

Statement of the Alliance of International Agricultural Research Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

Agenda item 7.4: Reports from international organizations on their policies, programmes and activities on agricultural biological diversity

Thursday, June 14, 2007

Mr. Chair, thank you for offering the International Agricultural Research Centres of the (CGIAR) another opportunity to address this meeting.

Document CGRFA-11/07/19.2 provides details of activities undertaken by the CG Centres since 2004 in relation to plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture, aquatic genetic resources, forest genetic resources and cross-sectorial matters.

I would like to highlight two areas of cross-sectoral activity in the report that we feel are important, and that we would like to suggest be considered for inclusion, in some way, in the Commission's multi-year programme of work.

The first issue I want to highlight concerns indicators for erosion of genetic resources for food and agriculture. The International Livestock Research Centre (ILRI) and Bioversity International are participating, with FAO and others in a UNEP/GEF supported project on the development of indicators of biodiversity. ILRI will focus on indicators of farm animal genetic resource diversity; Bioversity on indicators for ex situ plant genetic resources. The Centres note that considerably more, globally coordinated research concerning the measurement of the state of genetic diversity, the extent and causes of genetic erosion and the degree of genetic vulnerability is needed to develop policies supporting the use and conservation of GRFA.

The second issue I want to highlight concerns economic valuation of GRFA. In recent years, the System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP) of the CGIAR has supported research – mostly from ILRI, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Bioversity with a number of national partners -- concerning the valuation of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture. We have focused on identifying methodologies to valuing the components of agricultural biodiversity, with a particular emphasis on the values that farmers assign to biodiversity.

Commercial valuation methods underestimate the importance that specific traits have to those that depend on them. For example, these methods do not capture the value of crop biodiversity's ecosystem services. Nor are they well tuned to the subsistence livestock contexts where non-income functions are important.

A summary of our work to date has been published in a report entitled 'Valuation and sustainable management of crop and livestock biodiversity,' which is available on the IFPRI and SGRP websites. However, our work in the area represents only the beginning of what needs to be done. Considerably more work on valuation is necessary to develop minimum subsets of information for policy makers whose decisions affect the conservation and use of GRFA.

The CG Centres would like to suggest that these two cross cutting issues – measuring genetic erosion and economic valuation of GRFA – be integrated into the multi-year programme of work of the Commission.