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Organization of the
United Nations**



**International Treaty
on Plant Genetic Resources
for Food and Agriculture**

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Report from the Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights

Executive Summary

In response to a request made at the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, the Secretariat organized a Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights. The Global Symposium aimed to share experiences, innovative approaches, effective policies and best practices, and to promote learning between participants on implementing Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (International Treaty).¹

The Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights was generously hosted by the Government of India through the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Rights Welfare and the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA), in partnership with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR). The Governments of Italy and Norway provided financial resources that made the organisation of the Global Symposium possible.

The Global Symposium was held from 12 to 15 September 2023 at the ICAR Convention Center, New Delhi, India.

The highlights of the Global Symposium included an inaugural ceremony, with the President of India as chief guest, as well as presentation of the Indian Genome Saviour and Community Awards, and a programme of technical sessions. The technical sessions were structured around five themes related to Farmers' Rights, and promoted sharing experiences and learning on the implementation of Farmers' Rights. Open discussions were held at the end of each session. In addition to these and panel discussions, the Government of India, which hosted the Global Symposium, organized three special events to promote focused discussions on specific topics and gather ideas that could facilitate the implementation of practical approaches to realizing Farmers' Rights, as well as exploring possible elements for future work on Farmers' Rights.

The Global Symposium provided an opportunity for the presentation of the Indian Plant Genome Saviour and Community Awards to a number of Indian farmers and communities by the President of India, Ms Droupadi Murmu, who inaugurated the Symposium.

The outputs of the Global Symposium included Proceedings, which will be published at a later date, and this Report, as an information document, for the Tenth Session of the Governing Body.

¹ For more information about Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty, progress and developments, see: www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/farmers-rights/en/

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Overview

In response to a request made at the Ninth Session of the Governing Body, the Secretariat organized a Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights. The Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights was held from 12 to 15 September 2023, generously hosted by the Government of India through the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Rights Welfare and the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority, in partnership with the Indian Council of Agricultural Research and the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources. The Governments of Italy and Norway provided financial resources that made the organisation of the Global Symposium possible.

About 700 participants from more than 50 countries attended the Global Symposium, including policymakers, farmers and farmers' organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, and intergovernmental organizations, as well as dignitaries, senior government officials, and a large number of farmers from India.

B. Overall objectives

The Global Symposium aimed to provide a forum to share experiences, innovative approaches, effective policies and best practices, and to promote learning among participants on implementing Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty. The discussions, key messages, and proposed activities that emerged from the Global Symposium are summarized in this report for possible future work on Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty.

C. Programme structure and contents

The Global Symposium was structured in two parts: an inaugural ceremony and technical sessions. The inaugural ceremony was attended by the President of India, Ms Droupadi Murmu, the Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Mr. Narendra Singh Tomar, and a number of high-level officials from various ministries, as well as the FAO Representative in India and the Secretary of the International Treaty. The ceremony included presentation of the 2021 and 2022 Indian Genome Saviour and Community Awards to a number of Indian farmers/farming communities for their achievements and contributions to the development and conservation of crop diversity.

This event was followed by a plenary lecture and a series of plenary technical discussions on five themes related to Farmers' Rights. Panel discussions and special events were organized to complement the thematic sessions' discussions. Exhibitions showcasing India's crop diversity, and involving farmer award-winners, farmer-producers, and the private seed sector were also organized during the Global Symposium.

Participants at the Global Symposium had the opportunity to actively participate and make interventions at the end of each session.

The thematic sessions were as follows:

- Session 1. Options for realizing Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty
- Session 2. Legal and other measures supporting the realization of Farmers' Rights
- Session 3. International processes and other issues of relevance to Farmers' Rights
- Session 4. State of implementation of Article 9 of the International Treaty
- Session 5. Proposal for future work on Farmers' Rights

II. INAGURAL CEREMONY

Following the arrival of the chief guest, President of India, Droupadi Murmu, Mr Trilochan Mohapatra, Chairperson of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA) of India, welcomed the dignitaries and participants. Mohapatra expressed his appreciation for the presence of the senior officials and the Government of India for their crucial support in hosting the Global Symposium. In particular, he extended his deepest thanks to the President of India for attending the event and for supporting farmers and local communities of India.

In his welcome address, Mr Manoj Ahuja, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare of India, remarked that each farmer is a scientist in their own respect, and that this needs to be acknowledged. He cited the recognition and protection of Farmers' Rights as a critical component of the International Treaty. Mr Ahuja said he was proud that India is playing a prominent role in promoting Farmers' Rights in the context of plant variety registration through the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act of 2001. The Global Symposium represented a crucial global gathering to share experiences and discuss future work on Farmers' Rights. He hoped the Global Symposium would raise awareness of the importance of protecting Farmers' Rights.

Mr Narendra Singh Tomar, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare of India, thanked the International Treaty for organizing the Global Symposium in India. He acknowledged the fundamental role of farmers in conserving India's agricultural heritage, including its rich biodiversity, indigenous crops, and traditional knowledge. The Minister said the Government has worked diligently to ensure compliance with the International Treaty. He stressed that farmers provide food security to the world. Plant breeders' rights and Farmers' Rights are part of the PPVFR Act 2001, and Section 39 has provisions for Farmers' Rights. He confirmed that India will continue its commitment to promote and protect Farmers' Rights.

Opening the Global Symposium, President of India Droupadi Murmu, observed that *"... our farmers since the beginning of civilisation are the real engineers and scientists. They have harnessed the energies and bounties of nature for the benefit of humanity."* The President underscored the importance of the International Treaty, thanking it for organizing the event in India. *"The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, signed in 2001, was one of the most important international agreements among member countries to conserve, use and manage plant genetic resources for food and agriculture,"* she told the symposium. *"For the first time, it talked about guaranteeing food security through conservation, exchange and sustainable use of the world's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture."*

The President expressed her conviction *"that the Global Symposium, the very first of its kind in the world, provides a golden opportunity for the world fraternity to align their priorities and programmes according to the need of humanity and to make a common commitment for the fulfilment of Farmers' Rights"*.²

The ceremony concluded with the Indian Genome Saviour and Community Awards, with presentations made by the President of India to Indian farmers and farming communities, acknowledging their contributions and achievements in developing and conserving crop diversity.

Mr Trilochan Mohapatra delivered a Plenary Lecture, "Protecting Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights for a Secured Seed System: An Indian Perspective". He described how India had transformed itself from a food-deficit to a food-surplus nation. He recalled that in the 1950s, India had faced many challenges, such as population growth, climate change, limited resources and farming skills, malnutrition and poor health, inadequate rural infrastructure, low agricultural production, and occasional droughts and famines, which compelled it to import food grains. A number of government initiatives and investments led to various Agricultural Revolutions starting in the 1960s. This approach gradually enabled the country to improve domestic food production and significantly contributed to remarkable agricultural progress several decades later. Mr Mohapatra attributed the success of India to multiple factors, including the country's rich biodiversity and the vast genetic resources held in gene banks and in farmers' fields, as well as support for the seed system, and measures undertaken by the Government. In particular, he highlighted the contribution of the Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers' Rights Act of 2001. The main objective of the PPVFR³ is to provide an effective system for the protection of crop varieties and the rights of plant breeders and farmers in order to promote crop variety development. It also aimed to stimulate investment in research and development, both in public and private sectors, and to facilitate the growth of the country's seed industry, so as to ensure the availability of high-quality seed and planting material for farmers. Furthermore, the Act specifies the rights of a farmer as a plant breeder, establishes a national gene fund, and sets up recognition schemes for farmers as genome saviours. Mr Mohapatra illustrated the achievements of the PPVFR by pointing to the high number of farmers' varieties registered, which account for almost 40 percent of all registrations, and to several examples of recognized community-/farmer-managed seed systems. In summary,

² The inaugural address of the President is available at: static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2023/sep/doc2023912250701.pdf.

³ Also abbreviated to PPV&FRA

he stressed the importance of farmers' fields, caring for plant genetic resources, including wild relatives, landraces and local varieties maintained by farmers, and the need to strengthen farmers' seed systems.

