

Science Days for the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 Side-event.

The importance of plant genetic resources in the context of Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems: the role of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Highlights

The side event of the UNFSS Science Days 2021 focusing on the importance of plant genetic resources in the context of Indigenous Peoples' food systems was held on Monday 5th of July, and organized by the Global-hub on Indigenous Peoples' food systems & the Secretariat of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. 120 participants were present, among them Indigenous Peoples' representatives, governments, farmers and UN agencies. The side-event featured the importance of crop genetic resources and the critical role of the Indigenous Peoples in conserving crop biodiversity in situ, furthering crop adaptation to climate change and maintaining wide, diverse, nutritious food bases. It also showed how PGRFA and crop diversity are fundamental to building climate change resiliencies, agricultural growth, food security, economic development, and ensuring Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge and practice.

Event structure

The session was opened by **Ismahane Elouafi**, Chief-Scientist, FAO, **Anne Nuorgam**, Chair, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and **Kent Nnadozie**, Secretary, International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture delivering opening remarks for the event. The opening remarks were followed by an open dialogue on the importance of plant genetic resources in the context of Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems with **Gam Shimray**, Secretary General, Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, member of the Global-Hub on Indigenous Peoples food systems **Tania Martinez Cruz**, Indigenous leader, University of Greenwich, **Danny Hunter**, the Alliance of CIAT and Bioersivity International and **Svanhild-Isabelle Batta Torheim**, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Norway. The open dialogue was followed by a brainstorming and participatory dialogue which highlighted the ways in which Indigenous Peoples can engage with the treaty and other stake holders to ensure their right to their plant genetic resources. It also delved into the way in which Indigenous Peoples can engage with the summit and provide their evidence-based solutions, while ensuring their rights and intellectual property.

Some of the main findings which emerged from the discussion on the importance of plant genetic resources in the context of Indigenous Peoples' food systems include:

- Indigenous Peoples are keepers of globally important plant genetic resources and diversity in seeds and other plant materials.
- The International treaty acknowledges just a tremendous contribution of smallholder farmers Indigenous and local communities towards managing and conserving the rich biodiversity of plants upon which the world depends for food and nutrition.
- The richness of this knowledge is based on this relationship between this land use system and how it holistically compliments to support this kind of food production and generation.
- Indigenous Peoples play a critical role in conserving global crop biodiversity in situ and furthering crop adaptation to climate change through their ancestral practices of seed sharing and selection.
- the sustainability and resilience of Indigenous Peoples' food systems and their rich plant genetic resources can provide answers to achieving food security for all.
- Indigenous Peoples face many challenges, which put the continuation of their traditional knowledge and practices at risk. These challenges often compromise Indigenous Peoples' abilities to protect the plant genetic resources that are intrinsic to their food production and generation systems.
- It is important to ensure the appropriate use of their seed varieties and associated knowledge by promoting their effective inclusion in conventions protecting their Intellectual Property Rights and ensuring access to Benefit Sharing funding.
- Privatisation of ancestral seeds through intellectual property rights, such as patents and plant



variety protection are violating Indigenous Peoples' rights over our ancestral varieties. The adoption by Indigenous Peoples of varieties developed by government and industrial-led plant breeding contributes to a loss of traditional crop varieties and associated knowledge.

With regards to the way forward, participants of the discussion identified the need to protect and enhance the preservation of seed crop diversity, including all Indigenous crop and germplasm, and that Indigenous Peoples must be included in policymaking discussions, respecting interculturality. Further, it was agreed that biodiversity preservation and the constant domestication of new varieties and all the plants the plant genetic resources should be placed at the centre of the dialogue, and stakeholders must recognize and allow for the role of Indigenous culture, language, women, elders, and youth within policy making dialogues. We must bridge the gap between biodiversity and domestication of plants and ensuring food security, while leaving no one behind. To allow for this, all policy makers and stakeholder must support the promotion of Indigenous Peoples' agency and recognize the contribution of Indigenous Peoples' seed systems to global food security both in food generation systems and food production ones.

The event contributed to showcasing these important contributions coming from Indigenous Peoples with extensive knowledge and skills with regards to the preservation of plant genetic resources, also underscoring the need for policy makers to engage in collaborative agreements with Indigenous Peoples on seeds, to support the heritage, knowledge, and rights of Indigenous Peoples over the plant genetic resources. In this regard, Norway presented their newly initiated seed coalition, as an important development that looks beyond the formal seed system, with farmers and non-farmers, as not all Indigenous Peoples are farmers, that have tremendous knowledge to share about plant genetic diversity. This initiative underscores the need to reinforce Indigenous Peoples' seed systems and seed security to contribute to biodiversity conservation and in-situ preservation of germplasm available in Indigenous Peoples' food systems. For this to happen, we must ensure that Indigenous Peoples' rights to intellectual property are respected and fairly recognised.