

SEMINAR ON STRATEGIES THAT ADDRESS POLICIES INVOLVING PLANT BREEDING AND PLANT VARIETY PROTECTION

Geneva, October 20, 2021 (by electronic means)

Opening Remarks, Mr. Daren Tang, Secretary-General, UPOV

Mr. Marien Valstar, President of the UPOV Council,

Dear Participants, Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to be with you today and to open this seminar.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of UPOV's foundation. Back in 1961, UPOV was created to recognize the importance of the protection of new plant varieties and to uphold the interests of plant breeders around the world.

Six decades on, I would like to highlight three policy pillars which capture the impact of UPOV's work:

- First, transforming food production in a time of climate change.
- Second, spurring economic development through plant breeding and UPOV's system of plant protection.
- And, third, bringing innovation and technology transfer to farmers.

It is important to remember that at the time UPOV was formed the only way to produce more food was to use more land. However, this link has now been superseded thanks to innovation. Since the 1960s, food production has increased nearly four-fold, while land use has expanded by only around 10 percent. This means we can feed more by using less.

It has been estimated that plant breeding and new plant varieties are currently responsible for around 90 per cent of cereal land productivity gains in Europe. And if plant breeding has delivered in the past, then it will be even more important to ensuring food security in the future. This is well understood by the agricultural sector. A recent survey from the World Farmers Organization found that over 70 per cent of farmers are utilizing improved plant varieties. Moreover, eight in ten farmers who use new plant varieties identified them as important factors in ensuring the sustainability of food systems and in combatting climate change.

This aligns with UPOV's broader desire to accelerate progress towards the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. UPOV has identified six SDGs to which plant breeding and the UPOV system directly contributes towards. From ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, to protecting terrestrial ecosystems and halting biodiversity loss – transforming food production is helping to deliver a fairer, greener and more sustainable world.

This brings me to the second pillar: economic development.

In my address to the UPOV Council following my appointment as Secretary-General last year, I referenced the impressive economic benefits of plant breeding and UPOV's system of plant variety protection. Today, I want to discuss another important aspect of UPOV's work – the support we provide to people and communities around the world.

I have three examples that I would like to share.

First, in Kenya, UPOV membership has ensured access to much sought after varieties of cut flower roses. Thanks to their growing popularity, Kenya has developed a \$500 million cut-flower industry which, in turn, brings secure employment to around half a million Kenyans.

Second, in Viet Nam, thanks to plant breeding activities, the annual income of farmers has increased by over 24% since it joined UPOV in 2006. It is estimated that plant breeding has resulted in significant annual productivity increases for Viet Nam's main staple crops such as rice and maize, with the increased productivity associated with plant breeding being equivalent to more than 2.5 per cent of Viet Nam's GDP.

And finally, this year marks the tenth anniversary of Peru's membership of UPOV. In that time, more than eighty new varieties of grapes and more than sixty new varieties of blueberries have been protected.

This has helped to turbo-charge Peru's exports. For example, trade in fresh grapes is up almost ten-fold over the last decade, with blueberry exports up by a multiple of thirteen in the last five years alone.

This is how UPOV's helps to lift up people and communities around the world – supporting job creation, business investment and economic growth. And in the context of a pandemic that continues to take a terrible toll – including on many livelihoods around the world – this work is as important today as ever.

The third pillar concerns innovation and technology transfer to farmers.

Through an effective Plant Variety Protection (PVP) system, UPOV stimulates the development of new plant varieties. And these new varieties represent one of the most effective ways of delivering new technology to farmers. It is a symbiotic relationship: UPOV enables plant breeders to protect their varieties and to obtain a return on their investment; with this income predicated on farmers choosing to grow more suitable varieties that match local and export needs.

Equally, the UPOV system continues to support the delivery of public goods. Take the UC Davis Public Strawberry Breeding Program. Over six decades, the program has developed more than 30 protected varieties, made strawberries a year-round crop in California, and boosted strawberry yield from just 6 tons per acre in the 1950s to 30 tons per acre today.

Thanks to the UC Davis program, Californian growers pay lower rates than others for their strawberries and get access to new varieties before growers elsewhere.

Not only do UC Davis varieties benefit domestic growers but they have been instrumental in the development of the strawberry industry in several UPOV members– for instance 70-90% of strawberries in Spain have been bred by UC Davis, which transferred the varieties and knowledge as a part of the PBR license process.

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As you can see, the legal framework of protection offered by the UPOV system is as important today as it was 60 years ago. But while protection remains the cornerstone of UPOV's work, its broader impact continues to be felt around the world.

From progressing sustainable solutions at a time when humanity faces a code red from climate change.

- To providing jobs and economic growth in developing and the least developed countries.
- To supporting agricultural innovation and technology transfer.
- Plant breeding and plant variety protection is making a real difference to people and communities on the ground.

Today, you will hear from speakers representing countries right around the world. While their experiences differ, in all cases UPOV's work has an important role to play in realizing their future ambitions. On behalf of UPOV, I would like to thank all our speakers for their time today and I would like to thank everyone in the audience for your participation.

Please accept my best wishes for a lively, engaging and thought provoking seminar.
Thank you.