III. TECHNICAL SESSIONS

Introduction and setting the scene

Mr Kent Nnadozie, Secretary of the International Treaty, welcomed all the participants and commended the Government of India for hosting the Global Symposium, and for making the event a unique and remarkable experience for all. He thanked the participants for their interest in the topic of Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty. One key objective of the Global Symposium was to provide a forum to share experiences and learn from each other on how to promote and protect the rights of farmers to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (PGRFA). With this goal in mind, the Secretary encouraged everyone to actively participate in all the technical sessions. Finally, he expressed his hope that the Global Symposium would contribute to an understanding of the challenges and opportunities of implementing Farmers' Rights by Contracting Parties and interested stakeholders, and to defining possible future work on Farmers' Rights for consideration of the Governing Body at its Tenth Session.

Mr Mario Marino, Technical Officer, Secretariat of the International Treaty, echoed his appreciation to the host Government, giving a general overview and structure of the four-day event, which comprised five technical sessions organized by topic, as well as panel discussions and special events. He introduced the role of the facilitators and rapporteurs, and invited all participants to actively engage in the allocated open discussions at the end of each session, or to reach out to the Secretariat.

Session 1: Options for Realizing Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty

Facilitators: Ms Svanhild-Isabelle Batta Torheim, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Norway and Mr R.C. Agrawal, Deputy Director General (Agriculture and Education), Indian Council of Agricultural Research, India

Rapporteur: Ms Mary Jane Ramos Dela Cruz, ITPGRFA Secretariat

The purpose of this technical session was to provide updates on the work of the International Treaty on Farmers' Rights, inform about the progress made in the implementation of Farmers' Rights, share experiences and best practices, and promote learning among participants.

The overview of the development of the Inventory of national measures, and the Options for encouraging, guiding, and promoting the realization of Farmers' Rights as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty, was presented by Ms Svanhild-Isabelle Batta Torheim on behalf of the Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights (AHTEG-FR or Expert Group). Ms Batta Torheim recalled the establishment of the AHTEG-FR by the Seventh Session of the Governing Body. The AHTEG-FR was mandated to produce an inventory of national measures that may be adopted, best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty. Based on the inventory, the Expert Group was also tasked with developing options for encouraging, guiding and promoting the realization of Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty. The first two meetings of the AHTEG-FR focused on developing the Inventory, agreeing on a template for collecting information about national measures and a general structure of the Inventory. It also developed categories to systematize the information on the national measures. With the Inventory in place, the last two meetings of the AHTEG-FR focused on developing the Options, using the same categories as developed in the Inventory. Finally, Ms Torheim gave an overview the 32 options encouraging, guiding and promoting the realization of Farmers' Rights, including the Co-Chairs' proposals.

Sharing of experiences of best practices and lessons learned from the realization of Farmers' Rights

This technical session delved into the different options undertaken by different Contracting Parties and stakeholders to promote the implementation of Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty. Presentations of practices and experiences of implementing Farmers' Rights were shared by Mr Gyanendra Prataph Singh (India), Mr Pitambar Shrestha (Nepal), Mr Khaled Abulaila (Jordan), Mr Graybill Munkombwe (Zambia), Mr Riccardo Bocci (Italy), and Ms Szonja Csörgő (International Seed Federation). A summary of their presentations is presented below:

Mr Gyanendra Prataph Singh, Director of the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, India, shared India's experiences in implementing Farmers' Rights following the enactment of Protection of Plant Variety and Farmers' Rights Act (PPV&FRA). Mr Singh described the experiences and challenges in realizing the rights of farmers to plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. Lessons learned included the value of: (1) giving awards and recognition; (2) providing financial support to niche regions and communities; (3) supporting on-farm conservation and the revival of traditional cropping systems; (4) encouraging income generation to support farmers' conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA; (5) documentation of PGRFA and protection of traditional knowledge; (6) on-farm conservation of PGRFA; (7) farmers' participation in PGRFA evaluation and selection; (8) farmers' participation in decision-making as members of the PPV&FRA and the Biodiversity Management Committees; and (9) registering farmers' varieties in the PPV&FRA.

Mr Pitambar Shrestha, Programme Advisor, Community Seedbanks Association, Nepal, described that country's existing measures, tools, methods and approaches to support Farmers' Rights, as set out in Article 9 of the International Treaty, following the Categories of the Options. Mr Shrestha described various activities to promote Farmers' Rights, such as documentation and dissemination of traditional knowledge and information associated with local crop varieties; development of catalogues; community biodiversity registries; and maintenance of community seed banks. Participatory plant breeding, landrace enhancement, community-based seed production, and marketing are some other valuable practices that strengthen the local seed system, enabling farmers to save, use, sell and exchange quality farm-saved seeds and propagate materials.

Mr Khaled Abulaila, Director of Biodiversity and Genetic Resources, National Agricultural Research Center, Jordan, presented the Jordanian Law of Agriculture, which addresses Farmers' Rights in different articles, instructions and/or regulations. Realization of Farmers' Rights is being implemented through legal, technical and other financial provisions, such as protecting local farmers' products from competition, providing financial support or subsidies, capacity building and training on different scales and fields, supporting development projects in rural areas, and job creation. On the other hand, holding farm fairs, such as the Olive and Pomegranate Festivals, has proved to be of major importance to rural communities, but their scope and timing need to be more inclusive in terms of products and participation, and include investors from the private sector.

Mr Graybill Munkombwe, Zambia Agriculture Research Institute (ZARI), speaking on behalf of ZARI and the Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity and Community Technology Development Trust, presented the experiences and best practices of implementing Farmers' Rights. He described various practices, including: (1) community-based agrobiodiversity management (seed banks); (2) farmers seed and food fairs, which promote farmer-led seed sharing, marketing and knowledge exchange; (3) participatory research and development through farmer field schools, capacity development and information dissemination at community level; and (4) institutional support for Farmers' Rights. He concluded his presentation by sharing the campaign in Southern Africa to secure Farmers' Rights: "Our Seeds, Our Rights, Our Lives."⁴

Mr Riccardo Bocci, of Rete Semi Rurali, Italy, described three key experiences in Italy and elsewhere in Europe: (1) the National Programme on PGRFA (RGV/FAO); (2) the Italian National Law on Agrobiodiversity; and (3) the European Union (EU) legal framework. He ended his presentation by sharing some lessons learned based on experiences in Italy. These were that: the implementation of Farmers' Rights is not solely related to Article 9 of the International Treaty; full implementation of Articles 5 and 6 will support Farmers' Rights; access to PGRFA is crucial and can be considered a measure of non-monetary benefit-sharing; and diversity is a key consideration when adjusting the legal frameworks, such as seed laws and intellectual property rights.

Ms Szonja Csörgő, International Seed Federation (ISF), representing various seed associations (APSA, AFSTA, Euroseeds and SAA), discussed the views, experiences, role of breeders, and actions of the private seed sector in improving the livelihoods of small-scale farmers. Ms Csörgő explained that the aim of empowering farmers is to improve their livelihoods, particularly when they face challenges, and to give them crops that are adapted to their needs, as well as good quality seeds, and affordable agricultural inputs. Ms Csörgő emphasized that the role of breeders is to provide solutions, seed choices, and quality seeds. She concluded her presentation by sharing examples, such as the Model Seed Resilience Project launched by Fair

⁴ [Our seeds. Our rights. Our lives. - YouTube](#)

Planet and ISF in Rwanda, the Success of Fair Planet in Ethiopia – a public-private partnership – and several other examples that are helping farmers in crop planning, selecting crops and varieties, and better techniques, all of which can be found on the EuroSeeds website.⁵

Summary of inputs and discussions

In the following open discussion, participants called for greater participation and inclusion of farmers in events, gatherings, conferences and meetings. The inputs and recommendations of participants are summarized, in no particular order, as follows:

- Countries should continue to be invited to make reviews and/or adjustments to their national policies and laws to promote the implementation of Farmers' Rights.
- Set up a mechanism to support farming communities/farmers' organizations directly as recipients of capacity-building activities – technical and financial – and other kinds of support.
- Regarding the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF): (i) it should continue to prioritize financial support to farmers/peasants' organizations; (ii) the Call for Project Proposals must be simplified and be accessible to peasants' organizations and communities that ensure the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA in farmer/peasant seed systems; (iii) ensure representation of farmers'/peasants' organizations in the selection process of the recipients; and (iv) farmer-managed seed systems must be given priority in the BSF.
- Support farmer-managed seed systems and strengthen farmers'/peasants' capacity to produce, store, use and sell their seeds.
- Promote Farmers' Rights practices as contained in the Inventory, in particular, the measures implemented by the farmers'/peasants' organizations, non-governmental and civil society organizations, and seek ways to make these practices sustained through coordination with governments.
- Increase farmers' organizations' involvement in the continued development of the Inventory and the Options, by providing capacity-building support to document and submit their experiences.
- Promote the rights of farmers to participate in decision-making related to PGRFA by ensuring their effective participation in events, negotiations and conferences, especially when these are related to Farmers' Rights;
- Set up an international mechanism to monitor and implement Farmers' Rights, in addition to the regular reports by Contracting Parties under the compliance mechanism of the International Treaty. For example, a concrete way to evaluate the level of implementation of Article 9 is to include the state of implementation of Farmers' Rights in the regular reporting of Contracting Parties, for which the criteria for reporting have to be defined and agreed upon with peasants' organizations committed to the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA.
- Develop a mechanism enabling farmers/peasants and their organizations to seek support or remedy, in the event of a violation of their rights to seeds.
- Support efforts for non-Contracting Parties to become members of the International Treaty and to promote capacity-building programmes in implementing Farmers' Rights.
- Suggestions to specify the definition of 'farmers' to mean 'peasants'.

Elements for future work on Farmers' Rights

At national level:

- Continue to share experiences by submitting more measures to the Inventory, and be inspired by others' experiences as captured in the Inventory.
- Be inspired by the Options to further enhance the realization of Farmers' Rights.
- Identify farmers' needs and requirements for realizing their rights to seeds/farmers' seed systems: identify the levels, forms, degree and mechanisms or support required by farmers, by country and by region.

⁵ euroseeds.eu/seeding-benefits/

- Strengthen farmers' capacity, for example through capacity building and awareness-raising on Farmers' Rights, and to provide farmers with the required technical and institutional support.
- Develop mechanisms and identify requirements to support, recognize and institutionalize farmer-managed seed systems (peasants' seed systems).
- Develop mechanisms to support farmers' capacity to produce their own seeds, and save, sell, share and exchange them.
- Support farmers' seed markets for biodiversity conservation and other social considerations.

At international level:

- The Options are about WHAT could be done by Contracting Parties and other stakeholders to implement Farmers' Rights, but they do not say much about HOW to do this. Further guidance on HOW may be needed.
- Promote farmers' participation in international meetings, events and gatherings, especially women and youth, so as to empower them.
- Develop measures guaranteeing the recognition of farmers'/peasants' seed systems.
- Promote continuous sharing of experiences, best practices and lessons learned from realizing Farmers' Rights at different levels.

Sessi.on 2. Legal and other measures supporting the realization of Farmers' Rights

Facilitator: Mr P.L. Gautam, former Chairman, PPVFR Authority, India

Rapporteur: Ms Titilayo Adebola, Lecturer and Theme Coordinator, Intellectual Property Law, University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom

This session examined measures adopted at national level to support the realization of Farmers' Rights. It commenced with a comprehensive presentation by Malathi Lakshmikumaran on the Farmers Rights system in India, entitled "Legal Measures Supporting Farmers Rights: Challenges and Opportunities." This was followed by a panel discussion dedicated to examples and experiences of Farmers' Rights from Brazil, Ecuador, India, Malawi, Mali and Norway. The six panelists were Mr Marciano Toledo da Silva (Small Farmers Movement, Brazil), Mr Hugo Carrera (Small Farmers Organization, Ecuador), Mr Dinesh Agarwal (Plant Variety Protection and Farmers Rights Authority, India), Ms Modester Kachapila (Plant Genetic Resources Centre, Malawi), Ms Alimata Traore (Convergence of Rural Women for Food Sovereignty, Mali) and Ms Elin Cecilie Ranum (Development Fund, Norway). There was a question-and-answer session with participants following the panelists' presentations. The session ended with a summary of key points and takeaways by Gautam.

Summary of inputs and discussions

All panelists agreed on the importance of protecting Farmers' Rights, as provided in Article 9 of the International Treaty. However, the session revealed that the countries covered are at different stages in their implementation of the Farmers' Rights provisions. Some countries, such as India, have introduced Farmers' Rights laws, for example through its Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act. Others, such as Malawi, are in the process of drafting a Farmers' Rights policy and constructing a national strategy on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. All countries covered have a plurality of laws, policies, initiatives and draft instruments relating to Farmers' Rights, farmer-managed seed systems/peasant seed systems, or plant variety protection. These instruments cover subjects ranging from plant variety protection, seeds and biodiversity.

The panelists pointed out the significance of considering the implications of intellectual property rights (IPRs), such as plant breeders' rights and patents, on Farmers' Rights alongside the intersections of IPRs and Farmers' Rights. Some panelists asserted that Article 27.3 (b) of the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) was one of the core rationales for the introduction of IPRs for plant varieties in their home countries. Article 27.3 (b) of TRIPS provides an obligation for all members of WTO to protect plant varieties either through patents, an effective *sui generis* (meaning unique or special) system, or any combination thereof. A Farmers' Rights system can be incorporated into a *sui generis* system, in other instruments or as a stand-alone legal instrument.

Some panelists maintained that IPRs for plant varieties are detrimental to Farmers' Rights. Accordingly, they expressly said 'no' to IPRs for plant varieties. In particular, some panelists asserted that the plant breeders' rights system set out in the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) 1991 Act limits farmers' practices and the realization of Farmers' Rights. These panelists pointed out that the UPOV 1991 Act does not cater for farmer seed systems and farmers' varieties. For example, UPOV-styled plant breeders' rights systems could restrict farmers' rights to save, use, reuse, breed, exchange and sell farm-saved seeds. The panelists also drew attention to the importance of protecting farmer-managed seed systems from new and emerging technologies, including digital sequence information (DSI) on plant genetic resources. In this regard, they highlighted the need to link Farmers' Rights with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Nagoya Protocol.

Beyond TRIPS, in drawing attention to the importance of agriculture in their home countries and regions, some panelists mentioned social, economic, political and environmental rationales for the protection and promotion of Farmers' Rights systems. For example, panelists noted the need to protect farmer-managed seed systems, which are predominantly based on agroecological farming practices. These agroecological farming practices help to mitigate and address the impacts of climate change, such as the excessive use of chemical inputs like pesticides. Furthermore, some panelists highlighted the importance of analysing the links between Farmers' Rights, food security, food sovereignty and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) such as SDG 2: Zero Hunger. Some panelists noted the importance of conceptualizing Farmers' Rights as human rights. They explained that as human rights, Farmers' Rights superseded IPRs and trade laws. These panelists remarked on the need to examine the intersections of Farmers' Rights and human rights' instruments, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In addition, some panelists asserted that "farmers are scientists". Accordingly, they warned against the marginalization of farmers' seed systems, such as by referring to them as 'informal systems'. They asserted that appropriate ways to refer to these systems include – 'farmer-managed seed systems' and 'peasant seed systems'. In this regard, the panelists stressed the need to recognize and celebrate diverse seed systems. These panelists remarked on the importance of developing and promoting farmer-managed seed systems. They also noted the importance of different government institutions collaborating to promote farmer-managed seed systems.

