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Book - Unit 4 - The Multilateral System of Access and Benefit Sharing

Book - Unit 4

Site: UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION PORTAL ON MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS
Course: Introductory Course to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
Book: Book - Unit 4 - The Multilateral System of Access and Benefit Sharing

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1. Introduction

The Multilateral System of constitutes the core mechanism of the International Treaty. It is instrumental to achieving the objectives of the International Treaty – both the conservation and the sustainable use of PGRFA, as well as the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use. The entire part IV of the International Treaty, i.e. Articles 10-13, is dedicated to the Multilateral System.



2. Facilitated Access to PGRFA



Currently, there are about 7.4 million PGRFA accessions conserved in over 1,750 gene banks. More than 2,500 botanical gardens grow over 80,000 plant species. The Multilateral System contributes importantly to the strengthening of the international gene bank system. It does so by creating a global pool of a number of the world's most important crop genetic resources to which users based in countries that are Contracting Parties of the International Treaty enjoy facilitated access.

Contracting Parties, the CGIAR Centres and other organizations up to date have included over 1.6 million samples of mostly *ex situ-held* PGRFA that they make available under the facilitated conditions of a Standard Material Transfer Agreement[1]. Being able to easily access PGRFA located in different gene banks around the world diminishes the need for maintaining large amounts of duplicates especially for smaller institutions.

[1] The Contracting Parties of the International Treaty have agreed on standard terms and conditions that will govern their transfer for the purpose of research, breeding and training. These standard terms and conditions are set out in the Standard Material Transfer Agreement, adopted by the Governing Resolution 2/2006 at its First Session in June 2006.

64 food crops and forages

Whereas the scope of the International Treaty as a whole comprehends the conservation and the sustainable use of all PGRFA, the coverage of the Multilateral System is limited to the genetic material of 64 food crops and forages. These crops are listed in Annex I of the International Treaty and are therefore generally referred to as ‘Annex I-crops’.

Globally, the crops contained in Annex I provide for more than 80 percent of human calorie intake from plants. The International Treaty being a legally binding international instrument, also the Annex I list of course needed to be negotiated and agreed-upon by all Contracting Parties in a spirit of compromise.


FAO/G Napolitano

Access Conditions


FAO/A. Tarekegn

The material can only be accessed for the purpose of utilization and conservation for research, breeding and training activities related to food and agriculture. The use of material to other ends, such as chemical or pharmaceutical research, is not allowed.

If any, only minimal costs, such as shipping costs, are to be charged by the provider of the material. In addition, the provider has the obligation to make associated descriptive data available together with the plant genetic material to the recipient.

Recipients, in turn, cannot claim any intellectual property right on the material in the form that they have received it from the Multilateral System, nor on any genetic part or component thereof. In the case that recipients conserve the material they are bound to continue to make it available to subsequent users.

3. Benefit-sharing under the Multilateral System



In its Article 13 the International Treaty foresees several options for both monetary benefit-sharing arising from the commercialization of material accessed from the Multilateral System and non-monetary forms of benefit-sharing.

Mechanisms for non-monetary benefit-sharing include:

- Exchange of information related to PGRFA, such as inventories, information on technologies and relevant research results;

- Access to and transfer of technology for the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA that are part of the Multilateral System; and

- Capacity-building in developing countries, primarily related to conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, including through developing and strengthening facilities for those purposes, and carrying out scientific research.

In addition, under the Multilateral System monetary and non-monetary benefits arising from the use of PGRFA are shared with stakeholders that support the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA, primarily farmers in developing countries.

4. Flow of Materials and Benefits within the Multilateral System

