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The *Aksum* Commission - CGRFA

Guiding Global Governance

A Civil Society Report

The FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (CGRFA) held its seventh regular session in Rome from 15-23 May, 1997. The Commission's 154 member countries had two tasks: to continue negotiations leading to a legally-binding International Undertaking covering plant genetic resources that could become an agricultural protocol to the Biodiversity Convention; and, to maintain the momentum achieved through last year's Leipzig Conference on Plant Genetic Resources. Most Commission members exceeded their own expectations regarding the International Undertaking - but they fell short of the acceptable minimum on the second objective.

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The Aksum Perspective

OECD states find the South's sense of injury and passion for justice in the negotiations surrounding Farmers' Rights and the International Undertaking difficult to understand. They need only look out the window of their FAO meeting rooms. Intended to have been Mussolini's Colonial Ministry, the FAO buildings are fronted by the imposing Obelisk of Aksum. Almost two millennia old, the Ethiopian Obelisk was pirated from the ancient capital in 1937 - exactly sixty years ago. As delegations debated a new legally-binding agreement on the exchange of crop germplasm, Ethiopians marked the fiftieth anniversary of an OECD state's contractual commitment to repatriate the Obelisk. Recently, the Italian Government reiterated its intention to restore this sovereign treasure to the people of Aksum and Ethiopia. The Obelisk has come to represent a System of Greed - and of broken promises - that have plagued South-North relations from the founding of the United Nations.

As luck would have it, the Commission also met exactly 100 years after British troops ransacked the Palace at Benin and pirated the famous Benin Bronzes - a fabulous collection of several thousand religious and artistic pieces that symbolize - with the Obelisk - the thwarted history of Africa. Following the theft of 1897, the British auctioned off most of the collection to the Berlin Museum. During the chaos of World War II, the treasure disappeared. Another symbol of the System of Greed.

But there is hope in the Aksum Obelisk - battered as it is by the traffic of Rome. History - and food security - make clear that the System of Greed overlooked the real treasure of Aksum. Late every October, the people of Aksum gather at the church near where the Obelisk once stood to exchange seeds. From far and wide - from the vast diversity of plateaus and valleys of Ethiopia, those who have give freely and without question to those who have not. The Poor are restored and the diversity is reinvigorated. This is the System of Generosity. This is Farmers' Rights. It has not yet been pirated and the South has not yet surrendered to the North's greed.

There is hope, too, in the Benin Bronzes. Lost for almost half a century, the Berlin collection appeared mysteriously with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Africa's heritage was rediscovered - not in Berlin - but in Leipzig. For the diplomats in FAO's Red and Green Rooms - in the shadow of the Obelisk - the connections is clear.

The IU Negotiation

Five of the Commission's seven days of formal meetings were devoted to the renovation of the International Undertaking. The considerable progress achieved was at the price of the rest of the agenda.

International Undertaking

On Access and Praxis

The dominant issue of the seventh Commission session was the revision of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources first adopted in 1983 - nine years before the Biodiversity Convention. The intent of the negotiations is to create a legally-binding IU that is wholly compatible with the CBD. To date, there have been two extraordinary Commission rounds devoted to this task and the May meeting was, in a sense, a hybrid between a third extraordinary session and the regular work of the Commission. As such, the Commission opened with almost two days of regional and inter-regional deliberations followed by a further two days of formal Working Groups. While one Working Group met in FAO's Red Room to debate the scope and access issues critical to the formation of an intergovernmental system of germplasm exchange, a second Working Group convened in the Green Room across the hall to do battle over the implementation of Farmers' Rights. Four days on the IU, as it turned out, were not enough and the Commission returned to the item for a fifth day of working groups and "Friends of the Chair" seeking further progress.

There was indeed progress. Perhaps for the first time, all governments acknowledged the political and economic necessity of a new International Undertaking. Also, for the first time, the various regions came to an understanding of the complexity involved in establishing variable systems of germplasm exchange for major and minor food crops. By the Commission's conclusion - late Friday night - most delegations agreed that two more negotiating rounds would be necessary (along with one or more informal rounds) before governments would be ready to ratify an agreement.

