

Revised 26 March 2025

An Emergency Reserve for Genebanks

Operational Framework

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and the Global Crop Diversity Trust

1 Rationale

1.1 Introduction

Germplasm collections of important food crops around the world are suffering significant global damage or are under imminent threat of such damage, including because of the current pandemic, but also natural disasters, equipment failure, pest and pathogen outbreaks, institutional changes, and land ownership issues. Damage to unique germplasm collections is not only a loss for the holding institution, but also for the global agricultural research and breeding communities, as well as farmers and indeed society at large.

The Secretariat of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture ('International Treaty') and the Global Crop Diversity Trust ('Crop Trust') have therefore joined forces to set up, and mobilize resources for, an Emergency Reserve for Genebanks to facilitate rapid response to imminent threats to unique germplasm collections that fall under the framework of the International Treaty, in particular its Multilateral System of Access and Benefit-sharing.

This initiative responds to the recommendation by the Governing Body of the International Treaty for PGRFA to continue expanding cooperation between the Crop Trust and the International Treaty on resource mobilization, in particular initiatives that are jointly designed and implemented, and targeted to international collections and national genebanks in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

1.2 Context

The whole international community benefits from a rational, science-based system of *ex situ* conservation of PGRFA. Through the International Treaty, its Members are continuously enhancing the functioning of a global system that ensures the long-term conservation and availability of plant genetic diversity for food security and sustainable agriculture. The Crop Trust is an essential element of the Funding Strategy of the International Treaty.

An important pillar of the global system is the network of international collections. The Governing Body has concluded agreements with a number of international institutions holding collections of global or regional importance (Article 15 agreements), and the Crop Trust provides direct support from its endowment for the management and maintenance of most of these collections.

Article 15 of the International Treaty, and the agreements concluded under it, mandate the Secretary to respond to situations where the orderly maintenance of a collection is at risk due to unforeseen events. In particular, the Secretary must seek to intervene or provide assistance when a collection is threatened. This includes providing technical support and assistance for the evacuation or transfer of a threatened collection, as may be required. However, no dedicated resources are currently available to the Secretary to fulfill this critical mandate, or to deliver this vital support. While the Crop Trust has a mandate to provide long-term support to *ex situ* collections from its endowment, there is no financial or technical mechanism in place that can provide the quick emergency support needed at the most critical times.

The Secretary of the International Treaty and the Crop Trust also receive, from time to time, requests for urgent and critical support, or to intervene in situations where rapid intervention is needed by national collections, including to repair equipment, procure equipment or supplies, evacuate or temporarily move a collection, mitigate the effects of war or civil unrest, and duplicate unique materials under threat.

Field collections, which are part of the *ex situ* system of genebanks, play an essential role, both in terms of conservation of unique material and as a complement to in situ conservation in the context of local agricultural systems. However, field collections are particularly vulnerable as they are exposed to environmental stresses, real estate development and land use change. Field collections are therefore specifically included in the scope of this Emergency Reserve.

1.3 Scope

The Emergency Reserve will provide rapid, short-term urgent support to *ex situ* collections in the Multilateral System¹ by providing financial assistance to genebanks, enabling them to:

1. Respond quickly to an emergency likely to result in the imminent loss of genebank materials;
2. Reduce significant risks and vulnerabilities that could result in the loss of genebank materials.

Several forms of emergencies can be considered and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. [FAO Emergency](#) describes two forms of emergencies: natural and human-made disasters. Additionally, the [FAO Genebank Standards](#) point to power cuts and unreliable power supply as a type of emergency situation that can result in the loss of genebank accessions.

2 Disbursement Principles and Eligibility Criteria

Funds will be disbursed in line with the principles of expediency, responsiveness, and transparency, and in line with the following eligibility criteria:

- There is a demonstrated actual, imminent threat to a collection in an emergency situation.
- Proposed rescue activities focus on immediate, short-term impact (such as purchasing failed equipment and maintaining minimum operations).

¹ Collections not yet available in the Multilateral System may be considered for support on a case-by-case basis, taken into account such factors as the uniqueness and strategic importance of such collections.

- There is demonstrated financial need. In particular, it has to be demonstrated that sufficient financial support for the collection has been unsuccessfully solicited from other funding mechanisms, or that no suitable such mechanisms exist.
- The collection (including those maintained in the field) comprises unique genetic resources of regional and international significance.
- The collection must be available in the Multilateral System of the International Treaty, or contain a reasonable amount of material that is available in the Multilateral System, or is otherwise operating under the terms and conditions of the Multilateral System. If the collection is not available in the Multilateral System, it is expected that steps will be taken to make the material available in the Multilateral System as a result of this intervention.
- The recipient has a risk mitigation strategy and contingency plan in place for the collection, or agrees to develop a risk mitigation strategy and contingency plan as a matter of urgency, and generally complies with the due diligence requirements of both the International Treaty and the Crop Trust.
- The collection is located in a developing country (as defined by the OECD's DAC/ODA list) and has a written plan that explains the long-term conservation goals of the collection.
- The recipient institution managing the collection agrees to transparent, efficient management of funds and timely reporting on their use.
- The recipient institution must clearly demonstrate that it has no other available sources of funding.

