

Intervention, WIPO Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore.

Mr Chairman, my thanks to you for allowing me to the time to speak. I am Emile Frison, Director General of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute, one of the 15 Future Harvest Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research. IPGRI hosts the Secretariat of the CGIAR's System-Wide Genetic Resources Programme, which coordinates the CG's policy activities in the field of genetic resources. Many of you will remember from last year, at the Fifth Session of the Intergovernmental Committee, that the SGRP information network, known as SINGER, was linked to WIPO's Online Portal of Databases and Registries Concerning Traditional Knowledge and Genetic Resources, to assist in this pilot study of prior art searches. There is, of course, much still to do in international standards and making these data more useful for prior art searches, but the effort has now begun.

Before the creation of this Committee, IPGRI, through the SGRP, also collated the responses of all the CG Centres to WIPO's fact finding mission on the intellectual property demands of holders of traditional knowledge. In the intervening three years IPGRI, on behalf of the CGIAR, has been present as an observer at meetings of this Committee.

I want now to discuss other ways in which WIPO and the CGIAR, through IPGRI, could work together.

As background, let me say that IPGRI has long worked with farmers and others to understand the subtleties of genetic resources for food and agriculture and how they are used and managed. We have begun to understand the role of farmers in creating, maintaining and enhancing the genetic resources of the plants and animals they work with and depend on. We have glimpsed the complexity of the on-farm maintenance of diverse genetic resources. And we have some insights into the history of crop genetic resources and the links between traditional knowledge and genetic resources.

The bottom line in all this is that farmers are the creators, users and maintainers of the patterns of diversity we see around us. Generations of farmers created almost all the genetic resources for food and agriculture in the world. Future generations of farmers will continue to need that diversity to meet their needs in a changing world.

In Nepal, for example, farmers get more than 90% of their seed through informal systems of exchange. That is one of the surprising results of IPGRI's project on in-situ and on farm conservation of plant genetic resources, which has been operational in nine countries over the past five years. As a result of what we have learned, we have been able to take information from the natural and social sciences and enable its application in the interface between farmers and society. In Nepal this has resulted in changes to government policy that encourage increased local value of and use of genetic resources.

For example, Nepal has devoted budget resources to seed fairs, which are a simple and effective system for giving farmers access to genetic resources, which they then incorporate into their farming systems. Government policy also now supports the creation of Community Biodiversity Registers, which record details of genetic resources and the traditional knowledge associated with them in pilot studies at villages across the country. This will probably find resonance with the Intergovernmental Committee's discussions of protection of traditional knowledge. However, these Registers were established not specifically to offer protection, but to increase the local value of resources and knowledge for local use. They are based on previous studies of how communities actually work as they exchange and make use of genetic resources.

There may be ways of integrating such Registers into national systems, but that is not something that we have focused on to date. What we do know from our studies is that the informal exchanges that underly so much of farmers' use of genetic resources are complex and sensitive. We note that any efforts to assign rights to knowledge or genetic resources will have to take account of existing informal systems of exchange and innovation. Any changes should complement farmers' activities, encouraging them to continue and deepen

their current activities, and should guard against efforts that will even inadvertently persuade farmers to behave differently.

The case of Nepal is just one example of IPGRI's work at the intersection of farmers and the wider concerns of governments and intergovernmental bodies. Our experience of and interest in all aspects of genetic resources enables us to play the part of honest broker, collating and disseminating germane information and assessing the implications and ramifications of different policy options. This was our role in the long and complex negotiations leading up to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, which will almost certainly come into force later this year. I have come here to put that experience at your disposal. Through the SGRP, and on behalf of all the Future Harvest Centres of the CGIAR, IPGRI stands ready to assist in any way it can in your deliberations.