Scope and Access

Where there's Scope there's Hope

Scope: It is difficult to discern the debate between scope and access since the two are mutually-dependent. In the final analysis, there was agreement on scope. There was not an agreement on access. Governments are continuing to describe two (quite artificial) approaches to determining the scope of species to be included in the new IU. In general, some states in the South - and France - are arguing that each sovereign state will "volunteer" to exchange a nationally-determined range of accessions via a "facilitated access" arrangement which clearly implies some cost and some benefit-sharing agreement. Meanwhile, the North would either prefer not to address scope at this time (the European view) or would like to specify the precise species and gene banks that would participate in a multilateral system of exchange (the US view). The United States, in fact, appended a 36 line item list of crops it believes should be incorporated into a multilateral system.

The South also argues that any material in *ex situ* international or even national gene banks whose country of origin can be identified should be regarded as the sovereign property of that country. Material in gene banks whose origins are unknown should be placed in the multilateral exchange system and the benefits arising from their use should be shared among the countries of the South.

There are many nuances within the South. Africa, for example, continues to send a mixed message regarding multilateral versus bilateral exchange mechanisms. So convoluted are the interpretations as to render the use of terms like "multilateral" and "bilateral" almost meaningless. Asia, on the other hand, tends

toward a more traditional approach to multilateral exchange for major food crops while wishing to reserve on the exchange of more commercially-important species. The Latin Americans meander somewhere between the Africans and the Asians although Argentina, Brazil and Colombia (to varying degrees and at different times) are gingery about implicating any plant germplasm that might crop up in a rainforest or uncultivated savannah.

If this appears to indicate confusion, it is far less than it was before the May Commission. In reality, most South governments agree that certain widely-dispersed food crops could be part of a relatively unconstrained system of "facilitated" exchange. Other germplasm will probably be subject to varying levels of restriction. Determining just what should be placed in which category is clearly a matter for careful national deliberation and delegations to Rome were not ready to take that step without further consultations back home.

The South's position is far from popular in the North - whose bottom line is that the collections of the CGIAR Centres should not be restricted or fragmented. In general, the North would like to see as much germplasm as possible within the scope of a relatively free and open multilateral exchange system. Despite this, the North seems to realize that the scope of a new IU will be determined by the access/benefit-sharing conditions reached by all governments. Therefore, even the USA concedes there is no point in pressing for categories at this juncture.

Access: Intimately tied to the scope debate is the discussion regarding the conditions under which countries will have access to germplasm. The South, quite reasonably, wants assurance that commercial benefits arising from access to its germplasm will be shared equitably with the real countries of origin. Most South delegations recognize that the economic return from exchanges of wheat, rice, maize, etc. will be difficult or impossible to assign and that almost all countries stand to benefit from relatively unconstrained access. Conditions of access for

high-value species that have not been broadly dispersed (everything from plantation crops like coffee or citrus to forage legumes and grasses or specialty spices) will require controlled access or bilateral contracts to ensure that benefits are really shared. While the Europeans are realistic about this, the U.S. and Australia maintain that the full and free exchange of agricultural germplasm is its own reward. This is the trickle-down theory applied to DNA and it conveniently overlooks the North's propensity to slap patent monopolies on anything that grows.

All sides privately acknowledge that Africa's "facilitated access" position - including two or more levels of scope and access conditions - will be necessary. If this realism is refreshing, however, there remain major gaps in agreement (and understanding) over the value of germplasm. By and large, the South continues to believe that the seeds in its fields are almost beyond calculation while the North tries to downplay its long-term dependence on the South's living diversity.

Farmers' Rights

Gaining Rights - Risking Privileges

According to the North's IU game plan, Farmers' Rights was not to be a major issue in the IU negotiations and should be relegated, as gracefully as possible, to the sidelines. That scenario evaporated during the Leipzig Conference when Farmers' Rights struck out of nowhere to become the make-or-break topic for the Global Plan of Action. To the North's chagrin, Farmers' Rights remained the problematic focal point of tensions in Rome during the Commission.

Seen from the North, Farmers' Rights is a sloppy attempt to counter Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR) and other Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) such as patents. It is also seen to be an attempt by opportunistic South governments to claim financial benefit based upon the historic and continuing work of their farming communities in nurturing plant genetic resources. In this light, realistic agreements on germplasm exchange;

financial support for national conservation efforts; and generalized understandings on benefit-sharing for commercial material should be enough to set aside some of the wider (or "wilder") demands encompassed by Farmers' Rights. From this perspective, Farmers' Rights is just another angle on access and benefit-sharing.

The EU and the USA (but not countries like Canada or Norway) also see in Farmers' Rights the threat of constitutional change or Human Rights conventions. These wider implications make them very nervous.

