



## No country is self-sufficient in plant genetic resources

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**SUVA, Fiji** ----A special meeting was recently convened at SPC's Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees in Suva, Fiji on the International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. The meeting was specifically held for countries that have not acceded to the treaty but expressed to SPC their willingness to ratify.

Samu Turagacati, SPC Increasing Agricultural Commodity Trade project (IACT) Team Leader on behalf of the Director for Land Resources Division, opened the meeting with some food for thought. He said, "Countries sometimes wonder whether or not they need the treaty and what benefits it brings us. Food is abundant and we are just fine."

He went on to explain exactly why we need the treaty. "The main theme of this meeting is: No country is self-sufficient in plant genetic resources. This is not a myth but a reality in the world today, and it is based on real evidence.

"To prove that this is a reality in the Pacific, let us be reminded once again about the taro leaf blight (TLB) that devastated Samoa's taro resources and export industry in 1993. Samoa never imagined that such a disease could wipe out almost all of its traditional taro varieties and, as of today, you rarely see any traditional varieties growing in Samoa as they are highly susceptible to TLB.

"But Samoa is able to eat and export taro again, thanks to SPC's donor-



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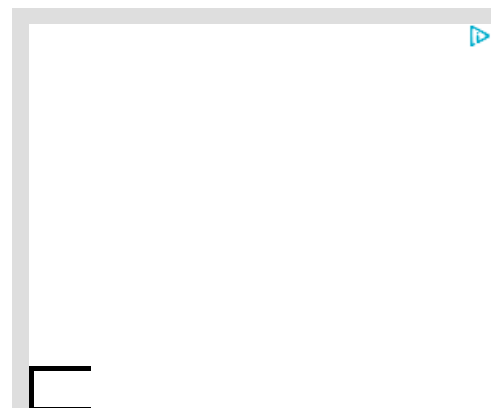


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funded breeding programmes that utilize diversity from Asia and taro from other Pacific Island countries, such as Palau and Federated States of Micronesia.”

He further commented, 'In fact, the taro leaf blight was a wake-up call for the Pacific region to make us realize that we need greater genetic diversity. Our region is facing challenges brought about by climate change, and there are new, emerging diseases, such as the Borgia phytoplasma disease of coconuts in Papua New Guinea. This is another area of urgently-needed research. We need to access new, resilient diversity from outside for breeding programmes as a long- term solution – the coconut is the tree of life in the Pacific.

“Our leaders in the Pacific endorsed a recommendation in 2012 to support the need for Pacific Island countries and territories that have not yet ratified the treaty to do so. This will enable us to access more diverse, resilient germplasm that is available in the treaty’s multilateral system.

“In our region, six countries have acceded to the treaty – Cooks Islands, Kiribati, Fiji, Samoa, Palau and Australia. France has also ratified, and its territories have indicated support for sharing their germplasm with contracting parties. At the recent Fifth Session of the Governing Body meeting in Muscat, Oman, the Treaty Secretariat reported that 131 countries are contracting parties. USA has reported on progress towards ratification for the next session of the governing body.

“Our region also endorsed the placement of our CePaCT collections officially in the multilateral system of the treaty at its Third Session of the Governing Body of the treaty in Tunis in June 2009. CePaCT also receives long term grant funds from the Global Crop Diversity Trust for conservation and utilization of these collections.

“SPC is happy to announce that its regional proposal submitted to the Benefit-Sharing Fund of the Treaty has been approved for implementation in the five Pacific countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Palau and Samoa) that are current parties to the Treaty.

“Another call for proposals for funding will be opened. Countries that would ratify earlier are eligible to put in proposals for food security programmes in their countries,” said Turagacati.

Turagacati thanked the representatives of non-contracting parties (Niue, Tonga, Tuvalu, PNG, Vanuatu and Marshall Islands) for attending this meeting so they could learn more about the treaty and for their commitment to join treaty membership.

The EU, through the SPC IACT, was acknowledged for its funding contribution to support this meeting, which is linking to some expected outputs of the IACT programme, including better access to markets for plant-based food products.

SPC also acknowledged the Treaty Secretariat for providing support to the meeting and the ABS Capacity Development Initiative for sharing its experiences on the Nagoya Protocol on Access Benefit Sharing.

For more information, please contact Dr Daniele Manzella, Treaty Support Office, Treaty Secretariat, Rome, email: Daniele.Manzella@fao.org and Valerie S. Tuia, Coordinator - Genetic Resources, email: Valeriet@spc.int, SPC LRD, or LRD helpdesk lrdhelpdesk@spc.int

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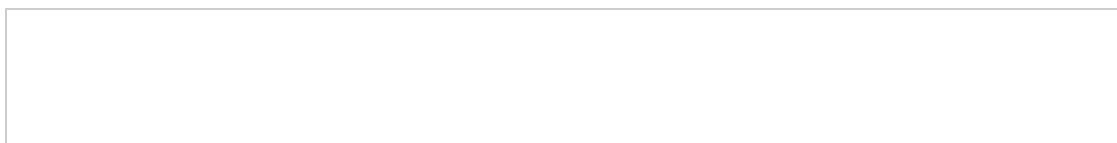
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