

Executive summary of the policy document of the Dutch Government

Sources of Existence: Conservation and Sustainable Use of Genetic Diversity

Unique life forms with their own intrinsic value, the results of centuries of combined natural development and/or human selection, are disappearing at a rapid pace. These losses may have serious consequences for the current or future development of agriculture, food supply, forestry, fisheries and nature management. It can also restrict our options with regard to using genetic resources for more sustainable forms of production of, for example, medical products, stimulants, luxury foods, clothing, building materials, fuel and dyes.

Genetic resources are part of the entire biological diversity. They concern all material containing the hereditary building blocks for animals, plants and micro-organisms, with an actual or potential value to humanity. Governments have an essential task in creating frameworks and legislation to guide the management of genetic resources.

The Netherlands holds a leading position in the export of seeds and breeding material for agriculture and livestock. The Netherlands is an important centre of microbiology knowledge with globally outstanding scientific research and a leading role in the food and pharmaceuticals industry. Developments in the use of genetic resources are likely to have a tremendous impact during this century. In that respect, genetic resources also have a substantial economic value.

There is an increase in social commitment to finding structural solutions to the loss of biodiversity and ways of achieving sustainable use of genetic resources. This document provides coherence in dealing with genetic resources.

Sources of Existence refers to:

- the conservation, sustainable use and fair distribution of the benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources,
- the application of general basic principles and regulations for dealing with genetic resources, for which the government is responsible
- regulations for conservation of genetic resources
- promotion of approaches towards the sustainable use of genetic resources
- reinforcement of cooperation aimed at a fair distribution of the benefits.

As a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Netherlands acknowledges the national sovereignty of countries regarding their genetic resources. The Netherlands fully complies with the obligations under the CBD. At the same time, the government strives for national and international open access to genetic material and its exchange, as a means of acquiring knowledge, and achieving the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

In the Netherlands, legislation has been introduced to protect important areas in the conservation of genetic resources in situ. There has also been legislation on the subjects of intellectual property rights and biotechnology. As the country of origin to only a few varieties or species, the government does not deem it necessary to secure its national sovereignty regarding access and use of these resources in its legislation. Developing common legislation and regulations within the European Union will be considered. A commitment is made to clarify and reinforce the coherence of multilateral agreements on genetic resources within the

framework of the CBD, FAO and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (IT PGRFA), WTO, WIPO, UPOV, and CITES.

For the implementation of this policy document, it is essential to increase the exchange of information regarding the Netherlands' genetic resources. The National Information Centre for Genetic Resources was recently set up as part of an international network of National Focal Points for Access and Benefit Sharing of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Information on how resources, both within this country and abroad, are managed and utilised will be collected and distributed. Information on policy, regulations and legislation and instruments governed by private law, such as Codes of Conduct and Material Transfer Agreements, will receive special attention.

Based on the obligations under the CBD and other international agreements, the policy is aimed at maintaining the genebanks for agricultural and horticultural crops and farm animals. The genebank for trees and shrubs will be linked to that for agricultural and horticultural crops. The Fungal Biodiversity Centre remains the collection centre for micro-organisms. Botanical gardens and zoos in the Netherlands value the CBD, exchange plants and animals conscientiously and participate actively in the specification of Codes of Conduct on an international level.

One of the Dutch government's objectives is the promotion of sustainable applications, since this is the best guarantee for the conservation of genetic resources. This includes promoting the sustainability of existing applications as well as developing new alternatives for sustainable use. A distinction is made between:

- Non-commercial use, such as landscape management, scientific purposes, research and knowledge;
- Commercial use such as primary plant and animal production in agriculture, forestry and fishery, and process technology, (modern) biotechnology, and pharmacy.

Through bilateral and multilateral programs, the Dutch government will facilitate an increase in the capacity of institutions in developing countries and central/eastern Europe with inadequate infrastructures and limited capacity for managing genetic resources and invites institutions established in the Netherlands to support sister institutions in these countries. The government will continue to support the reinforcement of international research on the use of genetic resources in agriculture and food production, mainly through the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR).

The government intends to reinforce cooperation with commerce, research and social organisations by means of this policy document.

With Sources of Existence, the government calls on businesses, institutions and individuals to deal carefully with regulations, legislation and policy convened internationally or instituted in other countries. Access, exchange and use of genetic resources can be based on existing public-law regulations, supplemented by alternatives in the sphere of private law.