

CGRFA 15 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 19 JANUARY 2015

The fifteenth session of the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA 15) opened on Monday, 19 January 2015, at the FAO Headquarters in Rome, Italy. Delegates met in plenary to consider cross-sectoral matters under the Commission's Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW), including: the preparation of the report on the State of the World's Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture (SoW-BFA); targets and indicators for biodiversity for food and agriculture; access and benefit-sharing (ABS) for genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA); and biodiversity and nutrition.

OPENING

CGRFA 15 Chair Amar Tahiri (Morocco) opened the meeting. Maria-Helena Semedo, Deputy Director-General, Natural Resources, FAO, highlighted the CGRFA's role in developing and implementing policies that address growing pressure on natural resources, and affirmed FAO's support for a strong international agreement on climate change.

Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), reported on CBD-CGRFA collaboration, noting FAO's leading role in implementing Aichi target 13 (genetic diversity of cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and wild relatives); the entry into force of the Nagoya Protocol; risk assessment regarding genetically modified organisms; and synthetic biology.

Linda Collette, CGRFA Secretary, reviewed changes in the policy-making context since CGRFA-14, including: formulation of goals under the post-2015 agenda; entry into force of the Nagoya Protocol on ABS; and the ongoing climate negotiations. Chair Tahiri noted that the Bureau is considering a more cross-sectoral mode of working for the Commission.

William Wigmore (Cook Islands) summarized discussions of the special event on 'Food Security and Genetic Diversity' held on Friday, 16 January, which had recognized the need to integrate nutritional aspects in crop and animal improvement programmes.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates adopted the meeting's agenda and organization of work (CGRFA-15/15/1 and 2) with minor amendments.

CROSS-SECTORAL MATTERS

PREPARATION OF THE SOW-BFA: The Secretariat introduced document CGRFA 15/15/3, highlighting that the SoW-BFA should be based on country reports and thematic studies. She noted that although guidelines for country report preparation had been developed, only five country reports have been submitted.

The EU, speaking also for Norway and Switzerland, supported including micro-organisms and invertebrates, and conducting regional exchange of experiences and additional thematic studies. The US expressed concerns on data availability, stressing that the report's conclusions should be based on hard data and scientific evidence.

GRULAC, AFRICA, NEAR EAST, AFGHANISTAN and BRAZIL requested technical and financial support, including webinars, workshops and extrabudgetary resources, to assist countries in the preparation of their reports. ASIA proposed regional consultations to finalize the reports. The Secretariat said technical support could be provided through webinars and video conferencing, if further resources are made available.

Several groups proposed extending the deadline for submitting country reports, with the EU and the US suggesting the end of June 2015, whereas CONGO, ETHIOPIA and ARGENTINA preferred the end of September 2015. Delegates agreed that countries should "preferably" submit their reports by the end of June but "no later" than the end of September, with the CGRFA Secretary clarifying that the SoW-BFA report may therefore not be fully completed for the Commission's next session.

The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE (IPC) FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY proposed considering not only species for human consumption but also other biodiversity, such as insects and micro-organisms. The INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE MOVEMENTS (IFOAM) suggested including ecosystem services, such as pollination, and drawing on outcomes of international conferences and regional symposia on ecological agriculture.

TARGETS AND INDICATORS FOR BIODIVERSITY FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE: The Secretariat introduced document CGRFA-15/15/4. The EU said that indicators should be scientifically sound, understandable, feasible to obtain and flexible, stressing the need for ensuring consistency among the relevant international fora in the refinement of indicators for biodiversity. The US expressed concern regarding food consumption data, which are difficult to obtain. AFRICA requested support to conduct food consumption surveys.

CANADA supported strengthening cooperation with other relevant institutions. On animal genetic resources, he asked to better define breed and population classification and to add statistical tools to assess current trends and status.

The IPC stressed the importance of an indicator to monitor the capacity of farmers and indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as custodians of biodiversity.

Plant GRFA: The Secretariat presented document CGRFA 15/15.4.1, including a proposed list of higher-order composite indicators (HCI) for each of the plant GRFA targets under the Global Plan of Action (GPA). CANADA supported the use of HCIs linked to GPA implementation. BRAZIL said delegates



should agree on a model and methodology rather than endorsing the proposed HCIs. ARGENTINA expressed concerns on data availability for the proposed model and suggested including expert opinions from national focal points to facilitate coherence, applicability and comparability over time.

The US requested replacing quantitative numerical indicators with numerical ranges. The EU expressed concern that HCIs may still require calculation based on the underlying 63 indicators. AFRICA said a pilot phase of monitoring HCIs will be valuable in ensuring the order of priorities.

The Secretariat advised that HCIs are based on the expert judgment of a national focal point or committee, and that countries can identify areas where particular indicators do not apply.

Forest GRFA: The Secretariat introduced document CGRFA 15/15/4.2, which includes a draft list of proposed indicators. BRAZIL, the EU and CANADA supported, and delegates agreed to, requesting FAO to coordinate a consultative process to further refine the list of verifiable indicators and to identify a set of targets for the conservation, sustainable use and development of forest GRFA for the consideration by the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group (ITWG) at its next session.

ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING: Hafad Mozafari Hashjin (Iran) presented the work of the team of technical and legal experts on ABS (ABS expert team) (CGRFA 15/15/Inf. 11 and Inf.12), stressing they were able to agree on draft elements to facilitate domestic implementation of ABS for different subsectors of GRFA. The Secretariat introduced document CGRFA-15/15/5 and other relevant information documents (CGRFA-15/15/Inf.13, Inf.13/Add.1 and Inf.14).

GRULAC preferred to “welcome” rather than “adopt” the draft elements to facilitate domestic implementation of ABS and proposed a reference to the understanding and utilization of traditional knowledge (TK). Expressing concern that further capacity development is subject to the availability of funds, AFRICA supported further review of the draft elements, noting his general support for the proposed resolution. AFRICA and the EU called for mutually supportive work among the Commission, the ITPGR and the Nagoya Protocol.

The EU, speaking also for Norway, Switzerland and Turkey, proposed that countries provide feedback on the use of the draft elements. He suggested emphasizing active management in the resolution’s preamble, and to compiling information on existing tools and voluntary codes of conduct in all subsectors of GRFA. AFGHANISTAN noted that not all FAO Member States are contracting parties to the ITPGR, and recommended seeking legal advice regarding implications of adopting the resolution.

CANADA said ABS for GRFA should be addressed by the ITPGR Governing Body, and, with JAPAN and the EU, proposed reflecting the role of the ITPGR in the draft resolution. He said it is premature to discuss an international ABS instrument, as this depends on how the Nagoya Protocol will be implemented. ARGENTINA said that where a history of human intervention makes it difficult to establish countries of origin, benefit sharing should be determined on a case-by-case basis. JAPAN stressed that the draft elements should not allow for retroactive applications of ABS requirements, and should cover only genetic resources, not biological resources and commodities. The US recommended making the draft elements available for countries to use, highlighting the need for technical assistance to ensure that ABS measures sufficiently accommodate GRFA considerations.

BHUTAN highlighted the need for legal, technical and financial support to developing countries in the implementation of national ABS regimes.

ITPGR highlighted the main developments during its last Governing Body meeting, noting that the Treaty currently has 133 contracting parties. CBD highlighted collaborative work with CGRFA and ITPGR, suggesting the CGRFA could share relevant standards and practices on ABS in the ABS Clearing-house of the Nagoya Protocol.

SEARICE called for highlighting farmers’ rights and their role in the sustainable use and conservation of GRFA. She suggested using the terminology ‘indigenous peoples and local communities’ in accordance with the CBD decision.

Delegates agreed to establish an informal group to further consider: the guidance to be given by the CGRFA; a proposed draft resolution on ABS for GRFA to the FAO Conference; and continuation of the ABS expert team.

BIODIVERSITY AND NUTRITION: The Secretariat presented document CGRFA-15/15/6. ARGENTINA highlighted the importance of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2). With the SOUTHWEST PACIFIC and BRAZIL, he proposed stating that the guidelines on biodiversity and nutrition are “voluntary.”

The EU speaking also for Norway, Switzerland and Turkey, proposed more references to aquatic resources and to additional ICN 2 recommendations, as well as the improvement of the scientific base.

The US expressed concerns that a section on raising awareness and implementation suggests scientific certainty that does not exist. The US and CANADA highlighted the need for robust scientific evidence.

CANADA said the concepts of dietary diversity and under-utilized species need to be well-defined and that recommendations in the guidelines should be consistent with relevant international obligations.

AFRICA called for additional research to improve the scientific base and asked for support to develop capacity for implementation. KENYA noted biodiversity’s potential to combat malnutrition and called for additional indicators, such as for nutrient productivity.

BRAZIL supported the call to enhance research capacity, knowledge and awareness of useful traits from the nutrition perspective; and to give special attention to native and locally-adapted species and breeds. The SOUTHWEST PACIFIC recommended targeting primary-school students and eliciting support at the highest level to promote consumption of highly nutritious indigenous crops, such as the Pacific banana.

The IPC said loss of biodiversity is not a reason to invest in bio-fortified food. He called for farmers to be allowed access to public gene banks. IFOAM called for communication campaigns to introduce healthy foods, targeting children and youth. The GLOBAL FORUM FOR AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (GFAR) invited countries’ participation in efforts by GFAR, FAO and CGIAR to develop metrics and indicators of nutritious consumption, based on the nutritive quality of foods, as well as access to food.

The item will be further discussed on Tuesday.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Delegates started CGRFA 15 in an upbeat mood convening in *bella Roma* after a busy weekend. Some had already met in various pre-meeting events, including a full day seminar on biodiversity and food security the previous Friday. The Seminar’s call to incorporate nutrition in crop and animal improvement programmes raised expectations that CGRFA-15 would “move from talk to action.” After the discussion, however, some felt that the proposed guidelines risked missing the mark, while others explained that a strong outcome should clearly express the links between nutrition and food security.

At lunchtime, some delegates feared that the swift pace of the morning could be bogged down by ABS discussions due to well-known polarization of views around intellectual property and farmers’ rights. As negotiations did grind to halt, proving the doomsayers right in principle, the latter had to concede that the reason for protracted discussions was procedural rather than substantive. As delegates prepared to take ABS into informal discussions, several noted that they did not see any insurmountable challenges, with one predicting that, “We’ll be over this in a few hours, if not days.”