. **dates:** 7-11 July 2025 **location:** Peru **www:** [fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/en/](https://fao.org/plant-treaty/meetings/en/)

**IUCN World Conservation Congress:** Held once every four years, the World Conservation Congress brings together several thousand leaders and decision-makers from government, civil society, Indigenous Peoples, business, and academia, with the goal of conserving the environment and harnessing the solutions nature offers to global challenges. **dates:** 9-15 October 2025 **location:** Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates **www:** [iucncongress2025.org](https://iucncongress2025.org)

**CBD SBSTTA 27:** The 27th meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice will address matters of relevance to the implementation of the Convention and the GBF. **dates:** 20-24 October 2025 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** [cbd.int/meetings](https://cbd.int/meetings)

**CBD SB8(j) 1:** Held back-to-back with SBSTTA 27, the first meeting of the Convention’s Subsidiary Body on Article 8(j) will address matters related to IPLCs. **dates:** 27-30 October 2025 **location:** Panama City, Panama **www:** [cbd.int/meetings](https://cbd.int/meetings)

**ITPGRFA GB 11:** The next meeting of the Governing Body is expected to conclude the revision of the Treaty’s MLS of ABS and will address other issues, including farmers’ rights. **dates:** 24-29 November 2025 **location:** Lima, Peru **www:** [fao.org/plant-treaty](https://fao.org/plant-treaty)

**CGRFA 21:** The 21st session of the CGRFA will convene to review progress on plant, animal, aquatic, forest, and microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources for food and agriculture, among other issues. **dates:** 2027 (TBC) **location:** Rome, Italy (TBC) **www:** [fao.org/cgrfa/en](https://fao.org/cgrfa/en)

For additional upcoming events, see [sdg.iisd.org](https://sdg.iisd.org)

Glossary

ABS	Access and benefit-sharing
AnGR	Animal genetic resources
AqGR	Aquatic genetic resources
BFA	Biodiversity for food and agriculture
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CGRFA	Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
DAD-IS	Domestic Animal Diversity Information Service
DSI	Digital sequence information
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN
FGR	Forest genetic resources
FV/LRs	Farmers’ varieties/landraces
GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
GPA	Global Plan of Action
GRFA	Genetic resources for food and agriculture
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and local communities
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
ITWG	Intergovernmental Technical Working Group
MIGR	Microorganism and invertebrate genetic resources
MLS	Multilateral System of the ITPGRFA
MYPOW	Multi-year Programme of Work
NEIs	New and emerging issues
NFP	National Focal Points
PGR	Plant genetic resources
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOW	State of the World Report