Recommendations and next steps

Panelists and participants noted that certain factors can facilitate the realization of Farmers' Rights at national level, including the following:

- Consider the crucial gender dimensions of implementing Farmers' Rights: work with women to promote Farmers' Rights.
- Consider the role of cooperatives in establishing community seed banks and in promoting Farmers' Rights.
- Build and develop community seed banks and gene banks.
- At national level, there should be collaboration among relevant institutions with interests in Farmers' Rights.
- Civil society organizations can support the implementation and monitoring of Farmers' Rights.
- Generate financial support to facilitate the implementation of Farmers' Rights.
- Build and maintain dialogues with farmers. There is an urgent need for farmers to be strategically involved in decision-making.
- Recognize, develop and promote farmer-managed seed systems, landraces and local/farmers' varieties to enhance local seed systems.
- States must recognize and promote peasant seed systems as conceived and practised by peasant communities, in accordance with their habits and customs.
- Measures governing the industrial and commercial seed system must not be applied to peasant seed systems, particularly those relating to marketing, sanitary quality and IPRs. States must recognize that peasant seed systems have their own specific rules guaranteeing the quality of peasant seeds,

particularly in terms of agronomy, nutrition and health, and the importance of ensuring the protection of peasant knowledge, through a voluntary initiative such as a code of conduct and/or a participatory guarantee system.

- Investigate the impacts of new and emerging technologies on Farmers' Rights.
- Examine the relationship between IPRs and Farmers' Rights.
- Review relevant national legislations and if necessary, amend or modify the provisions if they are inconsistent with Farmers' Rights and States' obligation to promote or protect Farmers' Rights under Article 9 of the International Treaty.
- Ensure that national laws, policies and initiatives do not undermine Farmers' Rights.
- Other legal measures to promote the realization of Farmers Rights include:
 - conservation and promotion of native farmers' seeds, including their protection from genetic modification;
 - promotion of resilient systems, such as agroecology;
 - public procurement of seeds produced by peasants' seed systems; and
 - participation of farmers in public policymaking spaces related to seeds. This should also relate to UNDROP and UNDRIP.
- Recognize peasants' collective rights to seeds.
- Raise awareness about Farmers' Rights and organize capacity building to equip stakeholders.
- Promote South-South cooperation in relation to Farmers' Rights.
- Peasant organizations – through the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), are interested in collaborating with States that want to work towards legal measures for the recognition, promotion and realization of Farmers' Rights.
- The Governing Body should request the Secretariat to support Contracting Parties with the construction of Farmers' Rights instruments and related policy documents.
- Registration of peasant seeds under the official registration system is not the answer to concerns regarding recognition, promotion and protection for farmers' seed systems. Peasants need their own seed systems to be recognized legally and supported in concrete terms, respecting the peasants' own quality criteria, i.e. agronomic, sanitary and germinative qualities that enable them to continue growing, distributing and selling their seeds from diversified population varieties – which is the strength of agroecological systems.
- The Secretariat should consider collaboration with human rights institutions to explore the connections between the Farmers' Rights provisions in Article 9 of the International Treaty and provisions in human rights instruments, particularly UNDROP and UNDRIP.
- Create platforms at national, regional and international levels to exchange experiences and knowledge on promoting and supporting farmer-managed seed systems and Farmers' Rights.
- Create a working group to enforce the legally binding nature of Article 9 of the International Treaty.

Session 3: International processes and other issues of relevance to Farmers' Rights

Facilitator: Mr Riccardo Bocci, Executive Director, Rete Semi Rurali, Italy

Rapporteur: Ms Rachel Wynberg, Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, University of Cape Town, South Africa

This was a dynamic and energetic session, drawing first on inputs from three presenters, followed by a facilitated discussion, with opportunities for audience input. A panel discussion followed, with each of the six panelists asked to respond to: (1) perspectives on DSI and Farmers' Rights; (2) perspectives on human rights and Farmers' Rights; and (3) concrete suggestions for moving forward. The facilitator then opened the discussion to audience participation.

The first presenter, Ms Thirimadura Anuka Vimukthi De Silva (Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform, Sri Lanka, member of La Via Campesina, speaking on behalf of the IPC, spoke about Farmers' Rights and international human rights instruments and frameworks. She was followed by Ms Rachel

Wynberg, of the University of Cape Town, who described the implications of DSI for Farmers' Rights. Viswajanani Sattigeri of the CSIR-Traditional Knowledge Digital Library Unit presented on India's Traditional Knowledge Digital Library.

The six panelists were Ms Normita Ignacio (SEARICE, the Philippines), Ms Georgina M. Catagora-Vargas (Bolivian Catholic University), Ms Szonja Csörgő (Euroseeds), Ms Teresa Aguero Teare (Ministry of Agriculture, Chile), Mr Sok Sotha (World Farmers Organisation, Cambodia), and Mr Achelander Reddy (National Biodiversity Authority, India).

Summary of inputs and discussions

Farmers' Rights and Human Rights

There was broad agreement that Farmers' Rights are an integral part of human rights. Many noted the complementarity between the International Treaty and a number of other United Nations (UN) agreements, including UNDROP, UNDRIP, the CBD and the Global Biodiversity Framework. UNDROP makes explicit several Farmers' Rights relevant to food and agriculture (Article 19), and emphasizes how access to land, water, seed and other natural resources are critical elements of farming and livelihoods. Many participants remarked that this broader perspective was critical, and that because farmers are food producers and land stewards, the discussion about Farmers' Rights should also be aligned with those concerning the right to food. Linking Farmers' Rights, agroecology and the conservation of agrobiodiversity underpinned such approaches. It was noted that Article 1 of the International Treaty, requiring the objectives of the International Treaty to be attained by closely linking it with the CBD, should be acted upon, and that Farmers' Rights should also be mutually supportive with Article 8j of the CBD and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities to conserve biodiversity, and their cultural heritage and expressions, including seeds. It was also noted that work on Farmers' Rights should be guided by the UN Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights, including due diligence. One participant observed that Article 27 of the UN Human Rights Declaration included intellectual property as a basic right. Another participant proposed exploring a new international regime on Farmers' Rights.

Many participants remarked that links with other international agreements should be built upon to strengthen Farmers' Rights, and that the International Treaty should cooperate with the relevant bodies involved in the administration and implementation of these different agreements. One panelist stressed the need for full implementation of the International Treaty to realize Farmers' Rights, and recognition of Article 9 as a binding article. The importance of implementing UNDROP and UNDRIP at national level was emphasized, along with the protection of Farmers' Rights at national level. The challenge of realizing human rights at national level was noted, especially in contexts where human rights are not recognized or respected.

Other international instruments affecting Farmers' Rights

Several participants stressed that attention should also be paid to international agreements such as UPOV 1991 that are perceived to undermine Farmers' Rights. The opportunities of developing a *sui generis* plant variety protection (PVP) system were expressed by many participants, noting the work of the Association for Plant Breeding for the Benefit of Society (APREBES) in this regard. A contrasting view was that UPOV 1991 was the best form of PVP, and provided for flexible interpretation. Some participants emphasized the need for PVP to incentivize breeders and secure a return on the time and effort invested in developing plant varieties for farmers. A remark was made that while there was agreement on the need for incentives, typically breeders obtained materials with few restrictions.

Views were expressed about the need to adapt national seed and marketing laws to ensure they support Farmers' Rights. Others underscored the need to work together with international organizations and Contracting Parties to maintain effective frameworks for breeders and to implement Article 9 effectively. The role of government in 'levelling the playing field' was noted.

Farmers' Rights and digital sequence information/genetic sequence data (DSI/GSD)

There was substantial discussion about the intersection of Farmers' Rights and DSI, with a common view that DSI should not jeopardize Farmers' Rights.

A view was expressed that the ‘dematerialization’ of PGRFA offers policy opportunities to chart an alternative and visionary pathway for the rights of farmers and other custodians. This would mean moving away from viewing agrobiodiversity as a privatized commodity that can be owned, towards a ‘stewardship’ approach that recognizes PGRFA as a public good, which should be governed as such. Several participants suggested revisiting the concept of stewardship, to give recognition to the collective heritage of PGRFA as a possible way to address DSI. It was noted that farmers are both stewards and custodians of PGRFA.

