

**ECPGR:
Secretariat's overview of its current status,
issues and future perspectives**

A synthesis document prepared for the Independent External Review



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1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this document is to offer the External Review Panel a synthesis of the relevant aspects of ECPGR which will be the subject of the Review. Critical issues and ideas for the future, as seen from the perspective of the ECPGR Secretariat, have been formulated as brief paragraphs at the end of the descriptive Sections 1 and 2. Section 3 (Comments on the stakeholders' analysis) and Section 4 (Conclusions and suggestions) consist of reflections on the most pertinent issues. The suggestions made are not necessarily intended to offer solutions, which would not be the role of the Secretariat, but rather pinpoint issues where the Panel might recognize the need to elaborate recommendations for the attention of the Steering Committee. This document was prepared by the ECPGR Coordinator as the lead author and staff from Bioversity's Regional Office for Europe.

1.1 Evolution of ECPGR (1980-2010)

The original concept of what is today called European Cooperative Programme on Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR) was identified in the mid-1970s by the European office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), based on the evidence that two thirds of the world's collected plant germplasm was maintained in Europe and that a better cooperation and coordination among genebanks and governments in Europe would have contributed to a more effective conservation and use of available plant genetic resources. Immediate objectives of the initial ECP/GR (European Cooperative Project for Conservation and Exchange of Crop Genetic Resources) were directed to ensure the **free exchange of germplasm and related data**, and to **coordinate the collection, conservation and evaluation of European germplasm**. The European network was planned to become an efficient regional component of a global network of plant genetic resources (PGR) at the service of plant breeders. The strategy was defined whereby each country would contribute in kind to the project, by channelling its national activities directed to PGR conservation for plant breeding towards implementing agreed workplans of the regional Programme.

During its 30 years of existence, started in 1980, ECPGR went through eight different and distinct Phases, evolving over time and endeavouring to adapt to the changing political environment and regional needs, as well as to the demands and expectations of the European PGR community. Overall ECPGR has remained true to the original concept, based on the assumption made by its members, that cooperation among national programmes, institutions and people across Europe was the most rational approach to collectively conserve the regional PGR and make them available for use within and outside the region. Initially, ECPGR was based on six selected crop Working Groups (*Allium*, *Avena*, *Barley*, *Forages*, *Prunus* and *Sunflower*) and meetings were organized primarily to establish contacts between PGR workers, establishing information systems and data exchange between genebanks, and promote joint activities including collecting expeditions and characterization and evaluation of germplasm.

Main changes/milestones in the subsequent evolution of ECPGR were the following:

- The initial years (1980-82) were dedicated to the appointment of National Coordinators, meetings of the Working Groups (WGs), organization of genetic resources activities and training of scientists. This initial two years phase was funded by UNDP, with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as executing agency. The executive secretary was based at the UNDP headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. A Governing Body was composed of members (21 member country representatives; UNDP; FAO; Executive Secretary, Chairman of the Scientific Advisory Committee) and observers [sub-regional European organizations; International Board of Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR-now Bioversity International); and other European countries];
- At the request of the member countries, starting from 1 January 1983, the regional Programme began operating under the aegis of IBPGR, with FAO as the executing agency. During the Second Phase (1983-86), the first European Crop Databases were established and increased exchange of information led to the production of preliminary inventories. The member countries matched the UNDP funding with 50 % of the Programme's budget. The Governing

- Board was replaced by a more agile Technical Consultative Committee, composed of scientists that would advise IBPGR in their individual capacity on decisions regarding the programme.
- In 1987, the Programme became self-sustained and dependent on country members' contributions. The main development in Phases III (1987-89) and IV (1990-93) was the implementation of crop databases for some 24 species, group of species or genera, located in 13 countries. This collaborative initiative promoted by the Working Groups also allowed significant developments in other areas: gaps in the collections were identified and coordinated collecting missions undertaken; descriptors lists were developed; standard reference varieties were selected; core collections started to be defined; national programmes development was facilitated; training needs of genebank personnel were supported; and the flow of information and germplasm was largely improved. During Phase V (1994-98), Crop and Thematic Networks were introduced as broad organizational structures that accommodated activities contributing to general objectives of the Programme. This approach was intended to allow more flexibility and to extend the Programme's scope beyond a limited number of crops or themes. Objectives were revised, including "to ensure the long-term conservation and to facilitate and encourage the increased utilization of PGR in Europe", "to increase the planning of joint activities", "to strengthen links between east and west European PGR programmes", "to develop joint project proposals to be submitted to funding agencies", "to contribute to monitoring the safety of plant genetic resources collections and take appropriate action when required" and "to increase public awareness at all levels of the importance of PGR activities".
 - In 1994 the Technical Consultative Committee was renamed Steering Committee, composed of National Coordinators.
 - The European Commission was also invited in 1994 to become a full member of the Programme, but it has never been possible to establish a formal arrangement of this type.
 - The launching in 1994 of the European Council Regulation 1467/94 for genetic resources in agriculture offered a new source of funding that could be used in a complementary way to implement the WGs' workplans. Even though it was not possible to establish any formal relationship between this European Commission initiative and ECPGR, the ECPGR Networks were very well positioned to prepare suitable collaborative projects. Indeed, a number of projects (*Allium*, *Avena*, *Brassica*, Barley, Carrot, Eggplant, Maize, Melon, *Prunus* and *Vitis*), prepared by the ECPGR Networks, received EU support between 1994 and 2004 and were able to improve the level of characterization and use of the respective European collections.
 - In 1995, the International Technical Conference on PGR, held in Nitra, Slovakia, recognized the role of ECPGR as the platform to facilitate the implementation of the Global Plan of Action (GPA) for the European region as part of the FAO Global System on PGR.
 - In 1998, the European Symposium on the implementation of the GPA in Europe, held in Braunschweig, Germany, recommended that ECPGR expand its scope in order to cover a wide range of the priority activities defined by the GPA. A revised set of objectives was defined, to better reflect the above expectation and these have since remained unchanged (see objectives below, 2.1).
 - In Phase VI (1999-2003) the number of Working Groups was extended to 15 and activities were started in all the thematic Networks. However, a proportional increase of the annual country contributions was not secured and therefore, the frequency of meetings of each WG was reduced and an attempt was made to increase coordination at the Network level by establishing Network Coordinating Groups (NCGs), composed of WG Chairs, Vice-Chairs and database managers.
 - At the end of Phase V, nearly 50 Central Crop Databases were being managed as an "input in kind" by a total of 32 institutes from 19 countries. A large number of these became online accessible and searchable thanks to Web-enabling supported by the Network.
 - EURISCO, the online catalogue of PGR passport data of European *ex situ* accession was launched in 2003, as the final output of a 5th Framework EU-funded project called "EPGRIS".