For its part, the South has spelled out a long list of elements which the G77 says are part of the implementation of Farmers' Rights. Included in the list (though contested sometimes by Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay) are the right to land, indigenous peoples' rights, the right to save seed (the so-called "farmers' privilege"), and the right to be insulated from the North's intellectual property regimes. The South also speaks about "collective rights" which conjures both Human Rights and *sui generis* IPR images that make the USA and Australia especially uncomfortable.

Some observers often feel that the South's support of Farmers' Rights is about as wide as the Pampas and about as shallow as Punjabi top soil. In other words, the G77 will plough under Farmers' Rights the moment the North offers a good deal on benefit-sharing. This may be partly true although some governments have very strong views on the right of farmers to save any and all planting material and to be able to replant or exchange this germplasm as they wish. Some countries, too, look beyond financial compensation and technology transfer interests to the long-term well-being of farming communities. At close of work May 23rd, Farmers' Rights remained the unpredictable 'wild card' in IU negotiations.

Next Steps

Time for a Walk in the Woods?

By the time delegations wandered off for dinner or bed very late Friday night, it was clear to most that the negotiations - though successful - need careful and detailed follow-through in the weeks and months ahead. It appears likely that an extra-ordinary Commission session (its third) will be convened before May of 1998 (prior to COP IV of the Biodiversity Convention that month). Before that negotiation, there is urgent need for an informal consultation involving key governments and non-governmental organizations. Such an informal meeting (perhaps in Sweden or Switzerland) could allow the kind of frank exchange rendered impossible during formal rounds. The informal get-together should be held well in advance of the Commission so that discussions there can penetrate policy development back home.

Beyond this, some delegates feel that an even smaller and still less formal exchange is needed among a few regional movers and shakers. There are clear discontinuities on the issue of germplasm value and species categories that can only be overcome when key players have confidence in one another. If so, that encounter is urgently needed sometime this year. The sooner the better.

During negotiations, the G77 and Europe almost joined forces to establish their own negotiating text separate from the North Americans and Australia. As President of the EU, The Netherlands played a crucial role in building bridges to the G77 - especially Africa. But, when the Commission next meets, the United Kingdom may be in the EU driver's seat and that country has been notoriously unhelpful throughout the whole process. Now, with a new government, the UK appears to be much more pro-UN and pro-EU. If the country's political masters can be encouraged to take note of the IU negotiations, there still might be hope that Europe can continue and increase its collaboration with the South.

Implications of the G77 IU Position

Analysis of "Benefit-sharing" in IU Negotiations

If the G77 position were adopted, what would the South gain? What would the OECD lose? How realistic is the bargaining position?

Benefits for South	Implications for OECD
1. Establishes membership/network (for germplasm exchange)	Requires commitment to adhere to members' rules
2. Legally-binding	Depending on country, this may require parliamentary ratification entailing monitoring/reporting obligations
3. Repatriates South's control over <i>ex situ</i> collections made prior to CBD	Obliges surrender of several million accessions
4. Establishes membership control over germplasm whose origin is uncertain	Obliges payment for access to some germplasm North already holds
5. Furthers Farmers' Rights	Threatens IPRs and gives South an "escape clause" on any exchange (PIC, "varieties under development", etc.)
6. Increases exchange transparency	Increases administrative burden and risks business contracts
7. Requires benefit-sharing	This is seen as <i>Status quo</i> with CBD
8. Re-affirms sovereignty	This is seen as <i>Status quo</i> with CBD
9. Potential to make improved Germplasm Collection Code legally-binding	Further constraints and obligations to access
10. Raises profile of PGRFA at home and abroad	This would be welcomed by most North negotiators

Conclusion: On the face of it, the South's proposal would seem to be illogical - but it is a negotiating position. It is important to note that if the position is tactically indefensible, it is morally defensible and appropriate. However, there is no incentive for the North to negotiate a new IU on these terms unless the North is convinced that the terms will be amended to be more beneficial for the North. The North's bargaining proposals are not as clear and largely amount to the status quo. It is time for the North to make genuine and detailed proposals.

Other Work of the Commission

Meanwhile, follow-through to the Leipzig Plan of Action; the renegotiation of the agreement with CGIAR; the shortcomings of the Early Warning System; and the urgent need to address livestock diversity all got short-changed during the Commission.