An analysis was given about the different ways in which DSI intersects with Farmers’ Rights in relation to the protection of traditional knowledge, benefit sharing, participation in decision-making, and rights that farmers have to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed. Concerns were expressed by several participants about the need to increase the transparency, accountability and traceability of DSI, and to set up mechanisms to obtain information about who is accessing data, and how it is used. There were questions about how this should be operationalized. The main concerns centred on avoiding the misappropriation of farmers’ knowledge and varieties, and ensuring benefit-sharing.

Several participants stressed the need to include farmers and other custodians of PGRFA in the governance of DSI and in associated benefit-sharing approaches, and to establish basic criteria so that DSI governance does not jeopardize the rights of farmers and provider countries. The need for an appeal mechanism for farmers was noted, in cases where their rights were violated related to PGRFA contained in the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (Multilateral System). A view was expressed that the use of DSI could contribute to benefit-sharing through farmer-centred innovations in plant breeding and participatory plant breeding, capacity building, technology transfer and infrastructure support. One participant remarked that while scientists are free to reach out to communities to take samples, there is no reciprocity for farmers.

It was noted that the exponential use of DSI in plant breeding could escalate intellectual property rights over PGRFA, possibly restricting the legal space for farmers to save, use, exchange and sell farm-saved seed of protected varieties. Many expressed the view that IPRs linked to DSI should be prohibited, including any genetic modification thereof, and that any DSI on plant genetic resources should be subject to obligations under the CBD and the International Treaty.

The potential of folding together concepts of stewardship, equity, Farmers’ Rights and open-source science and breeding was discussed. The point was raised of the need to ensure equitable access to DSI databases by countries of the global South.

A range of knowledge and capacity gaps were identified, including those about how DSI is used in breeding. It was noted that breeders see DSI as a tool to improve breeding and deliver innovation, and for characterization and quality control, with data mostly used for comparison. However, many breeders cannot detach DSI from the physical resource, and many do not use DSI. An internal study by the seed sector is currently under way to build understanding about the use of DSI in plant breeding.

Many participants stressed the need to build capacity to enhance understanding of the implications of DSI for farmers, and of how DSI affects their rights, benefits and well-being. It was noted that DSI should also be linked to wider discussions about the impacts of digitalization on farmers. The point was made about the importance of scientists and farmers working together to meet the expectations and needs of farmers. One participant reflected on the challenges of policy lagging behind technological developments. The divisive nature of technology was noted, and how the differing capacities of countries to develop ‘digital infrastructure’ risked leaving some countries behind.

The possibility was mentioned of upfront payments for the use of DSI through a potential subscription system under the International Treaty. The potential of a global multilateral benefit-sharing system that includes DSI, and which reflects farmers’ needs and priorities, was also suggested as a way forward. It was noted that there are ongoing policy processes to consider DSI/GSD within the Multilateral System and within the CBD, including definitional questions, and that it was best to use these processes to take forward the discussion.

Approaches to preventing biopiracy and protecting traditional knowledge

Experiences were shared about the establishment of the Indian Traditional Knowledge Data Library (TKDL), which aims to prevent misappropriation and biopiracy of genetic resources, and also to protect traditional knowledge. To date 16 patent offices use the Indian TKDL to check for novelty, with 323 successful cases of

patents being withdrawn or revoked, based on use of the database. Consideration is being given to expanding access to the database, to realize opportunities for research and development. A view was expressed that the Indian TKDL has potential application for PGRFA, to avoid misappropriation. There was broad support to expand the database to include farmers' varieties. Ethical issues are an important component of the database, including free prior and informed consent, acknowledging and recognizing traditional knowledge holders, and access and benefit-sharing. Another tool developed by the National Biodiversity Authority is the People's Biodiversity Register, which includes records of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. There was some discussion about the potential of Geographical Indications (GI) as an intellectual property rights tool, although one farmer noted the cost and challenges of using this approach.

Recommendations and next steps

A range of recommendations were made by different participants. These are listed below:

- Links with human rights and other agreements should be built upon to strengthen Farmers' Rights, including cooperation between the International Treaty and relevant bodies involved in the administration and implementation of these agreements.
- Participants noted the urgent need for transformative change to recognize the nexus between Farmers' Rights, sustainable food systems, agroecology and ecosystem health, and to consider these connections in future discussions on Farmers' Rights. It was recommended that experiences should be shared about how agroecology could be used as a strategy to realize Farmers' Rights.
- A recommendation was made to continue sharing experiences about different elements of Farmers' Rights, together with approaches to adjust the current legal framework to strengthen Farmers' Rights and agrobiodiversity. Legal measures to strengthen women's involvement in activities for PGRFA were recommended. National seed and marketing laws should be adapted to ensure they support Farmers' Rights.
- The importance of supporting farmer-managed seed systems was emphasized, including a recommendation for farmers to have full and free access to materials to build resilience for challenges such as climate change.
- A recommendation was made to conduct work on how farmer-managed seed systems and the formal seed system could complement each other and work together to serve the needs of farmers. It was suggested that work be done to align Farmers' Rights and breeder's rights. The desire was expressed for greater trust between stakeholders, and for better mutual understanding.
- Several participants recommended the need for more work to understand the impact of DSI on farmers. Suggestions were made to revisit the notion of stewardship and to reject intellectual property rights as 'fundamentally objectionable'. Another participant suggested exploring open access and a stewardship approach to enable benefit-sharing from DSI. The importance of transparency and accountability was noted in this regard, along with an appropriate governance mechanism. It was noted that there are ongoing processes to consider DSI within the Multilateral System and the CBD, including definitional questions, and that it was best to use these processes to take forward the discussion.
- A range of capacity-building measures were suggested, at international, regional and national levels, with a focus on technological developments and their implications for Farmers' Rights, as well as measures to reduce the scientific and technological gap between countries.

Session 4: Implementation of Farmers' Rights and ways forward

Facilitator: Ms Modester Kachapila, Plant Genetic Resources Centre, Malawi

Rapporteur: Ms Regine Andersen, Research Director/Research Professor, Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Norway

The programme agenda for Session 4 was modified to allow for more time to discuss ways forward.

Ms Regine Andersen, Research Director and Research Professor of the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI), Norway, gave an introduction about historical perspectives on Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty. She highlighted the roots of Farmers' Rights in FAO, and how other international regimes affected

these negotiations. Applying her *Stewardship and Ownership Approach* for analysing these developments, she explained how the provisions on Farmers' Rights in the 2001 International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture can be understood in light of this approach. Although legally non-binding, these provisions offer a platform for negotiations on how to implement Farmers' Rights, with the potential of shaping international norms. Ms Andersen explained how the Governing Body of the International Treaty functions in this regard, and how negotiations and intersessional work have led to a joint understanding of central aspects of Farmers' Rights and their implementation. Moreover, she noted, there are many examples of the implementation of Farmers' Rights, as shown by an inventory compiled by the Secretariat of the International Treaty. In her presentation, Ms Andersen launched a new website on Farmers' Rights, developed to support the realization of these rights related to seed and crop genetic resources, with research-based guidance. The website⁶ is hosted by the FNI, with support from the Research Council of Norway. The presentation ended with questions to the participants on ways forward for Farmers' Rights under the International Treaty. The participants responded with their recommendations.

Summary of proposed recommendations on ways forward

Carry out intersessional work to develop guidelines and promote the Inventory

Many participants stressed the need for intersessional work on Farmers' Rights:

- Several participants proposed establishing a working group with the mandate to develop voluntary guidelines on the implementation of Farmers' Rights at national level. Such guidelines could be based on the Options document, as well as the Inventory, with an emphasis on the practical steps required to implement the Options for the realization of Farmers' Rights. Some participants proposed that the guidelines should be focused on legal measures to protect, promote and realize Farmers' Rights.
- It was also proposed that a working group could identify ways and means to make the Inventory more visible, as it provides a rich collection of examples on how Farmers' Rights can be implemented. In this context, it would be important to encourage further submissions of good practices to the Inventory.
- Participants said that it would be important to ensure a better composition of the working group than was the case in the Ad Hoc Technical Working Group on Farmers' Rights, for example, a better representation of farmers, farmers' organizations and civil society. There were several ideas on how this could be facilitated, for example through a farmers' forum to be established to feed into the process.

