

sharing of benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. In November 1993 the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture initiated the negotiations for the a legally binding instrument for Plant Genetic Resources and adaptation of the IUPGR in harmony with the CBD. After sustained intergovernmental discussions and negotiations the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture was adopted in November 2001. The Treaty provides a framework of Multilateral System of exchange to ensure access to plant genetic resources, especially for plant species that are of importance for food security and of crops on which countries are interdependent. These global developments and the intricate relationship among them with regards to genetic resources have created a highly complex situation for the management of these resources. The world opinion today is clearly divided into two groups one

advocating a strictly regulated policy and other suggesting flexibility for controlling access to genetic resources. The developing countries are legitimately concerned about current developments that provide trans-national corporational opportunities for monopolizing the control and use of biologically derived materials, specifically through product or process patents or plant breeders' rights. Genetic resource managers thus are confronted today with new dimensions of obligations of some that are legal while others that are political and ethical. The respective nations are obliged to enact legislation and develop suitable regulatory mechanisms to ensure the enactment of the commitments made in the various negotiations. Not undermining the interdependence of nations in sharing and exploitation of genetic wealth on a sustainable basis, reaching a balanced and equitable agreement, seems a long drawn and difficult task.

International Crop Germplasm Exchange at ICRISAT

CL Laxmipathi Gowda and HD Upadhyaya

ICRISAT, Patancheru-502 324, Andhra Pradesh

Success of crop improvement programmes depends on the availability of diverse germplasm resources. Collection of the crop germplasm got impetus in the 1920s and as a result, presently, over six million germplasm accessions are held in over 1300 genebanks across the world. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is one of the important crop germplasm centers and holds 114 870 accessions of sorghum, pearl millet, chickpea, pigeonpea, groundnut, and six small millets. The germplasm collection has been built up by the generous donations of several national and international institutes and collections from the farming communities around the world. A large portion of this germplasm consists of landraces (78.6%) followed by breeding lines (15.4%), wild relatives of crops (2%), released cultivars (1.3%), and precise information is not available for the remaining 2.6% of germplasm accessions. About 99% of the collection has been characterized for a number of morphological, agronomical, and the nutritional quality traits, and the information has been computerized under an easy retrieval system. The germplasm accessions are maintained

following high scientific standards and conserved in a sophisticated facility. Besides managing the genetic resources, ICRISAT also has mandate for the genetic improvement of above cited first five crops. ICRISAT scientists generate breeding research materials of these crops and provide it to the scientists in national research programmes. As of now, over 1.2 million germplasm samples from ICRISAT genebank have been distributed to scientists worldwide. About 30% of these samples have been shared with the Indian national program scientists. This germplasm sharing has resulted in release of 544 varieties (478 from bred- and 66 from basic germplasm) supplied from ICRISAT.

ICRISAT has adhered to the policies of NBPGR/ Government of India while importing and exporting the germplasm using the Plant Quarantine Facility at ICRISAT-Patancheru where NBPGR and ICRISAT scientists have been working closely. So far there is no instance of the occurrence of any disease or insect-pest from the ICRISAT supplied germplasm material to other countries.