



Minutes of the 13th ECPGR Executive Committee meeting

18-19 June 2019, Maccarese, Italy

Present:

Eva Thörn (Chair)

Marc Lateur (Belgium)

Vojtěch Holubec (Czech Republic)

Küllü Annamaa (Estonia)

Benvindo Martins Maçãs (Portugal)

Lorenzo Maggioni (ECPGR Secretariat)

Observers:

Luigi Guarino (Crop Trust)

The Agenda for this meeting is available online ([here](#)).

1. Grant Scheme budget

Based on the recently circulated ECPGR Financial report for 2018, Lorenzo Maggioni explained that the starting budget of Phase X dedicated to Grant Scheme activities (€ 188 599) could be tentatively increased by ca. € 64 200 (corresponding to half of the amount that can be carried over from Phase IX, reduced of Phase IX outstanding contributions not yet received from Azerbaijan, Italy, North Macedonia and Portugal) and by ca. € 50 000 (corresponding to half of the amount of the ECPGR budget that is expected to be covered by the EC-funded GenRes Bridge project). Therefore, a total of € 302 799 can be considered available for Grant Scheme activities. An equivalent amount is available for the “Meetings” budget line, assuming that this increase of the budget continues to be split across the two budget lines “Meetings” and “Other actions”. A budget of € 302 799 is sufficient to fund twenty 15k activities, that is on average a bit less than one activity per each of the 23 Working Groups.

2. Evaluation of Grant Scheme proposals for the first Call of Phase X

A total of three proposals were submitted as a result of the First Call of the ECPGR Activity Grant Scheme. Following an evaluation of these proposals, based on the established criteria, the ExCo selected for funding two proposals (see below), and requested a number of clarifications before accepting the third proposal.

The approved proposals, listed in the table below, need to be sent to the Steering Committee (SC) to allow for comments or objections regarding the proposed partnership in each Activity. The results of the evaluation will be sent by the ExCo Chair to the Activity Coordinators of all the submitted proposals. Successful proposals and the corresponding Letters of Award will be published on the ECPGR website.

Title of approved proposal	Working Groups	Coordinator	Budget
1. Inclusion of CWR sites in European <i>in situ</i> network	Wild Species Conservation in Genetic Reserves	Juozas Labokas, Lithuania	€ 15 000
2. Enhancing quality and quantity of <i>Vitis</i> genetic resources in AEGIS	<i>Vitis</i>	Gregorio Muñoz Organero, Spain	€ 9 000
3. Capturing <i>Brassica</i> wild relatives' diversity in South Eastern Europe	<i>Brassica</i>	Smiljana Goreta Ban, Croatia	€ 15 000
Total Budget			€ 39 000

3. Next call for proposals

Upon consideration of available budget and the submission of only three proposals during the current round of the Grant Scheme, the ExCo suggested to launch a second call with deadline 18 October 2019. The ExCo will evaluate the proposals during their next meeting, to be scheduled back-to-back to the GenRes Bridge workshop, which is planned for 28-31 October 2019 in Helsinki, Finland. The new ExCo Chair will also be invited at this meeting and this will be the occasion for hand-over of responsibilities.

Owing to the low response of Working Groups to the First Call of Phase X, the Secretariat was invited to remind the WG Chairs about the possibilities to use both budget lines “Other actions” and “Meetings” and to verify what are the WG Chairs’ planned activities for Phase X (a letter at this regard should be drafted by the Secretariat and revised by the ExCo as soon as possible).

4. Follow-up on AEGIS meeting

Following from the AEGIS workshop held in Madrid in November 2018, the size of the AEGIS European Collection had increased by ca. 20%, with ca. 9000 additional accessions mainly flagged by Italy (ca. 8000) and the Nordic countries (ca.1000). Three new Associate Membership Agreements were also completed in Italy, Lithuania and Portugal. The AEGIS website had been further developed, specifically the pages related to Associate Members. It is now possible to read specific information on each AM, including contact points, the number and type of AEGIS accessions, the presence of an operational genebank manual, the report of accomplished peer review, etc. In fact, the first cycle of reciprocal peer reviews had been completed involving three genebanks from the Netherlands (CGN), Poland (IHAR) and Spain (Valencia) and the related reports were made available. On the other hand, other action points agreed in Madrid were behind schedule, such as some of the Secretariat tasks related to encouraging policy-makers, National Coordinators and Associate Members to follow up on AEGIS implementation. The drafting of the letter of intent for France joining AEGIS has also been delayed. Other tasks would require funding (training workshops) and the Secretariat was invited to monitor appropriate funding opportunities.

5. Information on the modalities of the Trust support to CGIAR genebanks

Luigi Guarino informed about the situation of the Crop Trust endowment fund, to which governments have so far contributed over \$ 250 M. The fund has grown and generated sufficient interest that the current endowment holds almost \$300 M in the bank and so far, some \$29 M have been disbursed in support of genebanks.

A recently signed agreement between the Trust and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) will fully support the cost of essential operations of the genebanks with \$1.4 M per year.

A similar agreement should eventually be signed also with the other 10 CGIAR genebanks, which are currently covered by the endowment for 20-25% of their operational costs, the rest coming from the CGIAR. It will be necessary for the endowment to reach \$500 M to establish long-term partnership agreement with all 11 CGIAR partners. Essential operations include storage, safety duplication, regeneration, characterization, information management, disease testing and distribution.

