Tropentag, October 11-13, 2006, Bonn

"Prosperity and Poverty in a Globalised World—
Challenges for Agricultural Research"

Insights from FAO's State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources Reporting Process

Barbara Rischkowsky, Dafydd Pilling, Beate Scherf, Ricardo Cardellino, Irene Hoffmann

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Animal Production and Health Division, Italy

Abstract

In 1990, FAO was asked by its governing body to prepare a comprehensive programme for the sustainable management of animal genetic resources (AnGR). In response, the Global Strategy for AnGR management was developed, which is being guided by FAO's Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Assessment of the status of AnGR management at country level and of methodological tools to support decision-making was considered as an important first step in the programme. The assessment was organised as a country-driven process, where countries were invited to report on AnGR management to FAO. The reporting process included the establishment of a network of National Coordinators and consultative committees, subregional training and follow-up workshops. The process of developing the first report on the State of the World's AnGR was considered as important as the outcome. 169 country reports have now been analysed to assess the countries' situation with regard to the state of livestock diversity, human capacities, current breeding and conservation programmes, use of biotechnology, and legal regulations affecting AnGR management. The diversity in livestock was assessed as number of breeds. Of the reported 7616 breeds 9 % have become extinct, most in Europe, and another 20 % are at risk. Management capacities of countries differ within and between regions. In general, human and institutional capacities in Europe, North America, Australia, and in parts of Asia and Latin America are more developed than in the rest of the world.

The global report also analyses scientific methods and tools related to AnGR management. Although the research interest in recent years has increased, there are still large gaps in methods for characterisation, and in defining goals and organisational structures for breeding and conservation programmes in lower input environments. Concerted efforts are needed to prioritise livestock genetic resources for conservation at national, regional and international level. Plant genetic resources have long been acknowledged as part of human heritage, awareness has grown that the same is true for livestock genetic resources. To maintain at least the most precious part of this heritage clearly requires more coordinated efforts.

Keywords: Animal genetic resources, global assessment, livestock diversity

Contact Address: Barbara Rischkowsky, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Animal Production and Health Division, Rome, Italy, e-mail: Barbara.Rischkowsky@fao.org