3 Application Process

3.1 Application Requirements

Applicants are required to complete the pre-assessment survey at:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/genebank_emergency

If the eligibility criteria have been met, the applicant will be requested to submit a concept note, making the case for why the request should qualify for funding from the Emergency Reserve for Genebanks. The concept note should contain the following information:

- Cover page with names and contact details of two focal points.
- A clear description of the emergency [max 1 page].
- A description of how this emergency qualifies for funding as stated in Section 2 [max 2 pages].
- A description of the Multilateral System status of the collection.
- Proposed work plan (including timeline and milestones) for emergency actions.
- Risk mitigation plan [max 1 page].
- A cost estimate for activities related to the emergency, even if approximate and preliminary.
- For requests involving equipment or service procurement, provide 3 price quotes from potential suppliers.
- Bank account details (official letter from bank).

In addition, requests from countries in conflict, civil strife, or war will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and may require a rapid assessment from an external expert to determine the feasibility of implementing the proposed activities.

Queries can be submitted via email to either the International Treaty Secretariat (PGRFA-Treaty@fao.org) or the Crop Trust (info@croptrust.org).

3.2 Requirements and Approval Based on Estimated Costs

- For requests under USD 100,000 that meet the eligibility criteria (as determined by both organizations), the decision will be the sole responsibility of the Secretary of the International Treaty and the Executive Director of the Crop Trust, and their respective teams.
- For requests between USD 100,000 and USD 150,000, if both organizations find that all eligibility criteria are met, a suggested decision is presented to the Secretary and the Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Treaty, and the Executive Director and the Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Crop Trust, who will either decide by email or convene a call to decide without delay.
- Requests for amounts over USD 150,000 will require a concept note, a feasibility study including an on-site visit by an external expert, designated by the Secretary of the International Treaty and the Executive Director of the Crop Trust. If both organizations find that all eligibility criteria are met and the feasibility study is positive, a suggested decision is presented to the Secretary and the Chairperson of the Governing Body of the International Treaty, and the Executive Director and the Chairperson of the Executive Board of the Crop Trust, who will either decide by email or convene a call to decide without delay.

3.3 Governance, Administration and Financial Procedures

The Emergency Reserve for Genebanks is governed by a simplified procedure. It consists of resources specifically allocated and held by either the International Treaty Secretariat or the Crop Trust for the purposes described above. The allocated financial resources will include direct costs for administering the fund (including on-site visits and rapid assessment studies). Staff time will be contributed in-kind by both the International Treaty Secretariat and the Crop Trust.

The Emergency Reserve for Genebanks will not issue calls for proposals. The existence of the Emergency Reserve for Genebanks will be promoted on existing communication channels by both organizations on a continuing basis. It will operate as a continuing financial mechanism that can be called upon at short notice whenever the need arises. The Emergency Reserve for Genebanks only operates as long as there are sufficient financial resources available, i.e. no less than USD 10,000.

The Crop Trust and the International Treaty Secretariat are committed to process incoming applications expeditiously and will provide confirmation of receipt within 5 working days.

Decisions for funding will be made and communicated by email. If needed, a virtual meeting can be organized with relevant parties to clarify elements of the proposal and advance decision-making.

The Secretary of the International Treaty and the Executive Director of the Crop Trust will jointly determine whether resources held by the Crop Trust or the International Treaty Secretariat for

the Emergency Reserve for Genebanks should be used, and, consequently, who will undertake the granting procedure with the recipient. Once the decision has been made, the recipient is informed and the granting procedure is executed expediently and efficiently. The grantee is required to provide technical and financial reports on the use of funds.

Both organizations will jointly develop periodic reports, both financial and technical, on the operations of the Emergency Reserve for Genebanks, which will be made available to the Bureau of the International Treaty, the Donor's Council, and the Executive Board of the Crop Trust. A summary will be submitted to the Governing Body of the International Treaty.

4. Communications

Communications efforts will be coordinated between the two organizations and focus on underscoring the importance of PGRFA collections and why they need to be safely conserved and protected from emergency threats. Success stories will be documented and support from donors will be duly recognized. Through the use of the Emergency Reserve for Genebanks there will be communications opportunities to highlight cooperation between the International Treaty and the Crop Trust, as well as the importance of the Multilateral System for the management of PGRFA.