- Phase VII (2004-2009) was characterized by a number of measures that were intended to better prioritize, plan, regulate and monitor the ECPGR activities, with an expanded programme in terms of Working Groups and other bodies, but still with only a limited increase in the country contributions. Four broad priorities for ECPGR were agreed, i.e.
 1. task sharing,
 2. characterization and evaluation,
 3. documentation and information, and
 4. *in situ*/on-farm conservation).
- The Working Groups increased to 18, but Working Groups were also prioritized, through the definition of active (funded) and not-active (not-funded) Groups. Networks were requested to better define objectives and measurable targets for their activities. Roles of all the ECPGR bodies were defined in the respective Terms of Reference. Each country was assigned a quota of funded participants to attend Working Group meetings (the country quota). A model project on sharing of responsibilities as a possible model of “An European Genebank Integration System (AEGIS)”, submitted by Germany, was approved and financially supported as part of the ECPGR budget.
- In 2004, a new European Council Regulation (870/2004) on genetic resources in agriculture was launched by the European Commission. Several projects prepared by the ECPGR Networks received funding for conservation, characterization, collection and utilization of genetic resources between 2004 and the present (*Allium*, *Avena*, Leafy vegetables, *Vitis* and *In situ* management of wild relatives and landraces).
- In 2006, the Steering Committee acknowledged the complementarity of objectives of the FAO International Treaty for PGRFA (IT) and those of ECPGR and encouraged ECPGR member countries to ratify the IT and to fully implement it at the national level as rapidly as possible. The four broad priorities were reconfirmed for Phase VIII (2009-2013), setting “task sharing and capacity building” as the highest priority.
- In 2008, Phase VIII was agreed. The discussion paper on a “Strategic Framework for the Implementation of AEGIS” was adopted as a “Policy guide”. The Steering Committee adopted the text of the AEGIS Memorandum of Understanding by consensus and gave instructions to the Secretariat towards the implementation of the System. Specific budget lines were dedicated to AEGIS coordination and to fund activities through an AEGIS grant scheme. For the first time, specific project proposals submitted by the Networks were approved with a specified budget. The opportunity was given to partially use Network funds for activities (up to 25%) and not only for meetings (75%). Collaborations were started with global initiatives such as the project on “Global Information on Germplasm Accessions (GIGA)” for the establishment of a Global Information System, and also with the Global Crop Diversity Trust on a collaborative regeneration project.
- In 2010 the number of ECPGR member countries reached 43 (with only Luxembourg and Moldova, of the eligible countries, remaining as non-ECPGR members).

1.2 Current ECPGR objectives, structure, priorities, mode of operation and role of the Secretariat

During the current Phase VIII, started in 2009, ECPGR has maintained the broad objectives defined at the start of Phase VI (see 2.1). The focus of all Network activities was defined by the four priorities agreed at the Steering Committee meeting in Riga, Latvia (October 2006). These are the same priorities of the previous Phase, but higher emphasis was given to “Task Sharing” (i.e. implementation of AEGIS) and a component on capacity building was also added as a new element. Capacity building was not accompanied by financial commitments from the ECPGR budget and therefore it remains as a note of encouragement for the member countries to consider.

The current structure of ECPGR is composed of six Crop Networks and three Thematic Networks, altogether mobilizing twenty Working Groups (in 2008 two new Working Groups were accepted as part of the *In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network). Each Network (Crop or Thematic) is guided by a Network Coordinating Group consisting of 5-10 members. During the last year of the previous Phase, each Network defined its project for Phase VIII that was submitted to the Steering Committee.

All the projects were approved by the Steering Committee at the same level of funding of the previous Phase. Networks had the possibility to allocate up to 25% of their funds to specific activities (collecting, characterization, evaluation, support to databases, safety-duplication, publications, etc.), while at least 75% of their budget needed to be dedicated to meetings. A large part of the projects planned by the networks are in line with the Steering Committee's intention to give emphasis to AEGIS by contributing to its implementation.

Currently, i.e. the beginning of Phase VIII, the ECPGR Secretariat is working on several fronts. Some of them can be sketched as follows:

1. Ensuring renewal of membership to Phase VIII and payment of the contributions by the 45 potential members;
2. Assistance to the implementation of all the planned Networks' activities (logistic and technical organization of meetings, attendance of meetings, drafting and publication of agreed reports, setting up of letters of agreement in all cases where specific activities are carried out with the support of ECPGR funding);
3. Finalization of constitutional documents of AEGIS and encouraging membership;
4. Definition of a road map for the implementation of AEGIS and leadership in setting up the AEGIS Quality System and a mechanism for the definition of the European Collection;
5. Organization of the AEGIS Grant Scheme that will disburse about € 100 000 to successful competitive projects;
6. Recently concluded coordination of the preparation of the € 8.6 M. EUROGENEBANK project proposal on AEGIS that was submitted for funding to the EC Seventh Framework Programme (Research Infrastructures) in December 2009;
7. Assistance to the implementation, administration and monitoring of a regeneration project involving 12 institutes, funded by the Global Crop Diversity Trust;
8. Liaison with the International Treaty Secretariat, specifically regarding activities of the Inter-regional Cooperation Network, that are devoted to organizing capacity building workshops in support of the implementation of the IT in other regions;
9. Maintenance and further development of the EURISCO catalogue, also in view of the collaboration with the project on Global Information on Germplasm Accessions (GIGA) and the expectation to provide, through EURISCO, European characterization and evaluation data to the global catalogue GENESYS; and
10. Organization of the ECPGR Independent External Review.

Issues / Outlook

1. The number of participants in each regular WG meeting (and its related cost) will be determined by the decision of the National Coordinators to use or not to use the country quota for each specific meeting. Even though the Steering Committee suggested that the Networks select which WGs should receive priority (and funding), most Networks decided to maintain all the WGs and split the available funds across all the existing WGs. The majority of the WGs have therefore planned no more than one meeting during Phase VIII, due to budgetary constraints. Moreover, the majority of the meetings and activities in Phase VIII are concentrated in years 2 and 3 (2010 and 2011), since WGs did not want to hold their meeting too long after the previous meeting held in Phase VII. This situation creates an unbalanced load of activities and expenses (pre-financing of meeting arrangements) to the Secretariat and the WGs during the first part of the Phase and in most cases there will be no further funds to support agreed actions. It is also one of the signals that funds are not sufficient to meet the expectations, since the Networks will tend to spend most of the funds available to them in the first part of the Phase.

The Secretariat views the above described developments as critical and believes that these developments do not facilitate a strengthening of the efficiency of the Programme. To change the trend it will be indispensable either to seek further funds or to change the *modus operandi* rather drastically.

2. ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF ECPGR

2.1 Objectives of the Programme: rationale and implementation

The current objectives of ECPGR were formulated in 1998, when the strategy for Phase VI (1999-2003) was developed. These have not been revised since then, but priorities for action were defined in 2003 for Phase VII (2003-2008) and for Phase VIII (2009-2013) (see below, 2.2). The objectives were meant to reflect the role of ECPGR as the platform to facilitate the implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the conservation and sustainable utilization of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, at the European level. This implied that the Programme should stimulate collaborative activities for a broader range of crops and themes and that it should actively facilitate a more effective conservation and use of PGRFA, *inter alia* through a greater sharing of responsibilities among member countries and through making better use of the complementarity offered by *in situ* and *ex situ* strategies.

