

INTERVIEW

New Secretary Outlines the Priorities of ITPGRFA

Dr. Kent Nnadozie has recently taken over as the Secretary of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources (ITPGRFA) during GB7 at Kigali. Dr. Nnadozie has a long experience of working on legal and policy matters and intergovernmental processes, with both the ITPGRFA and FAO's Commission for Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. A lawyer by training, Dr. Nnadozie holds master's degree in business administration and his Ph.D. work focusses on international legal systemic issues regarding genetic resources.

Sunil Archak on behalf of IJPGR interviewed Dr. Kent Nnadozie on 22-06-2018 at FAO, Rome.

IJPGR: Congratulations on assuming the responsibility of Secretary of ITPGRFA. The world is looking at you at the moment when the International Treaty is undergoing many changes. What are the three top priorities you have set for yourself?

Kent Nnadozie: Thank you. I am honored that the Governing Body has entrusted me with this responsibility and I look forward to working with India and all Contracting Parties to continue making progress on the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources around the world. The International Treaty is, indeed, at a very exciting stage of its evolution. Our challenge will be to keep up with the changing environment and to continue making a difference in the world. The most challenging issue and, therefore, the top priority for me now is to assist Contracting Parties in reaching agreement in the ongoing negotiations to enhance the functioning of the Multilateral System of the Treaty. This includes agreeing on adequate benefit-sharing arrangements, and revising the scope and coverage of the Multilateral System.

There are, of course, many priorities facing us today, but if I have to pick three, I would say:

1. **Continue supporting smallholder farmers**, who are among the most vulnerable when it comes to coping with the consequences of environmental, climatic, or manmade disasters. We are doing this in a number of ways, such as (a) by supporting projects



in developing countries through the Benefit-sharing Fund (BSF), and (b) by providing training and building capacity where it is most needed, included supporting the protection of Farmers' Rights and traditional knowledge. I recently had the opportunity to visit BSF project sites in rural Malawi, Kenya and Tanzania, where we met with the farmers as well as the PGR experts involved in the projects. I was touched and delighted to see how much they are able to achieve with the support provided through the BSF. We must continue to support projects in developing countries.

2. **Establishing a strong financial and operational footing for the International Treaty.** The growth of the Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing (MLS) and the evolution of the Funding Strategy remain important priorities for the International Treaty. We will work closely with the Working Group tasked with these important policy issues. (a) First is the need to provide a more reliable source of financial resources needed to continue key Treaty programs, e.g. projects supporting farmers in developing countries through the International

Treaty's Benefit-sharing Fund. Since inception, the BSF receives many more deserving project proposals than available funds. More regular funds into the BSF will make it more possible to try to meet this growing demand. (b) Hand-in-hand with adequate and predictable benefit-sharing is that the more diverse and inclusive the list of crops available through the MLS (as listed in Annex 1) will be, the greater the chances will be for farmers and breeders to develop the crop varieties they need to adapt to changing climatic conditions and to feed our growing world population. This will also lead to conserving and, indeed, boosting the world's agro-biodiversity, which in turn, will provide a more varied and more nutritious food basket.

3. **Working towards achieving universality by having all countries join the International Treaty.**

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is important for every nation in the world, and it is important to have everybody join our global community. We will all benefit by sharing and working together to conserve the natural agricultural heritage and rich agricultural biodiversity we have been entrusted with for current and future generations. This is also in keeping with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To mention just a few of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

- a. **SDG 2** calls on all of us to end hunger, which we are doing by promoting sustainable agriculture and supporting the most vulnerable segments of society, including smallholder farmers;
- b. **SDG 13** calls on all of us to combat climate change, which we are contributing to through our BSF projects and by building capacity in various Contracting Parties; and
- c. **SDG 15** calls on all of us to halt the loss of crop diversity, which we are working in numerous

ways, not the least of which is through our BSF projects and by encouraging sustainable use of PGRFA.

IJPGR: What are the topmost challenges that you are looking at?

Kent Nnadozie: There are a couple of challenges that come to mind:

1. Ensuring reliable and adequate **financial resources** to enable us to continue the valuable programmes and activities of the International Treaty.
2. Effectively **moderating the different views on critical issues**, such as on the enhancement of the MLS.

IJPGR: How do you visualize bringing tech-rich and gene-rich countries together in a consensus-oriented forum like the ITPGRFA?

Kent Nnadozie: I truly believe that bringing together the two groups you mention is a win-win situation. Those you are referring to as "tech-rich" need the "gene-rich" and vice-a-versa. The reality is both need one another. So, the main task is to highlight the mutual advantages of such a coalition, because we all share common objectives under the Treaty, and face common challenges to global food security and climatic challenges to agriculture.

IJPGR: Do you plan to get in more contracting parties, like China?

Kent Nnadozie: Our aim is and should be universality, which means inviting all those who are not yet Contracting Parties to the International Treaty to join our growing community. The larger our global community becomes the better for everyone. Sharing the world's plant genetic resources, sustainably using these precious resources – these are our key objectives. Joining the International Treaty is a win-win situation for everyone.