The path toward a long-term partnership agreement with the Trust includes:

1. Clear and transparent costing of an agreed set of essential operations
2. Systematic, regular external reviews
3. Establishment of a *sui generis* quality management system (QMS)
4. Short-term upgrading to reach and maintain agreed performance targets
5. Regular online reporting on an agreed set of indicators
6. A 5-year renewable investment and upgrading plan for the genebank in the context of its mother institute

The key performance indicators to be reached by the genebanks are as follows:

1. Availability: 90% accessions legally available
2. Security: 90% accessions safety duplicated
3. Data availability: 90% accessions documented and available online
4. QMS: Agreed elements of QMS/ISO are in place
5. Use: evidence of germplasm distribution

In addition to the Article 15 International collections and the Svalbard Seed Vault other key national and regional collections could become eligible for long-term partnerships as long as they provide global services, beyond their national or regional focus, and achieve performance targets. For example, a project is now underway with five African genebanks (funded by BFZ, Germany), namely Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia. These will be supported for upgrade during 5 years and then could become eligible for long-term support from the endowment (provided by BFZ).

Discussion

The AEGIS initiative neatly identifies the global role of the European genebanks, as the AEGIS material is made globally available based on the principles of the Multilateral System. As the European genebanks are serving more than just their own country, the cost involved in serving the rest of the world could be supported by the rest of the world – it is such residual role that could be promoted with multilateral donors. Therefore, in principle AEGIS could become eligible for a long-term partnership agreement with the Trust in case an appropriate donor could provide the related endowment funds. In fact, within AEGIS, European genebanks are already more or less going through the above-mentioned six steps.

The ExCo considered that the recently concluded peer visits of genebanks, that need to be extended to other genebanks, would be very important to evaluate the costs of necessary upgrades of AEGIS Associate Members. Therefore, we should carefully analyse the results of the reviews, estimate the costs of upgrade and then identify and approach suitable donors. Collaboration with the Trust with this approach would be desirable and more regular meetings would be useful. The Trust should continue to be invited at ExCo and SC meetings when issues of common interest are on the agenda.

Regarding the global crop strategies, Luigi informed that they need to be updated and a project proposal is being developed for Germany to carry this out. Experts from Europe will be involved. Specifically, the recently revised apple strategy needs fund-raising for implementation. Preparation of an operational workplan will be the objective of a meeting and the intention is to closely collaborate with the ECPGR Working Group.

Finally, Luigi informed about the upcoming celebration for the upgrading of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in February 2020. If any genebank is interested to make a deposit for that time, this will be an occasion for public awareness and media publicity. The travel of depositors to Svalbard will be supported by Norway.

The ExCo might consider organizing a meeting in Svalbard at this occasion, if the members from Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia and Portugal decided to attend the celebration with a new deposit. Vojtěch Holubec informed that the Czech Republic owns a house in Longyearbyen, that could be used for the ExCo meeting.

6. ExCo's inputs to the development of a European integrated strategy for the conservation and use of crop, forest and animal genetic resources, as part of GenRes Bridge

The ExCo was prepared to attend the GenRes Bridge project in Finland, 28-31 October 2019, serving as ECPGR advisory Task Force towards the preparation of the integrated strategy.

7. Update on other ECPGR matters

The Secretary gave some updates about ECPGR matters.

- All WG Chairs had been appointed for Phase X, including for the new groups on Maize and Berries. Only the Fibre Crops WG Chair had retired and required a replacement. V. Holubec will soon suggest a candidate Chair.
- Among the upcoming ECPGR meetings, the “Training on identification of botanical varieties in *Triticum* species (TTS)”, which is planned to take place in Slovakia 17-19 September 2019, has attracted interest from the Canadian genebank in Saskatoon, that will send a representative to participate in the workshop.
- The EVA project for the implementation of the first two evaluation networks, one on wheat and barley, the other on vegetables (carrot, lettuce and pepper) had received approval from the German donor and the contract was being prepared for signature.
- The Secretariat was involved as a partner in two project proposals under preparation for the Horizon 2020 Call SFS 28-2019, to be completed for the second evaluation stage and submitted to the European Commission by the deadline of 4 September 2019.
- Membership to ECPGR Phase X had reached 21 signatory members and payments were received from 14.
- A voluntary contribution for € 12 000 was pledged by Hungary and a contract for the EVA project was being signed with a voluntary contribution of over € 600 000 in three years from Germany.
- No further news were received from Spain regarding the ventilated proposal to offer specific funds for a WG on Olive.

8. Other business

The draft ECPGR Communication Strategy was further discussed and a few modifications added. The draft ‘Vision’ and ‘Mission’ were still not considered ideally formulated and it was proposed to open a contest among the National Coordinator to suggest better wording. After reaching agreement on Vision and Mission, the last draft version of the strategy should be circulated to the SC for approval.

In the meantime, it was agreed that we should aim at the preparation of a video on ECPGR, to be presented at the joint EUCARPIA/ECPGR meeting that is planned in October 2020. This “jubilee video” would celebrate 40 years of ECPGR activity. The first step should be the setup of a Task Force of at least three NCs who should make a plan for the creation of the video (choice of messages, length, draft script, selection of company, etc.). M. Lateur volunteered to be a member of the TF. The Secretariat will consult with Bioversity communication office to get advice. The Trust suggested two possible companies that might do the job.

The ECPGR e-bulletin was discussed and the ExCo agreed that it is a useful product, that should continue to be produced as it is, making sure that it reaches not only the NCs, but all the WG members.

Luigi Guarino mentioned the possibility for everyone to receive the newsletter of the Genebank Platform, by subscribing at the bottom of this page: <https://www.genebanks.org>