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Organización
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Naciones
Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

NINETEENTH SESSION

Rome, Italy, 16-20 March 2009

STATE OF THE WORLD'S FOREST GENETIC RESOURCES

1. Genetic diversity provides the fundamental basis for the evolution of forest tree species and for their adaptation to change. Conserving forest genetic resources is therefore vital, as they are a unique and irreplaceable resource for the future. FAO has for many decades acknowledged their importance. As far back as 1967, the FAO Conference recognized that forest genetic diversity was increasingly being lost and requested the establishment of the Panel of Experts on Forest Gene Resources, to help plan and coordinate FAO's efforts to manage the genetic resources of forest trees.
2. FAO's activities in forest genetic resources are an integral part of the FAO Forestry Programme and contribute to other programme components, such as sustainable forest management, tree breeding and plantation development, and protected area management. For many decades, the Panel of Experts on Forest Gene Resources (PEFGR) has guided FAO's work on forest genetic resources, reporting on progress made to the Committee on Forestry (COFO).
3. Forest genetic resources management can be effective only if treated as an integral element of overall sustainable forest management. Conservation concerns should be integrated into broader national and local development programmes, such as national forest programmes, rural development plans and poverty reduction strategies, which promote cooperation among sectors.
4. However, lack of information limits the capacity of countries and the international community to integrate forest genetic resources management into overall cross-cutting policies. It is recognized that reliable general data on forest status and trends is of great importance to the efficient management of forest genetic resources. Forest-related information, however, largely refers to forest resources in general rather than to forest diversity and variation. Availability of

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specific information on status and trends in forest genetic resources is today woefully inadequate, although some progress has been made at the national and sub-regional levels in the past decade.

5. At its Eleventh Session in June 2007, the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) acknowledged the urgency to conserve and sustainably utilize forest genetic resources. The Commission requested that a *State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* report be prepared and presented to the Commission in 2013. The CGRFA recommended that the Committee on Forestry and the FAO Regional Forestry Commissions be involved in the preparation of the report, in synergy with relevant regional and global programmes, including the Convention on Biological Diversity.

6. The report on the *State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* will be prepared through a country-driven approach based on information provided by countries and thematic studies. The Global Forest Resources Assessment process (FRA) might serve as a model, and the two processes will be linked.

7. The process would build upon relevant initiatives and experience, including seven sub-regional workshops organized by FAO over the past ten years, for which 71 national reports were prepared, and the global FAO Information System on Forest Genetic Resources (REFORGEN) database based on information provided by member countries. An analysis of key issues in forest genetic resources and a proposed timetable and budget for developing the report will be presented to the CGRFA at its 12th Session in 2009.

8. The preparation of the *State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* was welcomed by the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in May 2008.

9. COFO may wish to express its support to the preparation of the *State of the World's Forest Genetic Resources* as a framework for action at national, regional, eco-regional and global levels, and consider specific ways for the participation of member countries in the process of developing the report. Delegates may also wish to make suggestions for strengthening the process, including the identification of potential sources of financial support.