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COMMISSION ON GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

Sixth Session

13–15 April 2021

DRAFT REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Sixth Session of the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Forest Genetic Resources (Working Group) was held from 13 to 15 April 2021. The members and alternates of the Working Group are given in *Appendix X*. The list of delegates and observers is available on the Meeting website of the Working Group.¹
2. The meeting was convened virtually, on an exceptional basis, in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the associated public-health concerns and constraints. This followed consultations by the Commission's Bureau on the arrangements for the holding of the meeting virtually and the endorsement of the arrangements by the Members of the Working Group.
3. Prior to beginning its deliberation, the Working Group confirmed that the virtual meeting constituted a formal regular session of the Working Group. The Working Group agreed to apply its normal rules and practices to the conduct of the meeting and to suspend any rules that may be incompatible with the virtual mode used for the purposes of the meeting. The Working Group also agreed to the application of any special procedures or amended working modalities as may be required for the efficient conduct of the meeting.

II. OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON, VICE-CHAIRPERSONS AND *RAPPORTEUR*

4. Mr Czesław Koziol (Poland), Vice-Chair of the Fifth Session of the Working Group, welcomed delegates and observers.
5. Ms Mette Wilkie, Director, Forestry Division, welcomed delegates and observers. She stressed the crucial importance of trees and other woody plants species, and their genetic resources, for both people and biodiversity. She also recalled the important role of sustainable forest management, including forest restoration, in safeguarding biodiversity. She further pointed out that successful forest restoration requires well-functioning national tree seed systems and taking into account genetic considerations in practical forest restoration work. Moreover, she emphasized that the topics for this meeting are highly relevant to sustainable development and efforts to conserve biodiversity and forest genetic resources. She highlighted the need to further increase awareness and stressed that the implementation of the Global Plan of Action will help to contribute towards global efforts.
6. Ms Irene Hoffmann, Secretary of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Commission), welcomed delegates and observers. She stressed the importance of the continued implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources and its monitoring, as well as the preparation of the Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic, for the Commission's work. She concluded by emphasizing the need to address forest genetic resources in the broader context of biodiversity and to implement policies on forest genetic resources in harmony with other policies, including those addressing other genetic resources as well as the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.
7. The Vice-Chair informed the Working Group that, in line with Article III of the Statutes of the Working Group, Eswatini (instead of Cameroon), France (instead of Sweden), the Islamic Republic of Iran (instead of Jordan) and Afghanistan (instead of Sudan) would participate in the session as Members.

¹<http://www.fao.org/forest-genetic-resources/working-group/intergovernmental-technical-working-group-on-forest-genetic-resources/detail/en/c/1256834/>

8. The Working Group elected Mr Yongqi Zhen (China) as Chair. The Working Group elected Mr Sihle Magagula (Eswatini), Ms Mari Rusanen (Finland), Mr Leonardo Gallo (Argentina), Mr Khosro Sagheb-talebi (the Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr Gwylim Blackburn (Canada) and Mr Anton Lata (Papua New Guinea) as Vice-Chairs. Ms Mari Rusanen was elected *Rapporteur*.

9. The Working Group adopted the Agenda, as given in *Appendix X*.

III. STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE CONSERVATION, SUSTAINABLE USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

10. The Working Group considered the document *Status of implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Forest Genetic Resources*.²

11. The Working Group took note of the activities reported and acknowledged the progress made in the implementation of the Global Plan of Action, including its contribution to the international agenda of research in forest genetic resources. The Working Group acknowledged FAO's successful mobilization of extra-budgetary resources for the preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* and the development of the global information system. It thanked the Government of Germany for providing financial support for this work. The Working Group invited countries to strengthen their efforts to implement the Global Plan of Action. It also encouraged countries to continue mainstreaming forest genetic resources into larger and holistic actions on sustainable forest management and forest-based climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, as well as to identify needs for specific and strategic actions on forest genetic resources.

12. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to continue coordinating and supporting the implementation of the Global Plan of Action, in collaboration with regional networks on forest genetic resources and relevant international organizations. It further recommended that the Commission request FAO to continue its efforts to increase international awareness of the Global Plan of Action and the importance of forest genetic resources, and make the Voluntary guidelines for preparing a national strategy for forest genetic resources, including examples of national approaches, publicly available as soon as possible. The Working Group also recommended that the Commission encourage donors to support the implementation of the Global Plan of Action.