Objectives of ECPGR:

1. to facilitate the long-term *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of plant genetic resources in Europe;
2. to facilitate the increased utilization of plant genetic resources in Europe;
3. to strengthen links between all plant genetic resources Programmes in Europe and promote the integration of countries which are not members of ECPGR;
4. to encourage cooperation between all stakeholders, including NGOs and private breeders;
5. to increase the planning of joint activities, including the development of joint project proposals to be submitted to funding agencies;
6. to encourage the sharing of conservation responsibilities for PGRFA in Europe;
7. to increase awareness, at all levels, of the importance of PGRFA activities including conservation and sustainable use; and
8. to seek collaboration with other relevant regional and global initiatives.

The ECPGR Secretariat views these objectives as rather generic and too wide in scope. An account is given below of the way they are being implemented by ECPGR on a practical level:

- **Facilitation of long-term *in situ* conservation** is an objective mainly addressed by the “*In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network”. During its lifetime (since the year 2000), this Network has collected and published information on different country experiences both on the conservation of crop wild relatives and on the on-farm management of landraces. It has also assembled information and developed guidelines on various aspects of *in situ* conservation, mainly as part of the EU-funded projects “PGR Forum” and “AEGRO”.

Issues / Outlook

2. An important element that would further facilitate *in situ* conservation is the establishment of a European inventory of *in situ* populations of crop wild relatives, and of landraces cultivated in farms. The standardization of these inventories, in terms of type of data to be collected, data standards (i.e. descriptors), data flow mechanism, data upload on the Web and data display remains as an action that should be pursued in the near future as a collaborative activity of the “*In situ* Conservation” and the “Documentation and Information” Networks.
 3. Another issue that needs to be addressed by the Programme is that some members are proposing to include *in situ* conserved populations in AEGIS. Besides the fact that this aspect is not (yet) a high priority for AEGIS, it should also be noted that a number of technical and possibly legal matters need to be resolved first.
- **Facilitation of long-term *ex situ* conservation** is one of the original objectives of ECPGR. Given that the responsibility for conservation of genetic resources rests at the national level, the facilitating function of ECPGR can be expected to focus on promoting collaborative action whenever part of the collections require urgent regeneration or rejuvenation, or if specific collections are endangered either due to political or institutional changes. Defining guidelines for conservation have also frequently been a Working Group activity, which is conducive to increasing

the standards of conservation across the member countries. The AEGIS initiative, aiming to establish a well conserved and rationally managed European Collection, as well as a Quality System for conservation, offers the most comprehensive approach to the implementation of this objective.

Issues / Outlook

4. Based on the discussions and decisions by the Steering Committee, the Secretariat views the development of AEGIS as one of the areas where the ECPGR Programme has highest technical competences and responsibilities. It is expected that gradually more and more ECPGR funds will be spent on this priority. In order to further facilitate this process, it would be very helpful for the Secretariat to have a clear indication on the long-term perspective regarding the possible policy role and responsibilities that the EU is able and willing to play in the operation of the European Collection.

- **Facilitating the increased utilization of plant genetic resources in Europe**

There are different indirect means by which ECPGR addresses this objective, i.e. by encouraging the improvement of the documentation of germplasm conserved in genebanks, so that the material is well identified and characterized and also by improving accessibility to the respective data, creating agreed standards for data exchange and opportunities for online provision of data. This also includes the development of functionalities to search the databases online, thereby allowing an easier access to the available information. The above points have mainly been the area of action of the Documentation and Information Network, as well as the documentation activity of the crop Working Groups. As a result of such actions, Multi-Crop Descriptors, crop-specific descriptors, Central Crop Databases and EURISCO have been developed. Recent agreements to emphasize and implement the inclusion of characterization and evaluation data into EURISCO are also in line with this objective.

Projects prepared through the collaboration of members of the ECPGR Working Groups and eventually funded by the EC (Regulations 1467/94 and 870/04) have also increased the level of characterization of European germplasm.

Increased use of PGR is facilitated when the material is promptly available. The agreement reached by the International Treaty (IT) on the availability of conserved germplasm was most conducive to this purpose. ECPGR embraced the fundamental concept of the IT and supported its adoption throughout Europe. The AEGIS initiative is also fully in line with the IT principles and will extend the same principles to non-Annex I crops. A good quality of the material under conservation is also essential to facilitate its use. The AEGIS quality system intends to address this point. The close collaboration with plant breeders in the activities of ECPGR, the collaboration with organizations that have a direct interest in the use of germplasm (i.e. EUCARPIA and the European Seed Association) are examples of other activities to facilitate use.

Issues / Outlook

5. Overall, ECPGR did manage to achieve this objective to a large extent, but it still has an important role to play to further improve the use of PGR.

6. It has been beyond the scope of ECPGR to monitor the actual dispatch of material from genebanks for use in breeding programmes or other uses at the European level and therefore to assess the consequent impact that ECPGR might have made to the development of agriculture, research or education. More detailed knowledge of the impact of the use of PGR in Europe would be relevant as a powerful public awareness element that could support public investment in genebanks. Of course it would be difficult to attribute to ECPGR any direct merit for the use of PGRFA, which is a complex variable, depending on private and public investment into breeding programmes and agricultural research at large. Furthermore, the importance of national genebanks as sources of PGRFA would need to be clarified, in comparison with alternative sources of germplasm, especially those held and used by private companies. The role of ECPGR and the realistic expectation from this Programme regarding increased use could thus become sharper and more focused.

7. A related issue is the question of whether it is auspicious to strengthen the participation of (private/commercial) plant breeders in the ECPGR activities and how to go about achieving this. Although one could argue that the responsibility for (increased) utilization of germplasm will be more at the national or even at the institutional level, it could also be argued that a more active participation of plant breeders (especially from the private sector) in the ECPGR activities would certainly help to further strengthen the implementation of activities that contribute to achieving this objective.

- **Strengthen links between all plant genetic resources Programmes in Europe and promote the integration of countries which are not members of ECPGR**

The ECPGR mode of operation itself is conducive to this objective, starting with the role of the Steering Committee, which is setting up a programme of collaboration among the member countries each time a new Phase of ECPGR is agreed upon. All the Network plans and activities factually contribute to this objective. The AEGIS initiative is also operating towards the implementation of this objective and, in fact, building on its realization. With only two exceptions, all the countries of Europe (including Israel, Turkey and the Caucasus countries) have been integrated as members of ECPGR. ECPGR provided inputs to the two European Workshops on National Plant Genetic Resources Programmes, held in Alnarp, Sweden (2003) and in Luxembourg, Luxembourg (2006). These two initiatives aimed at strengthening linkages and promoting collaboration among the national programmes. In many cases in the past, EC funded projects of the GENRES series had involved only a limited number of mainly west European countries. ECPGR had supported the participation of additional (east European) countries to the EC project meetings, thereby ensuring a wider involvement in genetic resources projects of regional interest.