Leipzig Follow through

Nothing New... Despite Additional Financing

This was the first meeting of the Commission (in regular session) since the adoption of the Leipzig Plan of Action 11 months earlier. Given the enormous energy created around the Leipzig Process, governments might have been expected to demand 2 to 3 days of reports and debate on national and intergovernmental follow-through. As it turned out, Leipzig was heaped into the *pot pourri* of other non-IU agenda items that occupied barely a day and a half of the CGRFA schedule.

Short shrift though it was, the Commission's time does not translate into the Commission's attention. In fact, many governments - South and North - have taken the GPA seriously and work is underway on many fronts to increase global activity on the conservation and utilization of agricultural germplasm. Had there been an opportunity, Germany and The Netherlands could have disclosed their countries' new willingness to contemplate a mandatory financing mechanism for the GPA. Beyond contemplation, Norway could have talked about what it has already launched for new work in sub-Saharan Africa and (even) Sweden might have reported good news about its own new commitment to work in this field. For its part, the USA has restored some of its budget support for CGIAR, some linked to genetic resources. Among the industrialized countries, only Canada announced to the Commission, with confusing pride, that it was not using the GPA to further its own work on genetic resources. From the South, there has been impressive activity in many corners of Africa; new cooperation in the Andean region; and more activity in Asia ranging from Philippines to Bhutan and Bangladesh. Sadly, this momentum could dissipate between now and the next scheduled regular Commission meeting in 1999.

Ex Situ Collections

Reports without Retorts

A major bone of contention separating South and North over a revised IU is the status of germplasm held in *ex situ* gene banks around the world. As everyone knows, the Nairobi Final Act for the CBD left the fate of collections made prior to the coming into force of the Convention an unresolved issue. Quite properly, the South contends that, where the origin is known, such germplasm should be seen to be part of the sovereign right of the originating country - regardless of when it was collected. The North acknowledges the problem but is far from thrilled at the thought of surrendering several million accessions without getting something in return. The North is especially unwilling to dismantle the CGIAR's unique and extensive collections.

With this in the background, it was amazing that the South did not make the connection between the IU debate and the Commission's agenda item reviewing the status of the network of gene banks and the particular agreement between FAO and CGIAR that gives FAO "oversight" over CG germplasm. Barely a word was said. According to the agreement signed in 1994, the arrangement comes under review by both parties during 1997-98 and can be renewed for a second four year period without further reference to governments. Thus, unless the extraordinary negotiating session takes on the issue during its (likely) session in early 1998, the South's best hope of establishing its sovereignty over CG collections and/or applying diplomatic pressure on the North - has been squandered.

IPR Report: Of additional concern is the inability of the CGIAR to monitor its own relations with the private sector when sharing germplasm. RAFI told the Commission of several instances - some of them in 1997 - in

which companies or governments in the North have taken CG germplasm or Centre-produced varieties and placed them under PBR or patent protection. The CG's coordinating centre for the FAO Accord is IPGRI yet IPGRI had no knowledge of any of the IPR initiatives. Neither does IPGRI (or anyone else in the CGIAR) track other research arrangements involving the private sector. In the brief debate on this item, IPGRI did concede that some form of monitoring and reporting might be appropriate. However, as the Centre's Director-General quite properly pointed out, CGIAR needs policy guidance on a number of issues from the Commission. If the Commission only offers the Centres an hour or two every two years, reports have little purpose. Governments need to get their act together.

Network

And now for an Early Listening System?

The "report without retort" concern returned to haunt the Commission during its presentation of its information and early warning system. Governments were (fleetingly) concerned that reports submitted by CGIAR indicated serious shortcomings in the genetic resources programmes of at least ICRISAT and CIAT yet FAO had not flagged these Centres for further review or remedy. In fact, FAO has no capacity for "early listening" nor to take action. FAO is fully aware of the problem and more than anxious to find a solution within the strangling constraints of its withering budget. One area slated for early review is the information system established within FAO. It is not particularly impressive and many Commission participants were surprised to find FAO staff quite unfamiliar with the up-and-running SINGER (Internet) database developed by IPGRI and other CG Centres. SINGER currently provides extensive information on all CG collections and its base is growing by leaps and bounds.

Commission Structure

Commission, Heal Thyself?

In a healthy (though unusual) move, FAO decided to consult with governments on the future structure of the CGRFA as it functions within the Organization. Sometime during the coming year, the Commission secretariat will shift to the Sustainable Development division from Agriculture. The move facilitates the broader mandate of the Commission which now includes plants and livestock and is destined to spread (by Council resolution) to fisheries and forestry. While FAO staff addressing these four diverse areas of genetic resource activity will remain with their respective divisions, it seemed appropriate for the Commission itself to be independent of any one area.

