

April 2021



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations**



The International Treaty
ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

**INTERNATIONAL TREATY ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES
FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE**

**FOURTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE
GLOBAL INFORMATION SYSTEM OF ARTICLE 17 OF THE TREATY**

20–21 April 2021 (Teleconference)

REPORT

Opening of the meeting

1. Mr Kent Nnadozie, Secretary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, welcomed the participants to the fourth meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on the Global Information System of Article 17 of the Treaty (Committee). The full list of participants is contained in *Annex 3*.

I. ELECTION OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS

2. The two Co-Chairs, Mr Axel Diederichsen (Canada) and Mr Federico Condón (Uruguay), had been elected by the Committee, in advance of the meeting, by electronic means.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

3. The Committee adopted the Agenda, as contained in *Annex 1*.

4. The Committee thanked the Secretary for the preparations and the documentation for the meeting. It expressed concerns about the very late circulation of documents which did not permit adequate consultations within the regions. It advised that the documents should be circulated at least six weeks prior to a meeting.

**III. REPORT ON THE OPERATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PROGRAMME OF WORK**

5. The Secretariat introduced the document, IT/GB-9/SAC-GLIS-4/21/3, *Report on the Operations and Implementation of the Programme of Work*, which provided an overview of the major activities undertaken under the Programme of Work of the Global Information System (GLIS) since the Eighth Session of the Governing Body.

6. The Committee recalled that the vision for GLIS is that it integrates and augments existing information systems and builds upon the work of networks, projects and initiatives, whenever possible. The Committee also recalled Article 17 of the Treaty stating the GLIS shall be built based on existing information systems. The Committee underlined that the System should strengthen existing systems and, where gaps remain, facilitate the development of new systems and initiatives. The Committee was of the view that the identification of those gaps and how they could be addressed remain an important part of the future work for the GLIS and the Committee.

Agenda Item 3.1 - Update on the Implementation of the GLIS Portal

7. The Committee took note of the document, IT/GB-9/SAC- GLIS-4/21/3.1, *Structural Elements of the GLIS Portal*, and welcomed the new version of the home page and the new directory of links and services.¹

8. The Committee found that the channels presented on the home page reflected the elements of the Vision well and encouraged the Secretary to continue developing the Portal and its directory, taking into account the feedback provided at the meeting. It suggested that the content of the target systems and services should be indexed. The Committee advised the Secretariat to refine the structure of the channels by filtering and grouping several links and by using relevant keywords. It advised the Secretariat that the GLIS should continue making information on material in the Multilateral System accessible to the users of GLIS and pointing to databases with such information.

9. The Committee appreciated the ongoing collaboration with Genesys and WIEWS and the linkages provided to these systems for information about the *ex situ* sources of PGRFA. Regarding the sources for PGRFA conserved *in situ*, the Committee was of the view that there was still an information gap to be filled and that it would require further consideration and work in the future with both tools. Cooperation with the Crop Trust was also encouraged.

10. The Committee also noted that the channel, 'Added Value Chain', would benefit from further work. In this context, and with a view to fostering synergies, the Committee suggested that, among other approaches, the Secretariat explore collaboration with research networks and science groups, possibly through the organization of a workshop. One of the goals could be the development of an approach or an action plan for GLIS.

11. The Committee took note of the development of the Graph Browser and provided advice for its further development. The Committee noted that the interpretation of the lines in the plot might not be straightforward or instinctive for some users, so it suggested to better document comprehensively the technical details for generating the graphs, and to explain the links and the relationships between the representations. It also recommended the development of use cases to illustrate the needs that the graphs could address, and capturing and addressing the technical requirements of the users of the tool. The Graph Browser should also be accompanied by comprehensive technical documentation explaining the tool's functions and how the various relationship types can be used.

12. The Committee advised the Secretary, subject to the availability of resources, to continue developing and strengthening the capacity of Contracting Parties, especially with regard to keeping their PGRFA records up to date and making them accessible using a publicly accessible genebank database such as GRIN-Global. The Committee also advised the Secretary to promote the use of information management systems for genebank collections, such as GRIN-Global which also includes helpful guidance from USDA on plant taxonomy.

Agenda Item 3.2 - Development and Promotion of Digital Object Identifiers

13. The Committee noted the progress made since the last Session of the Governing Body and recalled that the use of the Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) is voluntary. The Committee also briefly discussed that assigning multiple DOIs for the same accession could cause confusion and it was brought to the attention of the Committee that some genebanks have used stable and unique identifiers for decades.

14. The Committee noted that holders of PGRFA had assigned more than 1.1 million DOIs, so far. It also invited the Secretary to continue reporting at future meetings on the metrics related to the use of DOIs, including the number of links to resources available in other information systems.

15. The Secretariat informed the Committee that the GLIS Portal is being promoted mainly through participation in projects, webinars, presentations, direct assistance to genebanks and other organizations, and workshops. Since the Eighth Governing Body, it had continued its

¹ Available at <https://ssl.fao.org/glis/>

collaboration with ECPGR, the Crop Trust, the DivSeek International Network, the CGIAR Centres and the partners of the projects funded by the Benefit-sharing Fund, among others.