Issues / Outlook

8. The Secretariat takes this objective as an important guide when planning implementation of activities, making sure that all the countries are given the opportunity to participate.

- **Encourage cooperation between all stakeholders, including NGOs and private sector breeders**

The ECPGR mode of operation implicitly contributes to this objective, since WGs can be composed of members originating from public, private or NGO sectors, depending on the nomination made by the country. The private sector, represented by the European Seed Association (ESA), and NGOs are also involved as permanent observers in the Steering Committee. An invitation to every WG meeting is also sent to ESA and the NGO representative, respectively.

In practice, collaboration with the private sector has taken place only when seed companies were involved in EU-funded projects submitted by the WGs. Offers of collaboration by private breeders for regeneration of vegetable accessions were communicated by the Secretariat to genebanks, but these have remained with virtually no response. The private sector is represented in the AEGIS Advisory Committee. NGOs have been involved in activities of the *In situ* and on-farm conservation Network.

Issues / Outlook

9. A strategy for collaboration with specific, even if broad, objectives has never been formulated either with the private sector or NGOs. If necessary, a clear mandate in this sense might need to be expressed by the Steering Committee in order to further strengthen these collaborations. One of the difficulties encountered in strengthening the cross-sector collaboration has been the particular difficulty that the NGO community has encountered in identifying good representation of the diverse interests and membership of that community to the Steering Committee (and other bodies of ECPGR).

- **Increase the planning of joint activities, including the development of joint project proposals to be submitted to funding agencies**

The extensive coverage of ECPGR's activities with respect to research and management of almost all crop genetic resources in Europe underpins its leadership role and makes it a natural partner for agencies interested to fund PGR-related work in Europe, provided that they are aware of the

potential offered by ECPGR. The various ECPGR Networks have created opportunities for members to exchange project ideas, discuss, investigate and coordinate potential funding opportunities and forge project partnerships. As such, the ECPGR Networks have been, and continue to be suitable platforms to develop joint project proposals for funding by the European Union (see Table 1). Lobbying activity at the EU level by the Secretariat and by ECPGR National Coordinators has on occasion influenced the choice of topics proposed for funding by the European Commission, or even their articulation (i.e. the GENRES and Seventh Framework Programme for Research).

Table 1. EU-funded projects developed in the context of ECPGR Networks

(updated from Hazekamp T. 2002. *IPGRI's Modus Operandi: Leveraging Resources to Achieve Common Goals*. Unpublished document)

ECP/GR Network	Project number and Crop	Period	Budget (EUR)
Vegetables	GEN RES #20: <i>Allium</i>	1996-2000	983,860
Industrial Crops and Potato	GEN RES #34/45: Potato	1996-2000	703,678
Industrial Crops and Potato	GEN RES #42: <i>Beta</i>	1997-2002	848,109
Fruits	GEN RES #61 <i>Prunus</i>		360,000
Fruits	GEN RES #81: Grapevine	1997-2002	853,000
Cereals	GEN RES #88: Maize	1997-2001	1,600,000
		Total Phase V	5,348,647
Cereals	GEN RES #106: <i>Avena</i>	1999-2003	460,632
Vegetables	GEN RES #105: Carrot	1999-2004	802,750
Cereals	GEN RES #104: Barley	2000-2003	1,040,314
Documentation and Information	European Plant Genetic Resources Infra-structure (EPGRIS).	2000-2003	480,470
Vegetables	GEN RES #109-112: <i>Brassica</i>	2000-2003	1,654,991
Vegetables	GEN RES #113: Eggplant s (<i>Solanum</i> species)	2000-2004	497,301
Forages	Improving germplasm conservation methods for perennial European forage species.	2001-2004	1,801,643
<i>In situ</i> Conservation Task Force	European Wild Plant Diversity Assessment and Conservation Forum.	2002-2005	733,700
		Total Phase VI	7,471,801
Vegetables	AGRI GEN RES 001: Leafy Vegetables Germplasm, Stimulating Use	2007-2010	1,118,600
Fruits	AGRI GEN RES 008: Management and conservation of Grapevine Genetic Resources	2007-2010	1,527,216
Vegetables	AGRI GEN RES 050: Vegetative Allium, Europe's Core Collection, safe and sound (EURALLIVEG)	2007-2011	1,089,000
<i>In situ</i> and On-Farm	AGRI GEN RES 057: An integrated European <i>in situ</i> management workplan: Implementing genetic reserves and on-farm concepts (AEGRO)	2007-2010	829,625
Cereals	AGRI GEN RES 061: <i>Avena</i> genetic resources for quality in human consumption (AVEQ)	2007-2011	1,037,882
		Total Phase VII	5,602,323
		Total Euro	18,422,771

Collaborative actions develop within the ECPGR Networks, sometimes as a result of EU-funded projects or even without available funding sources. The "EPGRIS3" initiative of the Documentation and Information Network consists of coordinating voluntary activities to resolve specific issues related to the establishment of a European Plant Genetic Resources Documentation Infra-structure. The assumption is that working in collaboration is more efficient and productive than working in isolation.

Issues / Outlook

10. The already mentioned importance of a strengthened role of the EU in ECPGR and mutual collaboration, especially with regard to the possible funding of operating the European Collection should be pursued. A continued discussion of this issue at the Steering Committee level seems to be very important.

- **Encourage the sharing of conservation responsibilities for PGRFA in Europe**

This objective has been translated into a priority action as of the start of Phase VII (2004). The AEGIS initiative is fully dedicated to fulfilling this objective. This is possibly the objective into which the most human and financial resources have been invested over the last 10 years. It is an area in which a mechanism such as ECPGR is essential in allowing progress to be made. At the conceptual and theoretical level the concept of “sharing responsibilities” with respect to AEGIS has been agreed upon throughout the region. Mechanisms for its effective implementation have also been developed by consensus.

Issues / Outlook

11. The actual realization of an effective genebank integrated system remains a challenge and a priority for the near future, since the process will still require independent additional funds and a strong coordination capacity. ECPGR will maintain a critical and essential role in this process.

- **Increase awareness, at all levels, of the importance of PGRFA activities including conservation and sustainable use**

Increased awareness raising was recognized in 2001 by the Steering Committee as an objective that should receive more attention. It was recommended that Working Groups and National Programmes dedicate efforts to develop activities and identify opportunities in support of this. The ECPGR Secretariat was seen as being an interface to promote ongoing activities, disseminate publications, assist with translations and with identification of resources. However, two obstacles to the effective achievement of any impact in this area were due to the insufficient resources allocated to the Secretariat, on the one hand and, on the other,, it became apparent that the most logical level to be effective with regard to public awareness is operating at the local/national level and that the best approach to address civil society with public awareness messages should be targeted to the local needs by national or local organizations. As of 2006, the Steering Committee felt that the main responsibility for public awareness should be left to the National Programmes. Considering that a large number of products (brochures, leaflets, posters, video, etc.) were being prepared in many countries, the Secretariat was invited to establish a collection of the various existing products and to make these available on the Web (see: http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/Introduction/Public_Awareness.htm).