During CGRFA debates, it was evident that not all governments - nor all FAO departments - are happy with the wider mandate. Championed by Argentina, the fish folk are clearly hoping to avoid the Commission's oversight and establish a competing intergovernmental body. Though more resigned to their fate, the forestry folk are eager to push ahead with their own Global Plan of Action and a forest genetic resources undertaking. Canada, Switzerland, the UK and the predictable Argentina are also less than enthusiastic (but resigned) to surrendering animal genetic resources to the Commission. A row broke out among delegations over whether or not its work would deal with all 80 species referent to animal genetic resources for food and agriculture - or confine itself to the core livestock species (cows, chickens, pigs, sheep, etc.). After much wasted energy, governments finally acknowledged the reality that FAO's small but active animals secretariat would have their hands more than full keeping the major species alive.

Working Groups: The Commission was also unduly occupied with a debate over its own Working Groups. Normally, the current Working Group meets once a year at best as well as immediately prior to the biennial sessions of the Commission itself. Composed of "governments" rather than "individuals", the

Working Group can come together through FAO Permanent Representatives (Perm Reps) with minimal cost. However, the Working Group to date has featured crops - not livestock - and many doubt that a single Working Group can pull together sufficient time or expertise to cultivate crops and herd livestock issues. Then, too, the Working Group will inevitably have some obligations related to the negotiating of the new IU. How could governments carry out their collective obligations within the confines of a single Working Group and a budget that allows for only one two-day meeting per year?

The "solution" was for the Commission to agree that an extraordinary Commission session early in 1998 was the highest budgeting priority. That session would further develop the new IU. Secondly, governments concurred that a new Working Group could be created to deal with animals and that group should meet as soon as funding is available. As a third priority, the Commission determined that a plant Working Group could meet - when money permits - to follow-through on Leipzig and monitor the other work of the Commission.

Secretariat

Sins of Commission

In the course of debates over the future work of the Commission, Canada and the United States

both took the opportunity to blast the Secretariat for failing to get some of the documents to governments six weeks in advance of meetings. In a remarkably inarticulate diatribe, the Canadian delegate accused the Secretariat of thwarting democracy and hamstringing the capacity of governments to govern. While almost everybody - including FAO staff - agreed with Canada that democracy is damaged when governments don't have time to read and prepare for debates, most countries were embarrassed by the outburst. The Commission secretariat - which was sized to manage one meeting every two years - has had to administer to three Commission sessions in 13 months - as well as Leipzig, the Food Summit, and the Biodiversity Convention's agricultural agenda. 1996 was - as Sweden noted - the Year of Agro Biodiversity and most of the burden fell upon the Commission's tiny Secretariat.

To make matters worse, of course, Canada has been among the industrialized countries leading the charge to cut FAO's budget. As a direct consequence, FAO has fewer text translators and less administrative support than ever. Worse still, the U.S. - which joined Canada in loud complaints, is many millions of dollars in arrears for its membership fees to the Organization. In this light, many countries found the attack on FAO staff abusive and absurd.

Guiding Global Governance The Power to Govern

The following information is based upon the Secretariat's preliminary list of delegations as made available during the Commission meeting. It will change when the final list of participants becomes available.

Although the FAO Commission has 153 member States, only 110 were able to attend the Rome meeting. Notable among the absentees was New Zealand among the OECD countries that has benefited most from exotic germplasm. New Zealand is also not a member of the CGIAR even though it has estimated the value of wheat germplasm provided through the CGIAR in the

millions of dollars. Thirty-six of the absentee States, however, were from the South. Either these countries did not have an available representative in Rome (no embassy or no diplomat able to devote her/his time exclusively to FAO affairs) or the country was unable to send an appropriate person from their capital due to a lack of funding.

Among those who did attend, only a third were from the "North" but delegations from these countries averaged three persons while "South" delegations averaged two persons. If the countries of the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are excluded, in fact, the "North" came closer to four persons per delegation. Africa and the Near East had fewer than two delegates each. This is important because the Commission broke into two working groups that met simultaneously. In addition, there were "Friends of the Chair" meetings and other "Contact Groups" and regional meetings that sometimes conflicted in timetable. Only those countries with large delegations were able to cover all the meetings.

