

Foreword

Over 1 billion people around the world are now suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition. The latest projections indicate that the world's population is likely to increase to over 9 billion by the year 2050, with the great majority of these people living in developing countries. To feed this expanding population, the world's agricultural production will need to increase by at least 70%. Due to the limited availability of new land for agriculture, 70% of the increase in cereal production will need to come from increased yields. In this situation, the conservation, exchange and use of plant genetic resources are critical to food security.

Agricultural research and production systems depend on genetic resources, but threats to the security of these resources continue to grow. Many existing genebanks are inadequate and, in some instances, the loss of plant genetic diversity in genebanks may be as important as it is in the field. National programmes to conserve, develop and use genetic diversity are often underfunded and understaffed.

Developments in international and national law and policy over the past 15 years have changed the working environment for those in charge of managing and making decisions about genetic resources. Former 'routine' collecting missions cannot now be carried out without understanding the legal environment and, in particular, access legislation. Research cannot be undertaken without understanding the legal environment and, in particular, intellectual property rights. In short, today, genetic resource managers need to understand the legal and policy environment in order to do their jobs effectively. The task of understanding all the issues of relevance to the conservation and management of plant genetic resources is extremely complex.

One of the most important developments in the legal and policy environment in the last decade has been the adoption and entry into force of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the adoption of its standard material transfer agreement (SMTA). This learning module attempts to develop knowledge and skills on the International Treaty in light of other international agreements and on the use of the SMTA. The learning module contains practical exercises to reinforce an understanding of the impact and working of International Treaty law in the types of situations that professionals in plant genetic resources can expect to face.

The development of the original comprehensive learning modules (2003 and 2005 2nd edition) arose out of a wider exercise covering the whole range of law and policy relevant to the management of plant genetic resources, prepared under the leadership of Bioversity International and ISNAR. The present learning module was developed in response to a need expressed by developing countries and by the Governing Body of the International Treaty for assistance and capacity building on the operation of the International Treaty itself. The learning module was initiated and sponsored by the CGIAR System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP) and developed under the leadership of Bioversity International with financial support from the CGIAR Generation Challenge Programme (GCP).

Emile Frison
Director-General, Bioversity International
Programme Leader, SGRP

Shakeel Bhatti
Secretary to the Governing Body of the
International Treaty