Issues / Outlook

12. The current approach to the objective of raising public awareness (i.e. being a portal of national public awareness activities) is probably the most suitable one. Should this approach continue to be endorsed, this objective might need to be reduced in its scope, and the current formulation of “increasing awareness at all levels” reworded.

- **Seek collaboration with other relevant regional and global initiatives**

At the present time, relevant regional (or sub-regional) activities include the European Union projects on genetic resources, the South East Europe Development Network (SEEDNet) and the FAO initiatives to update the State of the World and the Global Plan of Action. In all cases the ECPGR Secretariat has been maintaining appropriate linkages with these bodies/mechanisms. Among the global initiatives, the Global Crop Diversity Trust activity and the International Treaty implementation are the most relevant.

Issues / Outlook

13. The common location in Rome of the Secretariats of ECPGR and of some of the above mentioned activities has been conducive to strengthened collaboration.

2.2 Priorities for the current Phase VIII: rationale and implementation

Broad priorities that the Networks should adhere to during each ECPGR Phase were defined for the first time in 2003 and for Phase VII (2004-2009). These same priorities were reconfirmed in 2007, to be applicable for Phase VIII (2009-2013), with the assignment of top priority to “Task sharing”, given the importance that the Steering Committee decided to give to the implementation of AEGIS. Capacity building was also added as an element to be pursued in order to accompany task sharing, although no budget line was linked to this specific element.

Priorities for Phase VIII:

- Task sharing and capacity building
- Characterization and evaluation
- *In situ* and On-farm conservation and management
- Documentation and information

The Secretariat received the mandate to dedicate particular attention and efforts to the first priority, “Task sharing and capacity building”, since specific budget lines were allocated to the coordination of the AEGIS process and to its implementation through a Competitive Grant Scheme. Efforts are also being made to raise additional funds through the submission of project proposals.

All the Networks and WGs have developed their projects for Phase VIII activity focusing on the four priorities. The Task sharing activities consist in preparing for an integrated management of the European Collection, thereby defining the selection criteria for the Most Appropriate Accessions and the crop-specific quality standards for conservation. “Characterization and evaluation” have in some cases been included as activities to be funded with the allowed 25% of the Networks’ budgets. EU-funded collaborative projects were also developed with focus on evaluation (garlic, grapevine, leafy vegetables and oats).

“In situ and On-farm conservation and management” is carried out by the specific Network, which is collecting guidelines and experiences, as well as promoting genetic reserves and on-farm concepts through a EU-funded project (AEGRO). The establishment of national inventories and a centralized catalogue of *in situ* crop wild relatives and landraces is also being pursued by the *In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network and by the Documentation and Information Network, provided appropriate funds can be identified. The actual implementation of *in situ*/on-farm conservation measures remains a task that only the individual countries can put into practice.

“Documentation and information” is carried out by the respective Network, which is advising on the further development of EURISCO, including the future incorporation of characterization and evaluation (C&E) data and the collaboration for the establishment of GIGA. The Doc & Info Network is largely operating through self-funded activities (EPGRIS3), involving individual experts into activities on a voluntary basis, with the aim of resolving specific issues (scope and vision of EURISCO, data quantity and quality, uploading mechanism, user interfaces, training of the network of focal points, etc.). Working Groups also maintain substantial documentation activity, usually developing, maintaining and uploading Central Crop Databases and also have a role in ensuring data flow to EURISCO through the national focal points. The appropriate division of roles between EURISCO and the European Central Crop Databases (ECCDBs) has not always been clear and the concept is still evolving, especially with the decision to include C&E data into EURISCO. It has been proposed that the WGs upgrade the ECCDBs to more complex Crop Portals.

2.3 Structure and mode of operation

The networking structure of the Programme adopted in Nitra, Slovakia (1995) was reaffirmed by the Steering Committee in its following meetings. The Programme operates through Networks in which activities are carried out either in the framework of Working Groups or as ad hoc actions.

The Steering Committee, consisting of National Coordinators nominated by participating countries, has the overall responsibility for the Programme. It makes decisions regarding the general

scope of the Networks and the establishment or continuation of Working Groups and approves the Programme's budget. The Steering Committee periodically reviews the overall Programme and progress made by the Networks. On the basis of such reviews, the Steering Committee defines the priority activities to be funded through its core budget and the complementary activities for which additional funding has to be sought outside the core budget. The Steering Committee mandates the coordinating Secretariat to carry out its decisions (see next section).

ECPGR is structured into nine Networks (six Crop and three Thematic Networks). Each Network is overseen by a Network Coordinating Group (NCG), chaired by a Network Coordinator. Each Working Group is led by a Chair and a Vice-Chair (See Table 2).

Table 2. Networks and Working Groups

		Working Groups
Crop Networks	1. Cereals	<i>Avena</i> Barley Wheat
	2. Forages	Forages
	3. Fruit	<i>Malus/Pyrus</i> <i>Prunus</i> <i>Vitis</i>
	4. Oil and Protein Crops	Grain legumes
	5. Sugar, Starch and Fibre Crops	<i>Beta</i> Fibre crops (Flax and Hemp) Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Potato
	6. Vegetables	<i>Allium</i> <i>Brassica</i> Cucurbits Leafy vegetables Solanaceae Umbellifer crops
Thematic Networks	7. Documentation and information	-
	8. <i>In situ</i> conservation	Wild Species Conservation in Genetic Reserves On-farm conservation and management
	9. Inter-regional Cooperation	-

The responsibilities of each of the ECPGR operational bodies (National Coordinators, Steering Committee, Coordinating Secretariat, Networks, Network Coordinating Groups, Network Coordinators, Working Groups, Working Groups Chairs and Vice-Chairs, Task Forces and Database managers) are spelled out in the respective ECPGR Terms of References, a document prepared for the first time in 2004 and revised in its third version in 2008 (http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/Introduction/ToRs_ECPGR_PhaseVIII.pdf).