In summary, one-third of the countries of the South that are members of the Commission were not able to attend and another third were able to attend but were not able to monitor all the relevant negotiations.

It is equally significant that only one in five delegates from the South appear to have access to e-mail while one in three of their North counterparts have e-mail. In these times, the ability to communicate with other delegations by e-mail - and to download FAO documents from the Internet - are a critical advantage in preparing

and defending government positions. While North delegations were able to download Commission documents somewhat in advance of the meeting, the South (especially Africa and the Near East) generally could not. During the Commission, the larger North delegations often worked with laptop computers and were able to "bookmark" relevant key words and text connecting all the documentation. In general, the South could not.

It should be noted that FAO is trying to improve computer access for the South and that the Secretariat made available a draft list of fax and e-mail addresses from the Leipzig Conference for this Commission. The list, however, is neither complete nor entirely accurate. According to that list, in fact, the Executive Director of RAFI - headquartered in Ottawa - is identified as a Senior Programme Officer for Documentation and Information in Nairobi, Kenya. RAFI has no such position - in Ottawa or Nairobi!

Negotiating Strengths			
<i>Region</i>	<i>States</i>	<i>Delegates</i>	<i>Average</i>
Europe (OECD)	22	81	3.7
Other North (North Am, Australia, Japan)	4	13	3.3
New Europe (Former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe)	8	9	1.1
North (OECD Plus)	34	103	3
Africa (Sub-Saharan)	35	59	1.7
Asia/Pacific	12	28	2.3
GRULAC (Latin America, Caribbean incl. Mexico)	19	51	2.7
Near East (West Asia, North Africa)	10	17	1.3
South (non-OECD)	76	155	2
Total	110	258	2.3

