



June 26, 2020

United States Department of State Public Teleconference Concerning the Use of Digital Sequence Information of Genetic Resources

A comment by the United States Nagoya Protocol Action Group

Modern science depends on access to physical specimens¹. Collectively and individually each of these are potential genetic resources. While a small fraction of this work is commercial in nature, a majority is fundamental in nature and has no direct monetary benefit. The benefits, therefore, of decades of work is in the taxonomic structure that describes life, in the techniques that allow rapid advances in health science, in our ability to grow enough food to feed a growing population, and in a myriad of small, meaningful advances in bioscience.

Open access to genetic resources, including digital sequence information (DSI²), assures that advances in biological sciences will continue and that non-monetary benefits are able to be shared openly and without pre-qualification.

The US Nagoya Protocol Action Group has worked with national and international scientific societies to inform membership about requirements of the Nagoya Protocol. The US Nagoya Protocol Action Group opposes any restriction or control of access and/or use of DSI. We view efforts to restrict or control their access and/or use as both unacceptable and a threat to research and development, food security, and public health.

Open access to digital sequence information is foundational to many current practices including taxonomy, biotechnology, and agriculture. As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, digital sequence information allows rapid tracing of infection pathways and can help in mitigating disease increase. Similarly, digital sequence information enables disease tracking for plant and animal epidemics and is essential for protecting the national food production system.

Open access to digital sequence information enables provider countries to unambiguously identify and trace their unique genetic resources. Training in utilization of digital sequence information will improve equitable utilization of genetic resources and sharing of benefits.

The US Nagoya Protocol Action Group encourages the continued open availability of digital sequence information on genetic resources. Further, the group considers the investments made into the International Nucleotide Sequence Database Collaboration to be non-monetary benefit sharing.

¹ Specimens that are either collected *in situ* (e.g., fieldwork) or stored *ex situ* (e.g., botanical gardens, microbial culture collections, natural history collections, seed banks)

² A unanimous agreement of the precise meaning of DSI has not been reached.

We submit these comments and views as concerned individuals and citizens, and do not claim to represent the opinions, views, or policies of the organizations and institutions where we work.

Signed,

The United States Nagoya Protocol Action Group

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