IV. STATUS OF PREPARATION OF THE SECOND REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

13. The Working Group considered the document *Status of preparation of the Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources*.³

14. The Working Group took note of the status of preparation of *The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* (Second Report) and of the activities reported in relation to the preparation of the Second Report. The Working Group thanked FAO for organizing regional training workshops assisting National Focal Points in the preparation of their country reports. It requested FAO to ensure an inclusive process for the four expert meetings that will gather additional information on forest genetic resources from the scientific community for the preparation of the Second Report.

² CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/2.

³ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/3.

15. The Working Group stressed the urgency of finalizing the Second Report and recommended that the Commission invite countries that have not yet done so to nominate a National Focal Point. It also invited countries, regional networks and relevant international organizations that have not yet done so to submit their final reports to FAO by 31 October 2021 at the latest in order to not delay the finalization of the draft Second Report foreseen for review by the Working Group at its next Session and consideration by the Commission at its Nineteenth Regular Session. It noted that regional networking and the sharing of experiences could assist National Focal Points in preparing their country reports. It further noted that several countries informed their intention to submit their country reports by the deadline.

16. The Working Group also recommended that the Commission invite donors to support the country reporting, finalization and publication of the Second Report, and FAO to explore cost-effective and new ways to publish and distribute the Second Report and its key findings. It further encouraged FAO to make the country reports available on its Web site.

V. DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW GLOBAL INFORMATION SYSTEM ON FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

17. The Working Group considered the document *Development of a new global information system on forest genetic resources*.⁴

18. The Working Group took note of the activities reported for the development of the new global information system on forest genetic resources. It recommended that the new information system provide a user-friendly tool for reporting and an easily accessible web based platform for sharing data on forest genetic resources.

19. The Working Group welcomed the involvement of National Focal Points in the needs assessment and testing at different stages of development of the information system, and recommended that it contribute to the harmonization of national and regional forest genetic resource reporting and thereby reduce the reporting burden for countries and facilitate access to information on forest genetic resources. The Working Group encouraged FAO to continue informing the National Focal Points on the development of the information system. It took note of the interest of CIFOR-ICRAF and the European Forest Institute to contribute to the development of the new information system.

20. It recommended that the Commission invite countries and their National Focal Points on forest genetic resources to contribute to the development and testing of the new global information system on forest genetic resources, and to continue providing data on forest genetic resources, based on the targets, indicators and verifiers adopted by the Commission at its Sixteenth Regular Session⁵ with a view to wide dissemination. The Working Group also recommended that the Commission request FAO to continue its efforts in developing the new user-friendly global information system on forest genetic resources. The Working Groups also stressed the importance of avoiding duplication and distinguishing this information system from pre-existing ones.

⁴ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/4.

⁵ CGRFA-16/17/Report, paragraph 74; CGRFA-16/17/20, *Appendix C*.

VI. ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHARING FOR FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

21. The Working Group considered the document *Access and benefit-sharing for genetic resources for food and agriculture: Review and outlook*⁶ and took note of the information documents *Draft Survey of ABS Country Measures Accommodating Distinctive Features of Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and Associated Traditional Knowledge*⁷ and *Inputs by Members on access and benefit-sharing for genetic resources for food and agriculture*.⁸

22. The Working Group commended the Commission's work on access and benefit-sharing for genetic resources for food and agriculture, encouraged the Commission to continue this work and took note of developments under other international agreements and instruments relevant to ABS. It emphasized the need to avoid duplication of and ensure consistency with the work in other relevant fora. It welcomed the *Draft Survey of ABS Country Measures Accommodating Distinctive Features of Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and Associated Traditional Knowledge* as a comprehensive and useful compilation of existing ABS measures accommodating the distinctive features of GRFA. Members of the Working Group provided comments on the draft survey, informed about ongoing projects and national experiences and noted that written comments and inputs could still be submitted in writing.