Promote regional and South-South-cooperation

Regional consultations have been important instruments to share experiences and views with regard to the implementation of Farmers' Rights at national level, and to prepare for Governing Body sessions.

- Many participants stressed the need to strengthen such regional cooperation, as well as South-South cooperation.
- The inclusion of farmers' and peasants' organizations, as well as civil society and Indigenous Peoples' organizations, would be key to such consultations.

Promote national implementation

Many participants were concerned about how to strengthen the implementation of Farmers' Rights.

- Several participants stressed the need to track national implementation of Farmers' Rights, in order to monitor such implementation. This should be included in the regular reporting from the Contracting Parties on implementation of the International Treaty. Farmers' organizations should be involved in designing the criteria and methodology for assessing the state of implementation, they suggested, and it would be important to avoid measures that go against the protection, promotion and realization of Farmers' Rights.

⁶ www.farmersrights.org

- It would also be important to analyse the barriers to implementation of Farmers' Rights, and how to make implementation sustainable in the long term.
- Participants recommended that Contracting Parties should support community seed banks, and ensure supportive legal frameworks towards that end.
- Also, it would be important to make sure that scientific developments relating to seed and agriculture are reflected in the measures that are developed for the implementation of Farmers' Rights.
- Participants stressed that countries should continue to review, and if appropriate, adjust their policies and laws, in particular those that limit the implementation of Farmers' Rights.

Boost outreach and capacity building

Continuing outreach and capacity-building activities on Farmers' Rights would be essential in follow-up to Article 9 of the International Treaty, participants stressed.

- In this context, it would be important to address young people in particular, it was suggested.
- Participants proposed that peasant organizations could engage in providing capacity-building activities for Contracting Parties, based on farmers' expertise, provided that resources were made available for that purpose.

Take measures to safeguard Farmers' Rights against intellectual property rights

Participants stressed the need to safeguard Farmers' Rights against intellectual property rights, but their views differed on how to approach this objective.

- Some participants suggested that India's Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act could be replicated in other countries, and that measures could be taken to facilitate this.
- Other participants observed that developing countries should refrain from using intellectual property law for the purpose of implementing Farmers' Rights.
- Several participants were concerned about how international law could help in preventing violations against Farmers' Rights.
- It was recommended to continue to address the effects of UPOV on the implementation of Farmers' Rights.

Strengthen benefit-sharing mechanisms

Participants proposed that the possibilities for peasant organizations to receive benefits from the Benefit-sharing Fund should be strengthened, as this had so far been the exception, rather than the rule.

- It was stressed that the Benefit-sharing Fund should ensure that the benefits actually reach farmers, so that they can gain access to the resources they need.
- Several participants suggested that solutions must be found for benefit-sharing with regard to DSI, and that it would be important to continue discussions about the impact of DSI on Farmers' Rights.

Strengthen international collaboration

Several participants stressed the need to strengthen collaboration within the broader international structures.

- In particular, it would be important to strengthen collaboration with the CBD and UNDROP

Session 5. Proposal for future work on Farmers' Rights

Facilitator: Mr R.S. Paroda, President of the Indian Society of Plant Genetic Resources (ISPGR) and Founder Chairman, Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Sciences (TAAS)

Rapporteur: Mr Tobias Kiene, ITPGRFA Secretariat

The aim of this last session was to recall elements for future work on Farmers' Rights identified throughout the Symposium, and to allow a panel of five experts, as well as the general audience, to discuss and suggest further ideas.

Mr R.S. Paroda, President of the Indian Society of Plant Genetic Resources and Founder Chairman, Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Sciences, India, introduced the session by highlighting the importance of multilateralism in addressing global challenges and the important role of the International Treaty, in particular. He observed that the inaugural session had shown the many achievements and success stories in India. All plant varieties registered at the PPVFRA are important, whether bred by farmers or in the so-called formal seed system. Countries are called upon to recognize and realize Farmers' Rights, and the rich and productive discussions at this Global Symposium showed many initiatives that could be used for that purpose. Mr Paroda called for systems to be set in place so that valuable materials are collected, evaluated and conserved, while those who maintain them are recognized. He emphasized that the International Treaty has an important role to play in sharing success stories and initiatives in this regard, by Contracting Parties and stakeholders. South-South collaboration and cooperation could be a further avenue to pursue. Mr Paroda concluded by calling for a further Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights to be organized in the future, highlighting that Farmers' Rights serve communities and countries through *in situ* conservation of valuable plant genetic resources.

The rapporteurs then presented a brief summary of their respective sessions, focusing especially on possible elements for future work. Ms Mary Jane Ramos dela Cruz for Session 1, Ms Titilayo Adebola for Session 2, Ms Rachel Wynberg for Session 3, and Ms Regine Andersen for Session 4. These summaries are given above.

In the panel discussion that followed, panelists discussed further possible future work, with lively contributions from the general audience. The five panelists were Ms Alimata Traoré (COFERSA, Mali), Mr Riccardo Bocci (Executive Director, Rete Semi Rurali, Italy), Ms Mourtala Issa Zakari (Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger – INRAN), Mr Gregory Bailey (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs, Antigua and Barbuda), and Mr Arvind Padhee (Principal Secretary, Dept. of Agriculture & Farmers' Empowerment, Govt. of Odisha, India).

Summary of inputs and recommendations:

Many speakers highlighted the importance of ensuring the full participation of farmers, especially women and youth, in the debates and meetings on Farmers' Rights, as well as in efforts towards their effective implementation. It was important to ensure that farmers and peasant communities had the possibility of playing a key role in these processes. This Global Symposium had shown, in the view of many participants, the useful experiences and lessons learned, as well as challenges for the realization of Farmers' Rights.

- Community seed banks (CSBs) were identified as an important element of the realization of Farmers' Rights, with calls for more financial resources and support to be provided, including for establishing networks between CSBs, and possibilities to learn from each other.
- A holistic view of farmer-managed seed systems should be adopted and policies to support them should be developed, with a focus on supporting farmers, so that they could continue their indispensable work on the ground. The role and importance of farmers' varieties cannot be overstated.
- Farmers should also be recipients of benefits, including monetary ones, in return for their work on conserving and making available crops for the benefit of all.
- Several participants pointed to the need for more active work on the ground, by Contracting Parties, stakeholders and the International Treaty community at large.
- Many participants called for further regional consultations and workshops, and for strengthening South-South collaboration and cooperation for the implementation of Farmers' Rights.
- Collaboration with relevant human rights bodies and instruments was identified as a further area for future work.
- Since the possible implications and impacts of digital sequence information/genetic resource data for Farmers' Rights are not yet fully understood, some participants put further research on this subject on the list of possible future tasks.
- Finally, several participants called for a discussion at the Tenth Session of the Governing Body on a possible intersessional process to develop voluntary guidelines for the realization of Farmers' Rights.

Delhi Framework on Farmers' Rights

The Government of India presented the Delhi Framework on Farmers' Rights, which it had prepared in the context of the discussions at the Global Symposium, and as a possible action plan to chart the way forward. It announced that it would present the Delhi Framework on Farmers' Rights to the Tenth Session of the Governing Body, when reporting on the Global Symposium as the host country.

Summary Outcomes of the Special Events

1. South-South Cooperation on Farmers' Rights

Co-Chairs: Mr Himanshu Pathak, Secretary, DARE & DG, ICAR, India, and Mr Trilochan Mohapatra, Chairperson, PPVFRA, India

Facilitator: Mr P.K. Singh, Agricultural Commissioner, MoA&FW, India

Rapporteur: Mr Sunil Archak, Principal Scientist, ICAR-NBPGR, India

Context

- Countries of the Global South have more or less the same agrarian situation and are facing similar multiple challenges, such as climate change, energy and health crises, and diminishing agrobiodiversity. These challenges affect developing and underdeveloped countries the most, and within these countries the most vulnerable are farmers and indigenous communities. Given the issues of agrobiodiversity conservation and recognition of indigenous communities in their conservation, as well as national sovereign rights over these resources, and the prevalent subsistence farming situation in these most vulnerable parts of the world, the question of Farmers' Rights is therefore a critical one for the countries of the global South..
- In the context of the Global Symposium on Farmers' Rights, South-South Cooperation is "*a process whereby two or more participating developing countries pursue their shared objective of realization of Farmers' Rights through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources, successful initiatives and technical know-how, and possibly through regional and interregional collective actions.*" South-South cooperation is expected to lead to greater innovation, as it provides opportunities for developing countries – *sharing the rich history of their indigenous communities and conservation and having common socioeconomic challenges* – to learn from each other, and to develop a set of common strategy and action points in order to implement the provisions of Article 9 of the International Treaty.

