

## ITPGRFA GB 9 Highlights:

**Monday, 19 September 2022**

The ninth session of the Governing Body (GB 9) of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA or Treaty) opened in New Delhi, India, with an inaugural ceremony. Following welcome and opening sessions, delegates heard regional statements, addressed organizational matters, and discussed reports from the GB 9 Chairperson and the Secretary.

### Inaugural Session

Following Indian tradition, dignitaries jointly lit a lamp, to wish prosperity for humanity.

Yasmina El Bahloul (Morocco), GB 9 Chairperson, underscored that the Treaty is the only international legally binding instrument that acknowledges the contributions of farmers, and local and Indigenous communities, towards the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA).

In a video message, Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), highlighted that climate change, biodiversity loss, the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflicts have put pressure on agriculture in times “we need to feed more with less.” Stressing that the Treaty is critical for the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, he called for capacity development, robust institutions, and strong partnerships.

Participants watched a short film on the importance of PGRFA for humans and the planet.

Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator, India, emphasized that the overlapping crises humanity faces create a growing set of challenges regarding energy, food production, inflation, and supply chains. Stressing that global challenges require global solutions, he highlighted farmers’ contributions, providing examples from resurging native plants, such as quinoa and millet.

Underscoring the importance of PGRFA in addressing global food security, Himanshu Pathak, Secretary, Department of Agricultural Research and Education, and Director General, Indian Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR), called for global collaborations to enhance plant gene pools, address biotic and abiotic stressors, enhance germplasm exchanges, and ensure benefit-sharing.

Manoj Ahuja, Secretary of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, India, called attention to the country’s work towards promoting the rights of small and marginal farmers, and stressed the importance of enhancing the Treaty’s Multilateral System (MLS) and strengthening benefit-sharing efforts.

Underlining the need to ensure equitable benefit-sharing from the commercialization of PGRFA, Narendra Singh Tomar, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, India, stressed the importance of both technology and traditional knowledge in PGRFA conservation, including in genebanks. He welcomed the work of the Expert Group on Farmers’ Rights, suggested further research into smaller pulses and food grains, and called for a policy framework to ramp up investment in innovation in PGRFA.

In a vote of thanks to India as the host country, Kent Nnadozie, ITPGRFA Secretary, thanked the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare for the commitment to the successful hosting of the meeting.

### Opening

In a video message from the youth, Jordan Sanchez, Harvard University student, recited her poem titled “On Seed,” in which she referred to farmers as art gallery curators and painters.

Stefan Schmidt, Executive Director, Global Crop Diversity Trust, highlighted commitment of the Crop Trust to extending system-wide technical cooperation for empowering genebanks, noting that only biodiversity-rich agriculture can be productive, sustainable, and provide farmers with economic opportunities that are healthier for people and the planet.

In a video message, the Roca brothers Joan, Josep, and Jordi, chefs of El Cellar de Can Roca restaurant, presented the Seeds for the Future project, which encourages responsible eating habits that protect biodiversity through gastronomy based on quality local ingredients.

Santosh Attavar, Vice President, International Seed Federation, stressed the need to strengthen collaboration among farmers, the public sector, and the private seed sector to ensure more sustainable, resilient, and equitable seed production and food systems.

Participants watched a short film on the importance of plant genetic diversity and the role of ITPGRFA.

Pudi Soren, smallholder farmer from India, highlighted the importance of Treaty’s initiatives, in particular the Benefit-sharing Fund, for local farmers. Drawing from personal experience, she emphasized that new varieties, resistant to droughts and insect invasions, greatly help local communities.

Marco Ferroni, CGIAR System Board Chair, highlighted that CGIAR centers offer 90% of MLS transfers, and underscored that CGIAR will continue to mainstream tools and best practices on ABS and farmers’ rights.