16. The Committee noted that in the application of the DOI guidelines, the comments provided by national genebanks should be taken into consideration with the view to minimising possible duplication of identifiers for the same material after transfers. It also noted the multidimensional nature and purpose of the DOIs in the establishment of relationships through different layers, including pedigree, the PGRFA holder, the biological status, the types of related links and others.

17. The Committee invited the Secretariat to explore the use of DOIs in the context of documentation of Crop Wild Relatives conserved *in situ* and material managed on-farm, in consultation with relevant networks, and to report any progress to the next meeting.

IV. PGRFA DOCUMENTATION AND DESCRIPTORS

Agenda Item 4.1 - Descriptors for Crop Wild Relatives Conserved *in Situ*

18. The Secretariat introduced the document, IT/GB-9/SAC-GLIS-4/21/4.1, *Descriptors for crop wild relatives conserved in situ*, which provided updates on the activities under the project, “Development of a Globally Agreed List of Descriptors for *in situ* Crop Wild Relatives Documentation”.

19. The Committee appreciated the publication of the “Descriptors for Crop Wild Relatives Conserved *In Situ*” by the Secretariat and considered it a fundamental building block to creating new inventories. It invited the Secretariat to promote the new descriptors to facilitate their adoption and use.² The Committee also appreciated the testing conducted in the GRULAC region and Africa, and welcomed the further testing activities planned for Europe and Asia in 2021.

20. The Committee observed that only a very limited number of countries had national inventories and noted that it would be advisable for the Governing Body to consider inviting Contracting Parties to develop national inventories of crop wild relatives conserved *in situ*, noting that this activities would be carried out by countries on a voluntary basis.

21. In order to facilitate the consideration of the issue by the Governing Body at its Ninth Session, the Committee invited the Secretary to prepare a paper outlining the possible mechanisms and options to connect the data of the national inventories, as appropriate.

Agenda Item 4.2 - Review and development of descriptors for specific crops

22. The Secretariat introduced the document, IT/GB-9/SAC-GLIS-4/21/4.2, *Review and Development of Descriptors Lists for Specific Crops*, which provided updates on the previous work undertaken by the Committee, the result of an electronic consultation and a technical assessment for the assignment of priority to various crops.

23. The Committee appreciated the work undertaken so far and supported the list of prioritized crops, as contained in *Annex 2*.

24. The Committee noted the key role of the Secretariat in convening and facilitating discussions with the groups of experts from all the regions and stressed the need for collaboration with crop networks when developing and revising the crop descriptors lists. In this context, it also noted the relevance of the descriptors developed by the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and descriptors developed and applied by national research systems and genebanks such as USDA, IPK or VIR-Russia.

² English: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3256en/cb3256en.pdf> Spanish: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3256es/cb3256es.pdf> French: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3256fr/cb3256fr.pdf> and Arabic: <http://www.fao.org/3/cb3256ar/cb3256ar.pdf>

V. ACCESS AND USE OF PGRFA INFORMATION THROUGH THE GLOBAL INFORMATION SYSTEM AND OTHER RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS

25. The Secretariat introduced the document, IT/GB-9/SAC-GLIS-4/21/5, *Access and Use of PGRFA Information through the Global Information System and other relevant Developments*. The document provided an update on developments that occurred in the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity regarding digital sequence information (DSI) or genetic sequence data (GSD),³ as requested by the Governing Body at its Eighth Session.
26. The Committee noted that the information provided on developments in other fora was helpful and advised the Secretariat to continue monitoring these relevant processes and informing the Committee. It also stressed that the forum for discussing DSI/GSD in relation to PGRFA and benefit-sharing should be the International Treaty through its Governing Body.
27. The Committee stressed the importance of promoting access to information for a range of users and noted that providing such access was a form of benefit-sharing. The Committee also underlined that the Programme of Work should aim at eliminating barriers to accessing information.
28. The Committee noted that making existing data more accessible creates more opportunities to generate broader social benefits under PGRFA research. In this context, the Committee was of the view that the Programme of Work should support countries in improving documentation, in backing up paper records digitally and in making such information accessible, and in maintaining duplicates of digital records in more than one location and/or information management system.
29. With regard to the documentation for future meetings, and recognizing the extensive work done on the voluntary use of DOIs, the Committee invited the Secretary to discuss/elaborate on the use of other mechanisms on which the GLIS could impact the access and use of PGRFA information and to elaborate a paper with considerations to PGRFA data in the broader context of Article 13.2.a of the International Treaty. The paper could illustrate the steps of data generation, the relationship with scientific journals and reference databases, the use and improvement by research institutions of breeding applications and interfaces and other tools that can help to increase the value of PGRFA, as well as the needs and gaps in institutions based in developing countries Contracting Parties.