Summary outcomes

- The session on South-South Cooperation on Farmers Rights sought to offer a platform to deliberate on cooperation among Global South nations on Farmers' Rights. While the session was titled South-South Cooperation, it was not intended that it should lead to any grouping within the discussions of the Global Symposium. On the contrary, the special event aimed to explore the possibilities of South-South and Triangular Cooperation prompting successful initiatives, funding, capacity building, etc. among all the Contracting Parties of the International Treaty.
- Following a brief introduction about the session's background and the objectives of this special event within the context of the Global Symposium, the session opened with remarks from the Co-Chair Pathak, who reiterated that as a founder signatory to the International Treaty, as well as CBD, India has: (i) laws to protect Farmers' Rights; (ii) established proactive institutions to implement legal and non-legal options to realize Farmers' Rights in all their dimensions; and (iii) a mammoth vertical agricultural research, education and extension system, with institutional capacity and technical expertise.

There were no formal presentations in this session. Deliberations took place on various issues sequentially, with interventions from the participants.

- First and foremost was a discussion on if and how PPV&FRA, i.e. India's *sui generis* PVP model for the coexistence of breeders' rights and Farmers' Rights, has served its planned dual purposes, and how it can be emulated by other interested countries with a similar farming scenario. Participants mentioned that greater awareness is required at government level in other countries about the advantages of such a model for farmers and breeders. India (particularly the PPV&FR Authority) may consider engaging with other countries from the South in this regard.
- The second point to emerge concerned Farmers' Rights and IPRs. Farmers and civil society argued that any kind of IPR compromises the rights of farmers. Mr. Sunil Archak commented that India has established Geographical Indications (GI) that recognize a specific place as origin of that agricultural product, and thereby ensure the rights of the community/producers of that region. GIs convey an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which are essentially attributable to their origin in that defined geographical locality. India has many examples of GIs, including *Darjeeling Tea, Coorg Orange, Navara Rice, Malabar Pepper, Alleppey Green Cardamom, Nashik Grapes, Byadagi Chilli, Ganjam Kewda Flower, Basmati rice*, etc., which have facilitated farmers in capturing niche markets and higher economic returns. Participants agreed that GIs could be a viable option for other countries. However, they felt that more discussion was required to understand the beneficial impact of an IPR regime for farmers.
- The third point of discussion centred around new technologies as facilitators of Farmers' Rights. Participants immediately identified lack of capacity among farmers of the South, to harness the benefits of technological advancements. Expectations from ITPGRFA, and how farmers see and perceive the coexistence of multilateral and bilateral processes of benefit-sharing, were flagged. Participants commented that in future, in any such meetings, a longer session should be organized, with proper interpretation facilities. It was suggested that the issue of South-South cooperation should be discussed further during the Tenth Session of the Governing Body. Co-Chair Mr Pathak said that India can work with interested countries from the Global South through bilateral or regional cooperation, to provide customized solutions based on India's experiences in realizing Farmers' Rights. India also aims to learn from other countries, to enhance the efficiency of domestic processes. Mr Mohaptra added that the PPVFR Authority shall consider all possible opportunities to assist countries from the Global South, in capacity building and preparation of draft legislation related to Farmers' Rights.

2. Farmers' Forum

Chair: Mr Anil K. Gupta, Former Professor, IIM, Ahmadabad, India.

Co-Chairs: Mr A.K. Singh, Director, ICAR-IARI, India, Mr Anupam Mishra, VC, CAU, Imphal, India

Facilitator: Mr R.R. Burman, ADG (Extension), ICAR, India

Rapporteur: Mr Sushil Pandey, Principal Scientist, ICAR-NBPGR, India

During the session, eight selected farmers from different parts of India presented their experiences in conserving farmers' varieties and maintaining traditional diversity.

Mr E. Vinod from Kolli Hills of Tamil Nadu and **Ms Raimati Ghiuria** from Koraput District of Odisha gave a brief account of their activities, which was supported by the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF). Ghiuria explained how she successfully conserved more than 80 landraces of paddy and around 30 landraces of millets, which was supported by MSSRF.

Ms Lahri Bai from Dindori, Madhya Pradesh, who is popularly known as the 'Millet Woman of India', described her determination to regain the lost glory of millets. She has transformed her home into a 'Millet Seed Bank', where she has collected seeds of more than 60 varieties of millet in earthen containers. She distributes these seeds to farmers who grow them, and she receives a share of the produce, to be preserved in her home-made seed bank. Bai's unique mission has won recognition from the Prime Minister of India. Her story highlights the important role of women in agriculture in India, particularly in the conservation of heirloom varieties of different crops.

Mr S.S. Paramesha from Chellur, Karnataka, described a self-conserved jackfruit variety that yields unusually attractive fruits. Fruit flesh is coppery red, flaky, and very tasty. This traditional variety has been named as ‘Siddu jackfruit’, and has been registered with PPVFRA. With support from the ICAR-Indian Institute of Horticultural Research, Bengaluru, this traditional variety is being multiplied and sold at market, as there is huge demand for this tasty fruit, with its attractively-coloured flesh. This is an example of how, with the active support of research institutions, low IPR protection can help to mainstream farmers’ varieties and generate higher revenues for them.

Mr Napanda Poonacha of Kodagu district, Karnataka, who was recently awarded the Plant Genome Saviour Farmer Reward (2019–2020) for his contribution to the conservation of indigenous crops of ‘Adi Pepper’, narrated his experience. His farm is extensively involved in identifying native crops in the district that have strong potential for becoming commercial crops, without causing damage to the ecosystem. He shared his success story with the audience.

Ms Meena Devi from Himachal Pradesh explained how she has been involved in growing traditional vegetables, legumes, cereals and millets under organic conditions, to safeguard the environment. Similarly, Pushpa Parmar from Jhabua, a tribal district of Madhya Pradesh, explained her work growing the short-duration traditional varieties of pulses, millets and maize. Her efforts have been successful through support she received under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project.

Mr Sundaram Verma from Ramgarh, Rajasthan, explained his efforts in undertaking research on arid zone crops. He calls himself a ‘farmer-breeder’, one with a strong urge to develop traditional varieties through participatory selection. His improved plant variety – *Cicer arietinum* L., commonly known as ‘Kabuli chana - SR-1’ – is distinct by virtue of having medium bold seeds (higher test weight) and superior in terms of yield and pest resistance; it has been successfully registered with the PPV&FRA. Verma also has several other improved plant varieties to his credit, such as the high-yielding ‘Guar (cluster bean)- SR-23’, which is now suitable for both arid and semi-arid conditions, and can also be grown in various soil types, albeit most suitable to sandy/sandy loam. The ‘Moth bean (SR-1)’ is a short duration (60–65 days) variety, superior to the other commercially released varieties in terms of yield and resistance against major pests and diseases. Verma has been cultivating and conserving local landraces/cultivars of various crops for many years.