It should be specified that all the relevant actors identified in the above terms of reference (TORs), with the exception of the Secretariat, are carrying out their tasks on the basis of inputs-in-kind. The assumption behind this formula is that National Programmes are expected to allocate internal resources (staff, time and money) to contribute to the ECPGR activities. The number of Working Groups has expanded in time (from 12 in 1998 to 20 in 2009), as well as the number of participants in the meetings/activities of these bodies has on average increased, in parallel with the increase of member countries (from 32 in 1998 to 43 in 2010). Limitations in the available budget, compared to the expectations and potential of the Working Groups to carry out necessary activities, have induced the SC to take some corrective measures. Considering the impossibility to proportionally raise the ECPGR budget and to accommodate an increased number of meetings and people, the Steering Committee decided in 2003 to distinguish lower priority and higher priority WGs during Phase VII, where the lower priority ones were basically temporarily frozen in their activity. This decision was criticized by the Network members who complained about the risk for the lower priority Working Groups of

losing momentum and become totally ineffective. Rather than directly imposing a prioritization of Working Groups, the Steering Committee resolved the issue by assigning a defined (limited) budget to each Network and to request the Network Coordinating Groups to prioritize the use of the funds.

Another decision of the Steering Committee was made in 2003 to limit the participation in meetings, due to budget constraints and also so as to organize more effective meetings with a reduced number of participants. The “country quota” was therefore introduced, assigning to each country a defined quota of participants that would attend those meetings where the National Coordinator identified attendance as a priority for the country. The quota number is linked to the level of country contribution. Management of Networks’ and Working Groups’ activity planning and implementation has been assigned to the Chairs, Vice-Chairs and Network Coordinating Groups. This provision of assigning new coordinating roles among the Network members was introduced to support the Secretariat in its coordinating function, considering that the expanded number of WGs had limited the Secretariat’s possibility to exercise a very pro-active role in supporting them all with their technical planning and monitoring of progress. Obviously, the effectiveness of this provision is directly dependent on the engagement that Chairs and NCG members effectively dedicate to this task.

The oversight function exercised by the Steering Committee has become more complicated with the increase of the Committee’s members, also considering that all decisions are taken by consensus. Apart from the two meetings held in each Phase, the Steering Committee has the opportunity to make relatively quick decisions via email interaction. Through a dedicated listserver, the Secretariat can raise questions and submit proposals requiring Steering Committee decisions on various aspects of the Programme. Email consultation requires the time-frame of at least one month to allow all the Steering Committee members enough time to react, as well as to allow reaching consensus in case of disagreement.

Issues / Outlook

14. Regarding the effectiveness of the **“inputs-in-kind” principle**, there are countries where ECPGR members are actually acknowledged in their regular workplans for their time dedicated to ECPGR. In other cases, the ECPGR operators may find themselves unable to dedicate adequate time and efforts to ECPGR. Intermediate situations are also very frequent, where work on ECPGR activities is welcome, but not completely integrated in the official workplans. As a consequence, the various workplans are affected and there is no solid accountability mechanism to ensure the performance of the various bodies (except for the Secretariat’s performance). Particularly relevant for the success of each Network/Working Group is the time that Chairs and other Network leaders can dedicate to their responsibilities.
15. At various Steering Committee meetings, the Secretariat proposed substantial **increases in the overall budget** of ECPGR, in order to allow the means for equal participation of all the members in the meetings, as well as to enable the effective implementation of the agreed activities. However, only inflationary adjustments have been conceded by the member countries. This lack of increased funding, coupled with the Programme’s tendency to expand in its expectations and coverage, cause the risk of the Programme stretching itself too thin across too many Networks and activities.
16. A number of disadvantages of the **“quota system”** should be highlighted: the system establishes a rather unfair mechanism, whereby the countries with the highest contributions (not necessarily the countries with the highest genetic diversity) have more opportunities to participate in Network activities. Moreover, participation of members in a meeting depends on the punctual decision of the National Coordinator, therefore the Working Group members may not be aware whether or not they will be allowed to attend the meetings, until the above decision is taken, and this is often delayed or uncertain. Additionally, the cost of each meeting cannot be correctly planned until the above decisions have been made by all the countries. The Network budgets are defined at the onset of the Phase, but the cost of the meetings is the result of subsequent, unpredictable decisions taken by each National Coordinator at different times. This makes it difficult to make sensible budgetary plans at the Network level.
17. In order to improve the **decision-making mechanism of the Steering Committee**, it has been suggested that a smaller Executive Committee could be established to take quicker decisions on

behalf of the entire Steering Committee. While this choice might allow quicker decisions to be taken, it would reduce the active participation of several countries in the decision-making process. In practice, so far there have not really been critical situations where lack of consensus or lengthy decision-making processes have been particularly problematic.

2.4 Management of the Programme by the Secretariat

The responsibilities of the Coordinating Secretariat are indicated in the ECPGR Terms of Reference.

In order to implement its tasks, in Phase VIII the Secretariat was assigned a budget covering the cost for the following Secretariat staff: ECPGR Coordinator (Lorenzo Maggioni – 100%), Programme Assistant (Lidwina Koop - 75%); AEGIS Coordinator (Jan Engels - 50%) and Scientific Assistant (publications and support to the ECPGR Secretariat, Networks and Working Groups) (Elinor Lipman - 50%). Compared to Phase VII, this corresponds to an increase of 25% of Programme Assistant time and a reduction of 50% of scientific assistance time.

The ECPGR Coordinator has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the Secretariat's tasks. He reports to the Bioversity Regional Director for Europe and operates under the oversight of the ECPGR Steering Committee. The latter includes annual technical and financial reporting directly to the Steering Committee. The Programme Assistant provides full administrative support to the Programme and reports to the ECPGR Coordinator. The Scientific Assistant takes care of the compilation, editing and layout of ECPGR publications, reports and other documents and provides support to the ECPGR Networks and Working Groups in the follow up of their workplans. She reports to the ECPGR Coordinator. The AEGIS Coordinator is responsible for implementing the AEGIS related tasks that have been/are being agreed upon by the Steering Committee during its periodic meetings. He reports to the ECPGR Coordinator and operates under the oversight of the AEGIS Advisory Committee.

The EURISCO Coordinator (Sónia Dias, funded through Bioversity's core resources and dedicating 50% of time to EURISCO and 50% to other tasks in the Biodiversity Informatics area), coordinates the maintenance and development of EURISCO, as well as maintains the link with the network of National Inventory Focal Points. She reports to the Bioversity Information Management specialist and is co-supervised by the ECPGR Coordinator and under the general oversight of the Documentation and Information Network Coordinating Group. All the above staff members operating for ECPGR are part of the Regional Office for Europe of Bioversity International and are based in Maccarese, Rome, except for Elinor Lipman who is working from home in Montpellier, France.

All Secretariat staff is part of the Bioversity management and communication processes and follows its personnel procedures.

The ECPGR Secretariat holds regular meetings for internal coordination, approximately 3-4 times per year.