Joining virtually, Irene Hoffmann, Secretary, FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA), drew attention to ongoing work on the third report on the State of the World’s PGRFA, and called for concerted cooperation on the agreement and implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Noting that the future of food security depends on our ability to conserve and sustainably use PGRFA amid climate change and biodiversity loss, ITPGRFA Secretary Nnadozie expressed hope that the meeting will create a roadmap to respond to emerging challenges and strengthen the diversity of PGRFA.

### Statements

Argentina, for the LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GROUP (GRULAC), called for in-depth discussions on funding, the Global Information System (GLIS), conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, and farmers’ rights. He drew attention to items on the MLS, which should be considered alongside digital sequence information (DSI).

Lebanon, for NEAR EAST, underlined the importance of the MLS to support regional collaboration and exchange of genetic resources. He highlighted the need to reignite dialogue on benefit-sharing, including DSI, and urged protection of farmers’ rights and sustainable use.

Uganda, for AFRICA, stressed that despite different regional needs, aspirations, and limitations, all parties share a common goal expressed by the Treaty’s objective. India, for ASIA, highlighted

that some agenda items, including on the MLS and the Funding Strategy, are increasingly complex, especially for those that did not participate in intersessional meetings, calling for detailed introduction and discussion.

Canada, for NORTH AMERICA, looked forward to fruitful interactions, stressing India's contribution to food security and farmers' rights nationally and globally, highlighting the Hard Red Calcutta wheat variety that led to the Marquis bread wheat cultivar. Australia, for SOUTHWEST PACIFIC, shared concerns about rising levels of food insecurity globally, and stressed that access to PGRFA is essential to continue improving crops to achieve food security, address climate change, and satisfy changing consumer preferences.

Moldova, for the EUROPEAN REGIONAL GROUP (ERG), underscored the ever-growing importance of the Treaty for innovation, crop science, and the management of crop diversity for food security. Kuwait, for G-77/CHINA, highlighted intersessional progress on farmers' rights, and suggested that GB 10 take place in the closing months of 2023 at FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy.

BRAZIL underscored the need to strengthen the Benefit-sharing Fund as a priority to leverage new and additional resources, and added that enhancing the MLS will also benefit other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, as a new party, stressed that the Treaty enables access to technical resources and support, and expert advice on food production and farmers' rights.

Underscoring the collective power of peasant farmers, the INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY (IPC) called for ensuring the effective functioning of the MLS, and fair and equitable benefit-sharing from genetic resources in the form of DSI.

### Organizational Matters

Delegates agreed to hybrid meeting modalities (IT/GB-9/22/1.2 Appendix 1), and welcomed the Dominican Republic, Mozambique, and South Sudan as new members to the Treaty, bringing the membership to 149.

Parties adopted the agenda and timetable (IT/GB-9/22/1 and 1.2 Rev.1), agreeing to consider jointly the items on an amendment of the Treaty (IT/GB-9/22/8) and on implementation and operations of the MLS (IT/GB-9/22/9.1). Parties also approved the list of observers (IT/GB-9/22/1.3); accepted the nomination of Bell Batta Torheim (Norway) as rapporteur; and established a credentials committee.

Delegates agreed to convene GB 10 in the last quarter of 2023, in Rome, Italy.

### Establishment of a Budget Committee

The Secretariat introduced the draft terms of reference (ToR) for the budget committee, and the draft work programme and budget for 2022-2023 (IT/GB-9/22/4 and 18). Delegates debated a reference in the ToR, which allowed intersessional work of the budget committee in exceptional circumstances. Czech Republic for the ERG, SWITZERLAND, ARGENTINA, and NORWAY noted that the budget committee meets in-session and dissolves at the end of each meeting. JAPAN noted that this reference should be retained as it pertains to exceptional circumstances. Secretary Nnadozie clarified that the Committee works in-session, but exceptional circumstances may arise necessitating intersessional work. GB 9 Chair El Bahloul established a Friends of the Chair group to resolve this issue. Delegates also established the budget committee.