The Power to Govern

Access to Decision-making at CGRFA

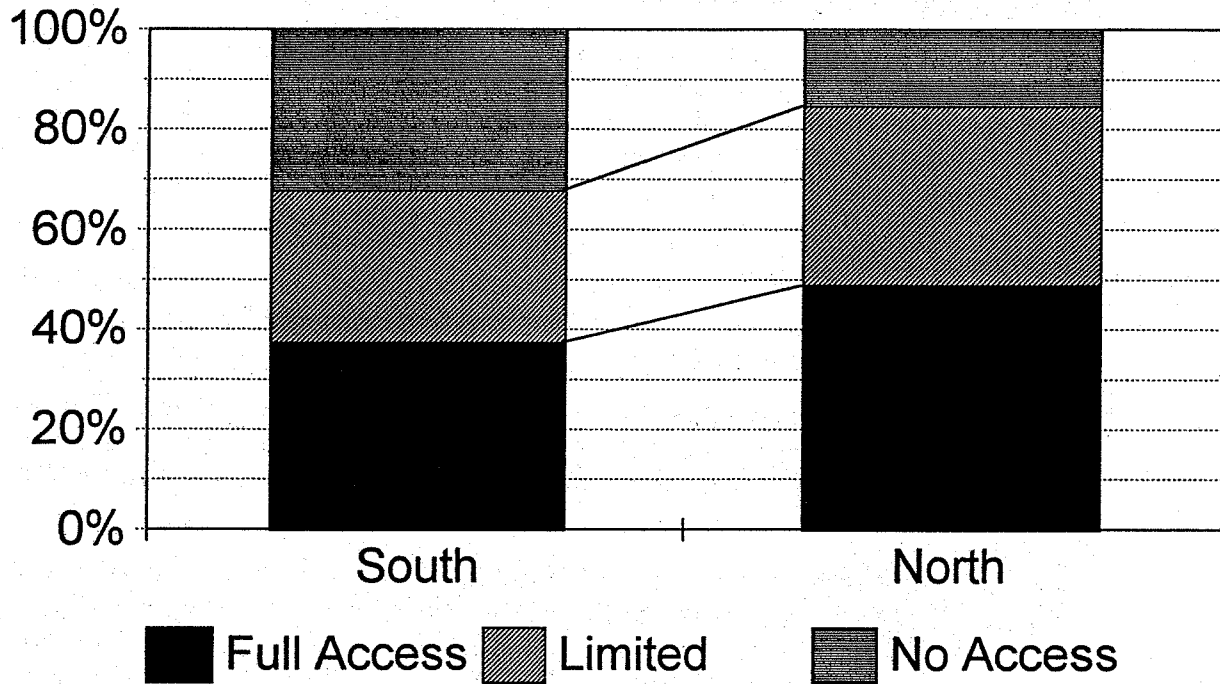


Figure 1

21 Countries that Made a Difference (Positively or Negatively)

Country	Comment
Angola	The Delegation's scientific expertise, combined with that of Ethiopia, continues to give Africa strong leadership on many techno-political points. Angola was outspoken and often courageous in confronting protagonists on access and scope issues.
Argentina	One of the three delegations other countries love to hate, Argentina's loner posture moderated somewhat during the course of negotiations as the new FAO Ambassador worked to re-take control of the delegation from a disgruntled former CBD staffer. Argentina broke with all other countries, however, over the final report's reference to fisheries - even though governments had approved the Commission's responsibility for fisheries germplasm at an earlier FAO Council.
Australia	Despite Argentina's strenuous efforts, the Australian delegation was the hands-down favourite pugilist during the Commission. While this country, too, tended to moderate toward the end of negotiations, Australia managed to pick fights with both Ethiopia and The Netherlands on the same agenda item and earn the reprimands of the entire G77 and the European regional group.
Brazil	As always, the Brazilian team ranked as perhaps the most professional delegation. Not as always, however, this team managed to play a low-key and less aggressive role. Other governments debated whether the Brazilian position has really changed or if the country is wisely letting the USA and Argentina do its work instead.
Canada	The U.S. delegation reported to Washington that it had made "great progress" in bringing Canada around to its viewpoint and this was evident during negotiations where Canada seemed to shift toward the USA and away from Europe. There is no disputing the preparedness or depth of the Canadian team, however, and Canada's position often left its allies uncertain about its final objective.
Colombia	In the uncomfortable position of being somewhat bigger than its briefs, the hefty Colombian delegation seemed to have a hard time getting its act together. Never short on intelligence or energy, the delegation still seemed inconsistent - flip-flopping between customary GRULAC positions and the Argentina/USA perspective. To quote one European delegate, "When Colombia's serious its important; when Colombia's not it's a real pain."
Ethiopia	As much as Angola led the African cause on access issues, Ethiopia led both Africa and the entire G77 on Farmers' Rights. The large (for the South) delegation stimulated some of the most combative and intellectually-challenging debates. Perhaps because some key diplomats arrived late from BioSafety battles in Montreal, Ethiopia sometimes seemed uncertain and inconsistent in merging the Commission's several related issues.
France	It is often unclear whether the French take more <i>joie de vivre</i> in being part of the solution or revelling in the problem. In the Commission, however, France has played a seriously supportive - though sometimes mysterious role. Elected as rapporteur to the Commission, France earned praise for its fair-handed drafting - so much so that the greatest complaints concerning translation quality came from the French!
Germany	Among the G7 countries, Germany stands out as the most pro-South and most willing to take its Leipzig Plan of Action to heart. The delegation's obvious commitment to genetic resources and to successful negotiations has won it unusual credibility.

21 Countries that Made a Difference (Positively or Negatively)

Iran	The last time a Near East country won praise for its role in an FAO germplasm negotiation was in the Eighties when Libya's Ambassador - a consummate diplomat with the added advantage of being a true scientist, routinely settled political and technical disputes between the British and Americans. Although the Iranian delegation lacks this kind of experience, it won wide (sometimes grudging) admiration for its scientific integrity, courtesy, and commitment to Farmers' Rights and follow-through to the Global Plan of Action.
Japan	Usually quiet, the Japanese delegation spoke out constructively on Farmers' Rights and helped Europe isolate the Australians and Americans. Whenever it wants to Japan can make a major difference to the outcome of negotiations.
Malaysia	The delegation continues to be one of the most politically-astute and energetic South negotiators. Malaysia is also one of the few countries that moves unhesitatingly between the regions, taking initiatives, and keeping the G77 coherent on Farmers' Rights. One of the key instigators of a final day strategy that would have isolated the U.S. and Australia, Malaysia came within a hair's breadth of a major diplomatic victory.
Netherlands	As President of the EU, the Dutch delegation did a remarkable job of building rapport with the G77 and helping to shift the EU position on Farmers' Rights to something very close to Africa's. The Netherlands also took on Australia over Farmers' Rights and then, in the closing hours of the Commission, strong-armed the U.S. into submission over the CGRFA report. Despite these accomplishments, the Dutch authoritarian style didn't win it any popularity contests within the European region and many countries felt that the confrontation with the USA - on a non-substantive point when there were many substantive differences to be found - was more showmanship than statesmanship.
Norway	In the enviable position of standing outside the EU-enforced consensus; with a booming economy and aid budget; and as a signatory only to UPOV'78, Norway was able to support much of the G77 position on Farmers' Rights. Its traditionally progressive posture was especially helpful on the farmers' "privilege" (right to save seed) issue. While the EU dithered over the risk that Farmers' Rights implies Human Rights, Norway had no such problem. Norway also managed to look beyond the IU debate to call for action on the Leipzig Plan and attend to the Commission's other neglected agenda items.
Samoa	As part of the Western Pacific Region, Samoa spent much of its time trying to find its well-heeled neighbours who seemed otherwise occupied (together) during regional meetings. Nevertheless, Samoa made its views felt on fisheries and crops and won respect for its competence and goodwill.
Sweden	In homogenized EU terms, Sweden "behaved" itself during the Commission but nevertheless managed to offer the negotiations the kind of constructive and creative energy countries have come to expect... even though the eclectic dynamo that has come to characterise Sweden's participation in these fora was delayed in coming.