Issues / Outlook

18. With the current arrangement, the **Secretariat** perceives that it performs the tasks assigned to it with a variable level of efficiency. As described above, the Programme is covering 43 countries, 9 Networks and 20 Working Groups and the list of contacts is nearly 600 people. This complex structure and large number of partners inevitably solicits the Secretariat to a high degree of administrative needs and opportunities for technical support. The unbalanced but explainable distribution of meetings that are being organized in Phase VIII mainly during 2010 and 2011 poses an enormous challenge. Overall, the Secretariat is not in a position to provide strong support to the WGs in order to ensure that the agreed workplans are carried out. Assistance with the formulation of project proposals is limited to a few cases, whereas contributions to the coordination of proposal development within the ECPGR "community" are done on a regular basis. Search for donors cannot be done systematically and with sufficient effort. Production of

reports and formal documents by the Secretariat is another area where it is difficult to keep pace with the demand. Editing, proof reading and layout work were formerly carried out with support of the Bioversity Publication Unit, but this support has ceased in the past few years and all the work has had to be covered by the Secretariat staff, creating a backlog of unfinished publications. This has led to a revision of the publication strategy (see below).

19. Overall, the Secretariat is currently almost exclusively dedicated to implementing the given activities, as defined by the Networks and the Steering Committee (organization of meetings, financial management, generation, follow-up and conclusion of letters of agreement related to planned ad hoc activities and production of WG and NCG meeting reports). The **creative and pro-active role of the Secretariat** in support of the Networks' technical and financial needs and demands is on the other hand very limited at present.
20. In the case of AEGIS, the **AEGIS and ECPGR Coordinators** have assumed a significant technical responsibility by leading the process of developing discussion papers, drafting agreements, guidelines and templates as well as providing advice and assistance to countries. They also use the Network and WG meetings to present draft proposals, discuss these and finalize them before submitting the same to either the AEGIS Advisory Committee and/or the Steering Committee.

2.5 Hosting arrangements

At every start of Phase meeting, the Steering Committee decides whether to extend the mandate to Bioversity International to act as Coordinating Secretariat for the implementation of the Programme [Bioversity International is one of the 15 Centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)]. This arrangement is defined by consensus between the Steering Committee and Bioversity representatives, with the joint endorsement of the ECPGR budget, which includes the cost of Secretariat staff and overheads.

Each member country formally becomes a member of ECPGR by signing a Letter of Agreement whereby it is agreed that Bioversity International will administer ECPGR in accordance with the decisions taken by the Steering Committee, including the inherent financial obligations.

The members of the ECPGR Secretariat are recruited and managed by Bioversity International as regular staff members. The ECPGR Coordinator and the AEGIS Coordinator are internationally recruited staff. The Programme Assistant and Scientific Assistant and EURISCO Coordinator are all locally recruited staff.

Issues / Outlook

21. The advantages for the **Secretariat being hosted by Bioversity** include the possibility to operate within the scientific environment of an organization that is solely dedicated to agricultural biodiversity. Opportunities exist to generate synergies with Bioversity colleagues who are experts in various fields of PGR conservation, use, law, policy, documentation, informatics, public awareness, etc. The Regional Offices of Bioversity offer an opportunity to link with other regions. Bioversity offers a suitable logistic environment, thanks to its suitable office infrastructure, travel, finance, computer helpdesk and publication offices. These supporting services facilitate the organization of complex meetings around Europe (travel arrangements and payments), the monitoring of the ECPGR budget and preparation and auditing of financial reports, the process of producing authoritative publications and reports and the maintenance of a dedicated Web site. Bioversity provides professional development opportunities for its staff members, including the ECPGR Secretariat staff. On the other hand, being members of Bioversity staff requires involvement in institutional activities, which are often demanding in terms of time spent in meetings and other interactions that, in the view of the Secretariat, may not be strictly related to ECPGR business.
22. In the course of time, **direct support provided by Bioversity** to ECPGR has decreased in parallel with an ongoing trend of the organization (and the CGIAR at large) to recover all costs of services. This means that editing and layout services are no longer provided by Bioversity without additional cost. In addition to the management, administrative, scientific and technical

contributions of Bioversity to the ECPGR Programme, the organization directly finances the EURISCO Coordinator (half-time). In addition, the worldwide trend to engage only in projects and activities that are being funded decreases the possibility of staff to engage “free of charge” in ECPGR activities and make contributions to the Programme. Only where interests are fully matching is this still the case.

23. In 2007, **Bioversity made a policy decision**, which implied that it no longer provides direct support for coordination of Regional networks or development of national programmes. In practice, ECPGR has not been affected directly by this decision, although this decision made it less obvious for Bioversity to justify and support the presence of a network’s Secretariat within its portfolio of activities.
24. As mentioned above, the Secretariat’s **location in Rome** has advantages for ECPGR, since it is easier to interact with institutions such as FAO, the Treaty Secretariat and the Global Crop Diversity Trust, besides Bioversity. It is frequently the case that events organized by the above institutions become the occasion for ECPGR partners to travel to Rome and this increases the opportunities to strengthen linkages and to make collaborative planning.
25. The **cost for ECPGR of the hosting arrangement at Bioversity** currently consists in a direct cost for communication and office consumables (8750 euro per year) and 13% overheads on the total expenses. The organization’s target overhead rate is 25%. The overhead rate applied for coordination of ECPGR is a discounted rate, agreed specifically for the Programme.
26. The **costs of internationally recruited staff employed at Bioversity** in Rome are generally considered to be very high, compared to a non-international organization or an international organization in a location with lower cost-of-living salary compensations.

2.6 Funding mechanism

The Steering Committee approves the budget of ECPGR at the beginning of each five-year Phase, even though formal decisions concerning the payment of annual member contributions are eventually taken by the competent authorities within each country. So far, budgetary decisions taken by the Steering Committee have never been rejected by the respective competent authorities. Also those countries that, at each start of Phase, have committed themselves to becoming members of ECPGR through their National Coordinators, have generally maintained their commitment and paid the expected contributions. In every Phase a few countries have been unable to regularly pay their annual dues and a number of outstanding contributions have accumulated. So far, the Secretariat has been able, in most cases, to obtain payment of outstanding contributions, even if with some delay. The funding situation of ECPGR has therefore never experienced critical moments. Of course the fact that Bioversity agrees to anticipate funds under its pre-financing policy, if needed, has ensured that activities could always continue without interruption, independently from the inflow of contributions.

Issues / Outlook

27. The current funding mechanism, based on national commitments for which the National Coordinators make themselves responsible, has been functioning reasonably well.
28. The budget approved by the Steering Committee has so far been widely viewed as the maximum level that can be obtained from the individual member contributions, given the feedback received from implementing agencies of individual countries, especially those with the highest contributions. However, the overall budget is not considered sufficient by the Secretariat to meet the demands and the expectations expressed by the Network members. Frequent requests, also reflected in the stakeholder analysis, regard the possibility to hold more frequent meetings, involving all the interested countries, to undertake more collaborative activities, to produce more publications, to expand the Networks to involve other crops that are currently not covered, etc.).
29. In order to cope with a restricted budget, the SC has taken measures such as prioritization of WGs and activities, and has accepted to discontinue the production of printed reports. The Secretariat was also requested to invite countries to provide voluntary contributions for specific activities. Voluntary contributions raised during Phase VII amounted to a total of 40 000 euro (i.e. less than 2% of the total budget). A more pro-active role of the Secretariat as fund-raiser was discussed at the SC meeting in 2003 and a fund raising role for the Secretariat was agreed

in principle. It was also acknowledged that this task would require additional staff resources, but no funds were allocated to strengthen this type of action.

