

Effective access and benefit sharing requires harmonized approach and a global commitment for biodiversity conservation

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POSITION

ISF maintains its principal position to not create regulatory frameworks relating to benefit sharing on the utilization of digital sequence information (DSI). Nevertheless, ISF recognizes that benefit-sharing from the use of DSI is still under discussion in different international fora (*e.g.*, in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture). Furthermore, we note that the CBD decided to establish a multilateral mechanism for benefit-sharing from the use of DSI on genetic resources as part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. (Decision 15/9).

ISF considers the conservation of biodiversity a global priority requiring committed action from all sectors of society and a leading role from governments in funding these efforts. Extending benefit-sharing regulation to the use of DSI, when combined with the existing regulatory landscape for physical genetic resources, will further increase complexity and costs for research and development, without sufficiently addressing the financial and other needs for biodiversity conservation.

Genetic information, in any form (digital or otherwise), is necessary for research and innovation. In the majority of research projects, genetic information (often from multiple sources) is used by the private and public sector along with physical genetic resources, to ensure the proper characterization, conservation, and sustainable use of biodiversity to the benefit of society. Therefore, if regulation for the benefit-sharing from the use of DSI is put in place, such regulation must be approached with great caution and due consideration for a workable and achievable result.

In our view, over-regulating access to genetic resources and DSI does not, and will not, generate sufficient funds on its own for biodiversity conservation. Furthermore, the creation of several different mechanisms, or a combination of multilateral and bilateral approaches, will add to the complexity without improving the financial outcome. Ultimately, over-regulation hampers research, especially plant breeding, which is needed to address challenges of climate change, sustainable agriculture, and food security in a rapid and effective manner.

ISF strongly advocates that the needs for impactful biodiversity conservation, capacity building, and technology transfer require urgent attention and a joint commitment of governments and all stakeholders. There needs to be a shift away from a focus on user-based and utilization-based payments, especially those implemented through national bilateral mechanisms. A multilateral mechanism that ensures the continued use of both genetic resources and DSI for all activities related to plant breeding, would work best for the seed sector. Any future multilateral access and benefit-sharing systems that comprise this mechanism need to agree on a common set of mutually supportive rules and operating procedures that de-link access from benefit sharing and replace a multitude of bilateral systems.