



Countries encouraged to ratify two international instruments at SPC meeting

Thursday, 12 December 2013, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)



Countries were encouraged to ratify two international instruments at the regional meeting organised by SPC on the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture held in Suva, Fiji last week. The meeting was convened specifically for parties that have not yet acceded to the Treaty, but have indicated willingness to become parties to it.

The multi-donor Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) Capacity Development Initiative also participated in the meeting, sharing its experiences on supporting the national implementation of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit-Sharing (a protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity). The presentation highlighted the need for coordination between agricultural focal points and ABS national focal points when implementing the two instruments – the International Treaty and the Nagoya Protocol – at national level.

SPC is the regional focal point for the International Treaty through the Ministries of Agriculture while the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) based in Samoa is the regional focal point for the Nagoya Protocol through the Ministries of Environment.

The meeting discussed common themes between the two instruments, such as standards for access to plant genetic resources and equitable benefit-sharing. The strong message from the meeting was that countries would be in an advantageous position to ratify both treaties, as mutually supportive and not contradicting instruments.

The Treaty establishes a multilateral system (MLS) for facilitated access to food and feed crops using the standard material transfer agreement (SMTA), which provides for utilisation rights and benefit sharing requirements.

The MLS comprises a pool of plant genetic resources, listed in its Annex 1, on which all countries inter-depend to sustain food security in the world. Benefits derived from the use of germplasm flow into a multilateral fund. This fund is prioritised for and utilised by developing countries to further conserve and develop diverse genetic resources.

The Nagoya Protocol foresees a bilateral agreement between the owner or provider of the genetic resources and the user or recipient of the resource, as access is to be granted based on prior informed consent and both parties agreeing on the benefit-sharing requirements and the utilisation rights of the genetic resources and the traditional knowledge associated with them.

Although both instruments have their strengths and weaknesses, they remain the most widely accepted mechanisms that countries are adopting to advance their domestic priorities, while

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maintaining the focus on global challenges, such as food security and biodiversity conservation.

This meeting also supported one of the recommendations from the international meeting held earlier this year in Rome, organised by the ABS Initiative jointly with Bioversity International, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Treaty secretariat, to promote mutual supportiveness for the implementation of both instruments at regional and national levels.

The message also reflected the role of the SPC Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees, which conserves and distributes genetic material on behalf of the region and the provider countries, under both the SMTA and bilateral agreements.

Participants from non-contracting parties attending the meeting were from Niue, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Papua New Guinea. Acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock in absentia also indicated Solomon Islands' willingness to ratify the International Treaty. SPC also provided a positive update on recent consultations with the Federated States of Micronesia, where Pohnpei State expressed its support to ratify the International Treaty.

For more information, please contact Dr Daniele Manzella, Treaty Support Officer, Treaty Secretariat, Rome, email: Daniele.Manzella@fao.org,
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Photo Captions: Dr Drews explaining the application of bilateral agreement on the use of non-annex 1 crops that are conserved by SPC CePaCT

[< Prev](#) [Next >](#)

[BACK](#)

[TOP](#)