

Saving Our Seeds: An Emergency Reserve for Genebanks in Peril

Photo: Random PUNCHES

Genebanks are the foundation of the world's food supply. They conserve the diversity of crops and their undomesticated cousins and make it available to researchers, breeders and farmers, helping our food systems adapt to the ever-increasing challenges of climate change. Yet, such collections are not indestructible.

Natural disasters, political crises, pest and disease outbreaks, equipment failure and, the challenges caused by the global pandemic can place them in jeopardy and trigger catastrophic loss of the invaluable resources they conserve.

The permanent loss of crop diversity makes it harder to develop new crops that can withstand climate change and feed a growing world population.

Coming Together to Build a New Safety Net

The Emergency Reserve for Genebanks has been set up to avert just such a scenario. Established jointly by the Secretariat of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (Plant Treaty) and the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust), the Reserve provides a funding mechanism that can respond rapidly whenever there is an imminent threat to collections of crop diversity that fall under the framework of the Plant Treaty.

The permanent loss of crop diversity makes it harder to develop new crops that can withstand climate change and feed a growing world population.



The Emergency Reserve is a component of a new 10-year project, “Biodiversity for Opportunities, Livelihoods and Development” (BOLD). Funded by the Government of Norway and launched in 2021, BOLD will help to strengthen food and nutrition security worldwide by supporting the conservation and use of crop diversity in genebanks.

Emergency Reserve: Helps to Prevent Catastrophic Losses

Laos: Rainy season in Laos threatens the energy supply, a crucial factor in maintaining genebanks functional. Funds were made available from the Emergency Reserve to the country’s Rice and Cash Crops Research Center, part of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI). The funds were used to buy and install a new generator, which now provides the genebank with a much-needed back-up source of energy to safeguard nearly 15,000 seed samples, many of which are of crops that are key to Lao diets, such as sticky rice.

Yemen: Just as Yemen was entering the hottest time of the year in August, a cooling unit failed at the genebank at the National Genetic Resources Center (NGRC) in Dhamar. Without swift action, this could have resulted in the loss of more than 6,000 seed samples stored there. The Crop Trust stepped in with an emergency grant to buy a new engine for the cooling unit and save the seeds. The NGRC genebank houses seeds of more than 40 crops, almost half of which are cereals.

Help Where and When it’s Needed Most

Through this partnership between the Plant Treaty and the Crop Trust, the Emergency Reserve for Genebanks provides rapid support to genebank collections within the Multilateral System in low- and middle-income countries when there is an imminent threat to the collection and no alternative financial support is available. The Emergency Reserve offers financial and technical assistance to repair equipment, procure supplies, evacuate collections or duplicate materials under threat.

Have Further Questions?

For queries, including about eligibility to apply for support from the Emergency Reserve, please send an email to info@croptrust.org. For media inquiries, please contact us via media@croptrust.org.

The Emergency Reserve for Genebanks is funded by the Governments of Norway, Italy and the U.S.



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



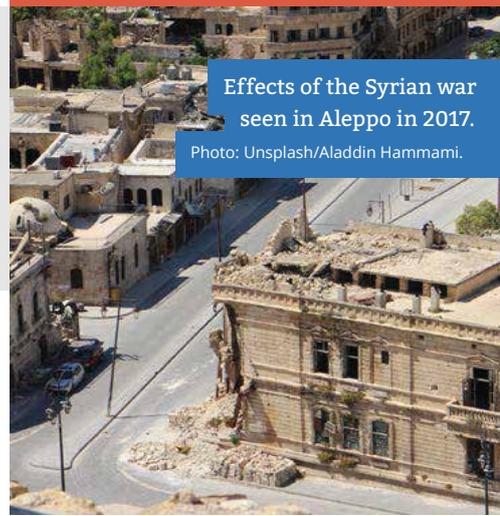
International Treaty
on Plant Genetic Resources
for Food and Agriculture

About the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

The Plant Treaty, which came into force in 2004, supports the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of their use. A key element of the Plant Treaty is the “Multilateral System,” which facilitates access to a pool of key genetic resources according to clearly defined rules. For more information, see www.fao.org/plant-treaty/en/.

About the Global Crop Diversity Trust

The Crop Trust, founded in 2004, is an international organization working to support conservation and use of plant genetic resources. It provides direct support from its Endowment Fund for the management and maintenance of key genebank collections of crop diversity. The Crop Trust is recognized as an essential element of the Plant Treaty’s funding strategy. For more information, see www.croptrust.org/.



Effects of the Syrian war seen in Aleppo in 2017.

Photo: Unsplash/Aladdin Hammami.