21 Countries that Made a Difference (Positively or Negatively)

Switzerland	Among the most encouraging of recent diplomatic trends is that governments are starting to send the same delegations to related meetings regardless of the titles of the fora. Thus it is that Switzerland not only chaired the critical negotiations related to indigenous knowledge, intellectual property and Farmers' Rights at the CBD in Buenos Aires but also the Farmers' Rights working group at the Commission. Although sometimes too timid and tenuous, the goodwill is evident and the negotiations are moving along. Switzerland (perhaps unintentionally) is positioned to play an important role in the further resolution of the entire IU debate.
Tanzania	Combining diplomatic skill with strategic clarity, Tanzania is demonstrating leadership capabilities not seen from that country since the halcyon days of Amir Jamal. Despite unfamiliarity with some of the technical issues, the Tanzanian delegation learns quickly and plays a bridge-builder role between the diverse regions of Africa.
United Kingdom	Whether it's the new Labour Government or merely the constructive nature of the UK delegate this time, the country worked hard and creatively on the Farmers' Rights issue and earned good marks from other Europeans. The UK also yielded gracefully to pressure from The Netherlands and withdrew an alternative text proposal with enough aplomb to win loud applause. If this style continues, there's hope that the UK will keep the momentum with the G77 when it takes over the EU Presidency from The Netherlands.
United States	As in 1996, the U.S. delegation continues to be (despite a large field of contenders) its own worst enemy. Internal disagreements were sometimes openly visible to their seat-mates and the team was obliged to spend more of its time healing interdepartmental divisions than persuading other countries of the justness of their causes. Residual ill-will more than righteousness led the U.S. to defeat over a rather minor and solvable issue in the closing hours of the Commission but the delegation was too insecure to avoid the humiliation. Washington rumours that former Democratic Presidential candidate (against Nixon) George McGovern may become Ambassador to FAO were received with almost universal enthusiasm by all those born in the first half of this century.
Venezuela	The delegation surrendered its leader to the Commission Chair but kept its fastest talker to argue reason in the plenaries. As Chair, Venezuela took firm command of the proceedings and kept everyone in line and marching briskly. If the Commission has an individual hero it is its Chair.

Sowing and Weeding

Generating	A number of countries took an active role in the Commission - some for the first time. Despite possible inexperience, Egypt, Malawi, and Zambia could be delegations to reckon with in future meetings.
Degenerating?	Although they ranked among the movers and shakers of 1996, China, India, and Philippines were hardly to be heard from. Has Asia lost its voice?

Making Space for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Support	FAO Commission
<i>Preparation</i>	
Draft	Along with other stakeholders and steak-eaters, CSOs were consulted on the key IU negotiating texts as they evolved.
Access	CSOs had Internet (and mail) access to papers as they became available. The workload imposed by 3 Commission sessions in 13 months meant that most texts, however, were only available immediately prior to the Commission.
<i>Negotiation</i>	
Attend	CSOs were encouraged to attend.
Intervene	CSOs could attend and intervene in both Plenaries and Working Groups at the discretion of the Chair. Few CSOs took advantage of the available opportunities.
<i>Participation</i>	
Liaison	CSOs had cordial access to the FAO secretariat.
Facilities	CSOs were provided with a meeting room and telephone and shared computers, printers, e-mail (including Internet) with governments.



