

SHARING THE BENEFITS FROM FOOD PLANTS THROUGH THE INTERNATIONAL TREATY

A NEW BIENNIUM AND A NEW ROUND OF BENEFIT-SHARING

Berlin, Germany, 17 January 2014 – The Global Forum for Food and Agriculture on "Empowering Agriculture: Fostering Resilience – Securing Food and Nutrition" took place in Berlin as part of International Green Week 2014. On this occasion, a number of State Secretaries of Agriculture, high-level delegates, diplomats and experts met to discuss the importance of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The event, "Sharing the Benefits from Food Plants: The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources on Food and Agriculture" came at a time when the Treaty enters a new biennium and a new phase of its implementation, moving from the start-up to the enhancement phase.

Among the issues discussed at the event were the importance of strengthening funding for the Treaty's Benefit-Sharing Fund, which helps support projects in developing countries, and the enhancement of the Multilateral System of the Treaty, which enables the exchange of plant genetic material throughout the world.

In her welcome address, Dr Maria Flachsbarth, German State Secretary of Agriculture, said "these next two years will be of immense importance for the evolution of the Treaty. Contracting Parties have established a roadmap to enhance the functioning of the Multilateral System of the International Treaty. Germany is conscious that this represents a unique opportunity to strengthen the benefit-sharing of the Treaty in a predictable and sustainable manner."

Germany has contributed to the further development of the Global Information System and to the Benefit-Sharing Fund (BSF) of the International Treaty. "The main beneficiaries of the German-sponsored activities through the BSF are poor vulnerable farmers, who strongly depend on crop production for their livelihoods and food security," she said.

Ms Hanne Maren Blåfjell, Norway's Vice-Minister of Agriculture and Food, said "Norway is committed to continuing contributing to our joint global efforts to secure plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Securing these resources is a shared responsibility. All Contracting Parties and other stakeholders benefit from a well-functioning global system for crop diversity management, and we all need to contribute."

Norway recently announced a contribution of almost USD 7 million to the Benefit-Sharing Fund at the occasion of the Fifth Session of the Treaty's Governing Body in Oman in September 2013. "The reason Norway recently made a significant contribution to this fund is that we see it as an essential element of the Treaty itself, providing concrete benefits to developing country farmers on the ground and in their efforts to achieve food security now and in the years to come."

The Treaty is preparing to launch its third call for proposals under the Benefit-Sharing Fund (BSF), which will continue to focus on helping farmers adapt to climate change, and on

supporting the sharing of technology, knowledge and plant genetic material needed by developing countries to achieve food security. Thanks to voluntary contributions received from Norway, the European Commission, Italy and others, the third round of BSF projects will have over USD 11 million to directly support projects aimed at conserving food plants in developing countries. The BSF is envisaged to become self-supporting over time through payments made by those accessing and using the plant genetic material available to them through the Treaty's Multilateral System. However, until this user-based payment mechanism is fully operational, the BSF relies largely on voluntary contributions from Contracting Parties and other stakeholders.

Speaking on behalf of the European Commission, which has contributed almost USD 7 million to the Treaty's Benefit-Sharing Fund, Mr Jean-Pierre Halkin, Head, Unit for Rural Development, Food Security and Nutrition, Europe Aid, described the Treaty as "essential to the governance of plant genetic resources, and for ensuring equitable access to the most important crops. Access to plant genetic resources and their sustainable use are particularly important for smallholder farmers in developing countries, who are most dependent on these crops for their livelihoods and who are most at risk to physical and economic shocks, including those due to climate change."

"The European Commission looks forward to seeing the launch of the third call from proposals (under the Treaty's BSF) and the implementation of activities that will improve the livelihoods and resilience of poor rural communities," Mr Halkin said.

In his video address, Dr Braulio Dias, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), emphasized the common goals of the CBD and the International Treaty in conserving agricultural biodiversity and plant genetic resources. "I am very pleased to see that the Treaty is generating financial resources through its Benefit-Sharing Fund, and I am even more pleased to see these resources beginning to provide support where it most counts – on farms."

Dr Shakeel Bhatti, Secretary of the International Treaty, said "This new biennium is full of opportunities for advancing the multilateral work of the Treaty, first and foremost in the important new Working Group on the Enhancement of the Multilateral System of the Treaty, which has the potential to create the next generation of access and benefit-sharing measures under the Treaty."

"We need the strong commitment of all Regions to enhance the benefit-sharing and the functioning of Treaty's Multilateral System to exchange crop diversity," said Mr Matthew Worrell, Chairman of the Sixth Session of the Treaty's Governing Body. Mr Worrell called on all parties to actively engage in the progress of the International Treaty, and said, "we need already to mobilize resources in this biennium for the fourth round of benefit-sharing so that monetary benefit-sharing is sustained until the user-based mechanisms are fully in place. This will sustain and further increase the high-impact support and benefits which the Treaty Benefit-Sharing Fund has already generated for the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources worldwide."

The Global Forum for Food and Agriculture included a Ministerial Summit, which released a joint Communique, “Empowering Agriculture: Fostering Resilience – Securing Food and Nutrition,” undertook to “support global efforts to encourage the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources (on farm, in situ and ex situ) and the sharing of the benefits arising out of their use in order to ensure that future generations have access to the necessary diversity for breeding.”

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Left to right: Mr Jean-Pierre Halkin, European Commission; Dr Maria Flachsbarth, State Secretary of Agriculture, Germany; Ms Hanne Maren Blåfjelldal, Vice-Minister of Agriculture & Food, Norway; Mr Matthew Worrell (Australia), Chair of the Sixth Governing Body, Dr Shakeel Bhatti, Secretary, ITPGRFA



Dr. Shakeel Bhatti, Secretary of the ITPGRFA



Mr Matthew Worrell (Australia), Chair, Sixth Governing Body



Dr Maria Flachsbarth, State Secretary of Agriculture, Germany

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture recognizes the enormous contribution of farmers to the diversity of crops that feed the world; establishes a global system to provide farmers, plant breeders and scientists access to plant genetic materials; and ensures that recipients share benefits they derive from the use of these genetic materials with the countries where they have originated.

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Mr Jean-Pierre Halkin, European Commission



Dr Geoffrey Hawtin, Senior Technical Advisor



Dr Maria Flachsbarth, State Secretary of Agriculture, Germany



Panel



Dr Silvana Maselli - BSF Project Coordinator



Audience