### Report of the Chairperson

Plenary took note of the Chairperson's report (IT/GB-9/22/5) outlining intersessional work of the Bureau, preparations for GB 9, and updates on partnerships. Chair El Bahloul noted that the work was carried out virtually due to COVID-19-related constraints. She highlighted, among others, the two-year extension of the Secretary's term, and submissions on the role of the ITPGRFA in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Delegates commended the Chair and the Bureau for achieving their mandate despite challenging circumstances.

### Report of the Secretary

Secretary Nnadozie presented his report (IT/GB-9/22/6), noting that, despite COVID-19-related challenges, the frequency and intensity of Treaty-related meetings increased. He highlighted new Treaty members and intersessional activities, including on farmers' rights, the GLIS, emergency measures to support genebanks, communication, and participation in the development of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Delegates expressed appreciation for intersessional work, congratulated the new parties, and supported the establishment of the Emergency Reserve for Germplasm Collections at Risk, jointly established with the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

**Draft Capacity Development Strategy:** The Secretariat presented the strategy, including a summary of consultative processes for its development (IT/GB-9/22/6.1). As a consequence of postponement of GB 9, parties were invited to consider adjusting the original timeframe of 2022-2025 to begin in 2023 and to extend it until 2030.

AFRICA endorsed the strategy. BRAZIL praised the openness and inclusivity of the process, noting that the GB will guide its implementation, and suggesting that its monitoring remain under the Secretariat.

NORTH AMERICA lamented that the process for developing the strategy was not adequately inclusive. He suggested that the first step should be stocktaking of ongoing capacity development activities in support of the Treaty, followed by identification of needs and gaps.

The ERG said the strategy is crucial and must be supported and strengthened. He called for emphasis on approaches for implementation of capacity development specific to the Treaty, further suggesting deleting a reference to the International Convention on Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV Convention). NEAR EAST stressed the need to strengthen implementation of the strategy, and to address capacity building at individual and institutional levels.

**Report on the Impact of COVID-19:** The Secretariat introduced the report (IT/GB-9/22/6.2). The ERG, with ECUADOR, supported the continued development and inclusion of genebank contingency plans and, with NORTH AMERICA, the development of digital solutions for enhancing genebank operations. The ERG also called for closer collaboration with FAO in germplasm preservation in Ukraine. ECUADOR called for further support for local communities in seed production and supply. The Secretariat took note of the guidance.

**Review of Progress on PGRFA-Related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The Secretariat introduced the report (IT/GB-9/22/6.3). Calling for enhanced collaboration between the ITPGRFA, FAO, and CBD Secretariats, the ERG noted the role of the Treaty for the achievements of SDGs 2.5 (agricultural genetic diversity) and 15.6 (fair and equitable benefit-sharing). ECUADOR called for reflecting inputs to SDGs 1 (poverty), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate change) and 17 (partnerships). NORTH AMERICA called for future reports to address crops beyond those contained in Annex I. The Secretariat took note of the guidance.

### In The Corridors

After a long postponement, over 500 delegates gathered for the first day of GB 9 – proof of the importance of resuming in-person meetings following the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. After the festive opening ceremony, delegates rolled up their sleeves and got down to business, addressing the reports of Chair El Bahloul and Secretary Nnadozie. The reports revealed that, despite the obstacles, a wealth of activities took place during the intersessional period, a testament of the tenacity and devotion of all those involved in the Treaty's work.

The corridors were buzzing with expectations for the week ahead. Many pointed towards the development of a roadmap to resume deliberations for the enhancement of the Treaty's Multilateral System of ABS. Others highlighted discussions on farmers' rights, anticipating heated debates on options for implementation. Delegates were in agreement that an exciting, if heavy, week lies ahead. "This week's significance for plant diversity, the Treaty, and the long-term survival and wellbeing of humanity as a whole cannot be overstated," opined one observer, heading for the dinner reception.