23. The Working Group recommended that the Commission consider at some stage the revision of the *ABS Elements with Explanatory Notes*, with a view to reflect specific examples of ABS country measures that accommodate the distinctive features of GRFA and/or traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources for food and agriculture (TKGRFA).

24. The Working Group also recommended that the Commission consider at some stage the preparation of a report on the implementation of ABS country measures to the different subsectors of GRFA in practice, with a view to identifying the effects of ABS measures on the utilization and conservation of the different subsectors of GRFA and TKGRFA and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits. It recommended that such report should not imply a high reporting burden for Members and not duplicate existing reporting requirements.

25. The Working Group further recommended that the Commission request the Secretariat to prepare an assessment of the usefulness of the ABS Elements for the development and implementation of ABS measures, as they are applied to the different subsectors of GRFA, with the aim of identifying and addressing gaps and weaknesses, and recommend activities for consideration by the Working Groups and the Commission.

VII. "DIGITAL SEQUENCE INFORMATION" ON FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

26. The Working Group considered the document "*Digital sequence information" on genetic resources for food and agriculture: Innovation opportunities, challenges and implications*.⁹ It reviewed the actual or potential applications of "DSI" in the field of forest genetic resources, as set out in the working document, and considered that they covered the most important applications of "DSI" in sustainable forestry, conservation and trade.

⁶ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/5.

⁷ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/Inf.3.

⁸ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/Inf.4.

⁹ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/6.

27. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to analyze the current impact of existing national measures or approaches of ABS for “DSI” on research and development in the food and agriculture sector, for review by the Working Groups and the Commission.
28. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to hold an intersessional workshop, in collaboration with relevant instruments and organizations, to raise awareness of relevant stakeholders of the role of “DSI” for research and development related to GRFA, and the food and agriculture sector in general, as well as of the challenges for accessing and making full use of “DSI”.
29. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to support countries, in particular developing countries, including through regional and interregional training, in building the necessary technical, institutional and human capacity to utilize “DSI” on GRFA for research and development.
30. The Working Group recommended that the Commission continue monitoring developments relevant to “DSI” in other international fora, to consider the implications of these developments for the access to, use of and the sharing of benefits derived from GRFA, with a view to identify, as appropriate, key aspects that should be taken into consideration in addressing “DSI” on GRFA and to create an enabling environment and facilitate access, as well as build capacity to generate, use, share and access data for conservation, development and sustainable use of GRFA.

VIII. THE ROLE OF FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES IN MITIGATION OF AND ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

31. The Working Group considered the document *Climate change and genetic resources for food and agriculture*¹⁰ and took note of the information documents *FAO activities on climate change*¹¹ and *The role of genetic resources for food and agriculture in climate change adaptation and mitigation*.¹²
32. The Working Group took note of the scoping study on the role of GRFA in adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change and recommended that the Commission request FAO to publish it. The Working Group reviewed the draft revised Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) work stream on climate change, as contained in *Appendix I* to the document CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/7.
33. The Working Group noted the already heavy reporting burden on countries and the need to avoid any unnecessary extra burden and to streamline reporting processes. It underscored that the future work of the Commission on climate change should build on the current work on GRFA and be complementary to the work of other relevant international organizations. It also recommended that the Commission request FAO to consider biodiversity for food and agriculture and GRFA in its future work on climate change.
34. The Working Group noted the ongoing country reporting for *The Second Report on the State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* and the Commission's request to provide guidance to the Commission on the preparation of a country-driven global assessment of the role of GRFA in adaptation to and mitigation of climate change¹³, if this is considered pertinent.
35. The Working Group reviewed the proposed country survey on climate change and GRFA, as contained in *Appendix II* to the document CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/7, and recommended that the Commission review the country survey on climate change and GRFA, and consider possible flexible

¹⁰ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/7.

¹¹ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/Inf.5.

¹² CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/Inf.6.

¹³ CGRFA-16/17/Report Rev.1, paragraph 27; CGRFA-17/19/Report, paragraph 28.

modalities to integrate a shorter version, where appropriate, of the survey. It recommended that the Commission invite FAO to circulate the survey to countries and make the results available for consideration by the Working Groups and, subsequently, the Commission. It further recommended that the Commission consider the possibility of further including information provided by countries on GRFA and climate change in on-going global assessments of the state of the world's forest and plant genetic resources, as an alternative to an additional global assessment on climate change.

36. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to review the *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Integration of Genetic Diversity into National Climate Change Adaptation Planning*, and to suggest changes, as appropriate, for consideration by the Working Groups and the Commission, taking into account the need to address the vulnerabilities of forest genetic resources, in line with relevant international agreements.

37. Furthermore, the Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to propose how climate change will be consistently addressed for all sectors of GRFA¹⁴ in future assessments and policy instruments, for consideration by the Working Groups and the Commission.

IX. REVIEW OF THE WORK ON BIOTECHNOLOGIES FOR THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

38. The Working Group considered the document Review of the work on biotechnologies for the sustainable use and conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture¹⁵ and took note of the information document Recent developments in biotechnologies relevant to the characterization, sustainable use and conservation of genetic resources for food and agriculture.¹⁶

39. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to continue to strengthen the national and regional capacities of developing countries to apply and develop appropriate and standardized methods in biotechnologies for the characterization, sustainable use of FGR and conservation of GRFA, taking into consideration relevant benefits and risks, relevant national and regional laws and regulations, and international instruments, including those related to risk assessment.

40. The Working Group stressed the need to promote biotechnologies to develop favourable traits, most importantly the tolerance of abiotic stresses such as drought, heat and salinity and resistance to biotic stresses caused by transboundary pests and diseases, which are increasing in prevalence due to climate change, as well as forensic biotechnologies used for traceability and the enforcement of environmental laws. It noted that the impacts of biotechnologies on native species should be taken into account prior to their application.

41. The Working Group recommended that the Commission invite FAO to prepare, through an inclusive process, guidelines for clonal forestry, including advice on the minimum number of individual clones and discussions on planting, seed dispersal and potential impact on forest genetic diversity, dependent on individual species.

42. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to continue to regularly assemble and disseminate updated factual information on the role of biotechnologies in the

¹⁴ a common approach.

¹⁵ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/8.

¹⁶ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/Inf.7.

characterization, sustainable use and conservation of GRFA through its existing databases, networks and newsletters.

43. Despite the rapid developments within biotechnologies and the possibilities this might bring to the characterization, sustainable use and conservation of GRFA, the Working Group stressed the continued importance of conserving genetic diversity *in situ* across the globe.

44. The Working Group recommended that the Commission request FAO to continue to explore mechanisms for future cooperation with relevant international organizations, including for fostering cooperation, in particular South–South, but also North–South, and Triangular cooperation, in promoting appropriate biotechnologies for the characterization, sustainable use and conservation of GRFA.

X. OPTIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMISSION'S FUTURE INTERSESSIONAL WORK

45. The Working Group considered the document *Possible re-organization of the Commission's future intersessional work*.¹⁷ It welcomed with appreciation the progress made in the Commission's intersessional work, based on inputs by its subsidiary bodies, its Bureau, National Focal Points/Coordinators and Members' submissions. It stressed the need to address in a coherent, integrated and consistent way biodiversity for food and agriculture (BFA), including micro-organism and invertebrate genetic resources (MIGR), in the Commission's and countries' work, and the need to enhance coordination and communication among the Commission's Working Groups and among National Focal Points/Coordinators.

46. The Working Group considered and provided guidance on the future organization of the Commission's intersessional work. It recommended that the Commission consider in its deliberations on the re-organization of its intersessional work the limited resources available to countries and the Secretariat. Taking into account the various options for the re-organization of the Commission's subsidiary bodies, the Working Group recommended that a fifth option on the establishment of two expert groups on BFA and MIGR respectively, based on experiences from the organization of work on ABS, be elaborated.

47. The Working Group noted that virtual consultations or regional workshops for National Focal Points/Coordinators, including briefings convened in preparation of formal meetings, are preferable to hybrid meetings in order to ensure participation on an equal footing.

48. The Working Group welcomed the development of draft Terms of Reference for the National Focal Points/Coordinators and noted that its Members may submit comments after the meeting, for consolidation by the Secretariat, for consideration by the Commission at its next Session.

¹⁷ CGRFA/WG-FGR-6/21/9.