VI. REPORT ON PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

30. The Committee took note of the document, IT/GB-9/SAC-GLIS-4/21/6, *Report on Partnerships and Collaboration*, and the Co-Chairs welcomed several invited experts from partner organisations to provide updates on their respective areas of work of relevance to GLIS.
31. Mr Matija Obreza (Crop Trust) informed on the latest developments of Genesys and the collaboration with genebanks, including the use of dedicated tools and IT infrastructure. He also illustrated the most recent statistics on the records and collections published in the database. He further provided an overview of the contribution of Genesys to GLIS and the expanded collaboration to various other activities.
32. Mr Matthew Dias (CBD) updated on the latest developments of the ABS Clearing-House of the Nagoya Protocol. He indicated that almost 70 percent of the certificates and 65 percent of the records published were related to plants and provided examples of Internationally Recognized Certificate of Compliance (IRCCs) related to crops.
33. Mr Roberto Papa (Polytechnic University of Le Marche) presented the project “Intelligent Collections of Food Legumes Genetic Resources for European Agrofood Systems” (INCREASE). He explained that the project, funded under the Horizon 2020 Programme of the European Union, was using DOIs to connect passport with phenotypic data through a decentralized research experience with citizens in various countries.

³ The term “digital sequence information” is utilized interchangeably with “genetic sequence data” in this report, without any prejudice to the possible definition of terminology by the Governing Body.

34. Mr Juan Carlos Alarcon (CIMMYT) described the latest collaboration with the Treaty Secretariat for the development of the GRIN-GLOBAL wizards that allow the genebank curators to query relevant information about the SMTAs to export it to Easy-SMTA as well as the datasets needed for the assignation of DOIs.

35. Mr Mauricio Parra Quijano (National University of Colombia) reported on the major achievements of the Capfitogen Programme during its first eight years of operations, in relation to the development of the tools, the production of documentation and the delivery of the training and capacity building support. He also presented a version of the Capfitogen running on a server.

36. Mr David King (CGIAR-BDP) provided an update on the latest developments of the Big Data Platform of the CGIAR and illustrated some of its work to develop novel methodologies and innovative pilot projects to increase the impact of its community of researchers and analysts. He also provided an overview of some of the activities related to the promotion of open access and interoperability.

37. Mr Stefano Diulgheroff (FAO) provided an update on the World Information and Early Warning System (WIEWS) on PGRFA and explained the way in which users can access the information provided by countries under the reporting processes for the indicator 2.5.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals and for the Second Global Plan of Action on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

38. Mr Michael Halewood (CGIAR) informed the Committee on some aspects of the reform of the CGIAR and the “*CGIAR 2030 research and innovation strategy*” with a focus on transforming food, land and water systems in a climate crisis. He reported that most of the research activities and initiatives related to the work of the International Treaty would be grouped under the science programme “Genetic innovation” and that most of the Centers were expected to start working as One CGIAR from January 2022.

39. The Committee thanked the Secretariat for inviting the presenters, thanked them for the excellent presentations and noted the importance of establishing and strengthening collaboration with other organizations, projects and initiatives for the implementation of Article 17 of the International Treaty. The Committee suggested to the Secretariat to have fewer but longer presentations at future virtual meetings to allow for more in-depth discussion or to make video presentations available before the meetings.

VII. REVISION AND UPDATE OF THE GLIS PROGRAMME OF WORK

40. The Committee considered the draft GLIS Programme of Work and advised the Secretariat to further revise it and share with the members of the Committee for further comments.

VIII. OTHER MATTERS

41. The Committee agreed to adopt the report of meeting electronically.

IX. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

42. The Co-Chairs thanked all the experts and observers for their participation and the Secretary for his support and adjourned the meeting.

**FOURTH MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE
GLOBAL INFORMATION SYSTEM OF ARTICLE 17 OF THE TREATY****20–21 April 2021 (Teleconference)****AGENDA****TUESDAY, 20 APRIL 2021 (12:00 – 15:00 CEST)****Opening of the meeting****Item 1. Election of Co-Chairpersons****Item 2. Adoption of the Agenda and Timetable****Item 3. Report on the Operations and Implementation of the Programme of Work**

- 3.1 Update on the Implementation of the GLIS Portal
- 3.2 Development and Promotion of Digital Object Identifiers

Item 4. PGRFA Documentation and descriptors

- 4.1 Descriptors for Crop Wild Relatives Conserved *in Situ*
- 4.2 Review and development of descriptors for specific crops

Item 5. Access and Use of PGRFA Information through the Global Information System and other relevant developments**WEDNESDAY, 21 APRIL 2021 (12:00 – 15:00 CEST)****Item 6. Report on Partnerships and Collaboration****Item 7. Revision and Update of the GLIS Program of Work****Item 8. Other Matters****Item 9. Closure**

Prioritized crops for the development and update of descriptor lists

<i>Annex I</i> crops	Priority
Oat	1
Pea	1
Sunflower	1
Eggplant	2
Grass forages	2
Legume forages (Lupinus or Medicago)	2
<i>Non-Annex I</i> crops	
Soyabean	1
Flax	2
Cucurbits (cucumbers, watermelons, squashes, pumpkins)	2

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