The contributions of all these farmers were highly appreciated by the audience, particularly by the delegates from the different countries. There were several interesting exchanges between the speakers and farmers in the audience. The special event ended with following recommendations:

- The crop improvement programmes should focus more on participatory plant breeding approaches involving custodian farmers from different zones.
- A system of testing and evaluation of farmer's varieties needs to be developed, particularly following the All India Coordinated Research Project (AICRP) testing and evaluation.
- It was also felt that in order to formalize and encourage cultivation of traditional cultivars and farmers’ varieties, it is important to develop a separate set of descriptors and seed standards for the farmers’ varieties.
- Farmers are being recognized with awards by different agencies for their efforts to safeguard the diversity and grow traditional varieties and landraces. To sustain farmers’ activities, there is a need for continuous support by national governments.
- There is a need to organize Traditional Food Festivals to popularize traditional varieties and promote their importance.
- Farmers’ Rights, along with consumer support, are essential to any sustainable system to safeguard and preserve crop diversity.
- Based on the majority request, it is strongly recommended that in future, the session on ‘Farmers’ Forum’ should be organized as part of the main programme, and not as a special event.
- There is a need to create greater opportunities for more interaction among farmers of different countries/regions, so that experiences are shared and best practices are scaled up.

3. Community Seed Bank and Value Chain

Chair: R.B. Singh, Former Chancellor, CAU, Imphal, India

Co-Chairs: Mr A.K. Singh, Vice Chancellor, CAU, Jhansi, India

Facilitator: Mr D.K. Yadava, ADG, Seeds, ICAR, India

Rapporteur: Mr P.R. Choudhury, Principal Scientist, ICAR, India

The Chair welcomed the speakers and greeted the dignitaries and audience. He observed that a robust seed system is the pillar of transformative agriculture. He emphasized the need for the right kind of seed for specific agroclimatic regions and in this respect, community seed banks play a key role in meeting local seed needs and thereby ensuring livelihood security. Mr D.K. Yadava, the Facilitator, told the audience that the informal seed system contributes around 40 percent of seeds required in the country, and therefore plays an important role in food security.

The first speaker was Ms Jui Pethe, a *freelance ecological researcher* predominantly working in the Nandurbar/northern Western Ghats of Maharashtra, in and around the tribal-dominated Satpura Hilly areas. She has contributed to the development of a community seed bank, with documentation of more than 100 wild species of edible vegetables and 250 landraces, involving local people. Pethe spoke briefly about her work and stressed that the Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs, Farm Science Centres) and agricultural colleges/universities should be linked to the native seed conservation programme. Funds and grants to the universities and KVKs should be increased for these types of activity. She also suggested establishing one Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS) centre for each district, to raise awareness about the documentation and identification of landraces/native seeds and the development of homestead-level to cluster-level chains for the conservation of native landraces.

Mr G. Krishna Prasad, *Founder Director of Sahaja Seeds*, known as Rural Karnataka's 'native seed man', explained that his company has a turnover of INR 12 million, and is India's first farmer-owned organic seed company. He described how Sahaja Samrudha, an organic farmers collective, has spearheaded a movement for the promotion of ecological agriculture through the revival of indigenous seeds, and is taking inspiration from many local seed savers, who for generations have conserved, reproduced and handed down seeds that have an unrivalled richness in terms of flavour, nutritional benefits, and resistance to pest and diseases. He emphasized that a support system from the Government is required for the sustainability of community seed banks.

Mr Lal Singh works in the remote mountains of Himachal Pradesh, where he founded the Himalayan Research Group (HRG) in 1997, and was subsequently joined by like-minded professionals. Under his leadership, HRG has successfully completed more than 50 research and development projects to improve livelihoods and conserve biodiversity, creating a range of technology models. Mr Singh explained that his group's technology-based initiatives have directly impacted the lives of about 900 households, bringing in an average annual benefit of about INR 40–45 *lakhs*. HRG is currently working on red rice, buckwheat, kidney bean and amaranth, and has documented 111 landraces on six crops. A company has been established, involving farmers in the community seed bank. A cluster of around 500 people is involved in the processing, packaging and branding of indigenous seeds, including red rice, which fetches INR 500/kg, as this rice has a strong nutritional content. Consumers are ready to pay for genuine products. Mr Singh argued that reviving the food system, organizing food festivals, and developing market-driven initiatives for farmers are all urgently needed measures to promote elite local varieties.

Ms Harshita Priyadarshini Mohanty, a *Class-VII student from Odisha*, is on a mission to preserve rare varieties of paddy and millets in the Koraput district. Mohanty has set up a seed bank in her house, where she has preserved seeds of more than 150 rare varieties of paddy, 53 varieties of finger millet, and seven varieties of pearl millet. Mohanty spoke about organic farming and her collection, which she exhibited at the symposium. She has formed the Harshita Priyadarshini Science Club, which many of her friends and local farmers have since joined. Through the club, Mohanty provides seeds of rare and country-grown food grains free of charge, for cultivation. Many paddy and millet varieties are becoming rare, and through her collection, she wishes to help farmers to grow them in the future. Ms Mohanty, who aims to become an agronomist, told the audience that greater awareness of native seed conservation should be spread to schools, Panchayats, Blocks, and Districts. She highlighted the need to establish more genome clubs in localities, and she requested more funding for schools to organize awareness-raising programmes and activities for native seed conservation.

Mr Rajiv Sarma talked about his work on agrobiodiversity conservation in the state of Assam. He has been instrumental in creating a value chain, to ensure the conservation of rare seeds. Sarma has conserved more than 130 rice landraces, and a number of black gram, green gram, mustard and sesame landraces. He is associated with the farm-to-fork initiative and created a brand called *Native Basket*, involving some 2 000 farming families and the launch of around 40 natural products, including deep-water rice and soft rice that does not require cooking. Sarma described how research-backed farmers' branding of nutritional rice has been an endeavour of more than two decades, aimed at saving Assam's indigenous paddy from extinction. He stressed the need for organizing more awareness-raising activities for communities involved in conserving native seeds, and for generous funding from the private and public sectors for native seed conservation.

The last speaker of the session, **Mr Jai C. Rana**, is the Country Representative of the Bioversity International-CIAT Alliance in India. He presented the work of the Alliance with regard to biodiversity conservation and use. He shared information regarding the institution's collection of more than 200 000 landraces and crop wild relative samples from around the world. Closing his presentation, Mr Rana said that greater awareness at government and international level on the importance of conserving valuable landraces would be essential to saving them from extinction.

Following the presentations, facilitator Mr D.K. Yadava summarized the main points of the discussions, and taking into account the opinions of the Chair and the Co-chairs, the following recommendations were made:

- A new education policy has been implemented in India. As part of this, emphasis and encouragement on traditional seed savings is to be given to students through proper policy intervention by the Government. The course curriculum needs to have topics on the local seed system and its importance.
- Financial support through an appropriate institutional framework for community seed banks should be provided by the Government and private organizations.
- Synergy is critical between different sectors, including the private and public sectors, and NGOs; they need to come together to save traditional knowledge and traditional varieties from extinction.
- Development of the National Seed Savers Forum is important, as is linking it to markets through policy interventions.
- There is a need to incentivize farmers, especially those involved in native landrace conservation, through more awards and greater recognition.
- The Corpus of the National Gene Fund should be increased to INR 100 *crores* to support community gene cum seed banks in India.
- To ensure the economic security of farmers, special capacity-building programmes are required for the development of community seed banks, value chains, branding and marketing of seeds and local products.
- Farmers should receive more encouragement for participatory plant breeding, as they are the seed savers, seed conservers, breeders and providers of seeds through informal seed systems.
- Proper administrative and legal support and guidance are needed for the establishment, management and sustainable use of community seed banks.
- The Farm Science Centres (KVKs) located in each district are to be involved in the management and use of community seed banks, so that their sustainability is ensured through this important institutional arrangement.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Global Symposium attracted participants from more than 50 countries, including about 700 individuals from government, international organizations, NGOs, civil society organizations, farmers' organizations, rural women farmers' cooperatives and associations, and the private sector. Around 200 participants actively participated in the technical sessions and events. Speakers and panelists from various regions and stakeholders contributed to the richness of discussions by sharing practices, experiences, challenges and lessons learned in implementing Farmers' Rights.

The event contributed to the greater visibility of Farmers' Rights and gathered support from high-level government officials, including the President of India, who led the inaugural ceremony and spoke of the high regard for, and paramount importance, of the role of farmers as the guardians of crop diversity. The key outcomes and discussion recommendations are expected to contribute to the discussion on the possible future work on Farmers' Rights, to be considered by the Governing Body at its Tenth Session.