30. Preparation of project proposals to be funded by the EC under the coordination of the ECPGR Secretariat has been attempted on three occasions in the last few years, in order to fund the implementation of AEGIS. The effort required in these cases was very demanding and overstretched the Secretariat staff, which was simultaneously obliged to carry on the regular ECPGR activities. The results have not been successful from a financial point of view. From a technical point of view, the development of complex proposals required the Secretariat and the respective ECPGR bodies to elaborate in greater detail, than would be required on a routine basis, approaches and solutions that are beneficial for the implementation of AEGIS. The Working Groups that have submitted project proposals to the EC have been more successful in a number of cases (see above, Table 1).
31. Responding to these concerns and developments, a strategy for collaboration with the European Union was prepared and presented to the Steering Committee in 2008 (see Section below). In order to upscale the level of funding for ECPGR and in general for the management of plant genetic resources in Europe, further communication and collaboration with the European Commission and other European Union institutions needs to be sought (see Section 2.7), whereby ECPGR could become the operational and technical arm for the implementation at the regional level of an EC strategy on genetic resources. This type of arrangement would ensure full sustainability at the appropriate level of funding.

2.7 Partnerships

The Steering Committee agreed to invite a number of permanent observers to its meetings, currently Bioversity International, as the host organization, the Coordinator of the South East European Development Network on Plant Genetic Resources (SEEDNet), the European Association for Research on Plant Breeding (EUCARPIA), the European Seed Association (ESA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen) and one Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) representative.

- **SEEDNet** is a sub-regional network which involves nine member countries of ECPGR. This network receives funds from the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) for the development of National Programmes on PGR and for meetings and collaborative actions across the sub-region. As such, this network has similar objectives to ECPGR and it has the means to implement, within the sub-region, those principles that are agreed at a wider level within ECPGR (i.e. sharing of responsibilities, documentation systems, standards for conservation, etc.).

Issues / Outlook

32. It is important that the two programmes maintain an open dialogue and remain reciprocally informed of their activities, in order to proceed in a complementary way towards the same goals, at the same time avoiding duplication of efforts.

- **EUCARPIA** has a Section that is dedicated to genetic resources and an audience that consists mainly of plant breeders, i.e. the main beneficiaries of the conservation work that is promoted by ECPGR. Participation of ECPGR in the EUCARPIA meetings and vice-versa has allowed informing the breeders of the ECPGR activities, although it has not so far concretized any joint initiatives or strengthened collaborations in a visible way.

Issues / Outlook

33. It might be necessary to extend the collaboration to other sections in EUCARPIA in order to strengthen the voice of private sector plant breeders.

- **The European Seed Association** is invited as a permanent observer to the SC meetings as well as to send representatives to all the WG meetings. Also in this case, apart from reciprocal information on the respective activities, this partnership has not led to practical joint initiatives or more proactive collaboration, except for the presence of ESA in the Advisory Group of AEGIS.

Issues / Outlook

34. The view of the Secretariat is that so far the breeders' association has not seen a big benefit in the existence of ECPGR. This may be due to the fact that breeders are satisfied with bilateral arrangements with national or local genebanks. On the other hand, genebanks did not show interest in receiving support from breeding companies for regeneration of their material, when this option was proposed through an ECPGR initiative in 2003-04.

- **FAO** staff has regularly attended the ECPGR Steering Committee meetings as observers. These have been occasions to promote processes such as updating the State of the World Report and the implementation and monitoring of the Global Plan of Action. The FAO International Treaty has also been promoted through ECPGR and the Steering Committee has encouraged countries to ratify it and to implement it at the national level. AEGIS is developed and operates within the framework of the Treaty in a manner consistent with the Treaty's objectives. AEGIS provides a mechanism for regional cooperation that also contributes to the implementation of the Treaty in the European region. Specific collaboration has been established with the **Treaty Secretariat**, particularly by the Documentation and Information Network, with the intention to contribute, through EURISCO, to the implementation of Art. 17 on the establishment of a Global Information System; and by the Inter-regional Cooperation Network, with the objective to convey to other regions similar views to those prevailing in Europe as regards the sharing of tasks, material and information, at the same time facilitating and promoting the ratification and implementation of the Treaty.
- **NordGen** is the Nordic Genetic Resource Center, operating on behalf of the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) for the conservation and use of genetic resources, even though each of the countries also operates a national programme. Since NordGen is to some extent coordinating the activities of the five Nordic countries that are ECPGR members and is maintaining a centralized genebank and documentation system, it is a "natural" observer in the Steering Committee meetings.
- **NGOs** are currently represented as observers in the Steering Committee by "Pro Specie Rara", a Swiss NGO.

Issues / Outlook

35. European NGOs are facing a challenge in coordinating among themselves their participation in ECPGR and to dialogue in an authoritative manner with ECPGR. The Steering Committee stated that this coordination problem might be best resolved through an active participation of the NGOs at the national level and the National Coordinators are encouraged to facilitate this process.

- The **Global Crop Diversity Trust** recognizes AEGIS as Europe's contribution to the development of a rational, effective and efficient global system which is at the heart of its mandate. Collections of wheat, barley and various grain legumes in Europe have been identified as priority crops for regeneration through the global crops strategies. The Trust endorsed for funding an ECPGR proposal for regenerating smaller collections (cereals, grain legumes and potatoes) in nine European countries. The project started in 2009 and is ongoing. In addition, the Networks can be suitable fora to prepare project proposals to be submitted to the various grant schemes offered by the Trust for regeneration and evaluation of PGR. Another area of collaboration is in the context of the Global Information on Germplasm Accessions (GIGA) Project, where the Trust is one of three investors. ECPGR has agreed to channel the EURISCO data into the global accession level portal (GENESYS) which is being developed at Bioversity as the main product of GIGA.
- The importance of a closer collaboration between the **European Union** institutions on the one hand and ECPGR on the other has been reiterated many times by the Steering Committee. The difficulties of finding the most suitable entry point for a dialogue with the European Commission (EC) are related to the fact that the responsibilities and activities on genetic resources issues are

split amongst different EC Directorates. Even though linkages have been established at various levels, a consistent collaboration between ECPGR and the EC is not in place.

A strategy for collaboration with EU institutions was presented at the Steering Committee meeting in October 2008. As a result, a Task Force was established and initiated to support further development of the ECPGR strategy for collaboration with the EU. No financial resources were allocated by the Steering Committee for this initiative. As proposed in the strategy, the most obvious area for strengthening linkages is the implementation process of the International Treaty on PGRFA. The EU ratified the Treaty (in 2004), but did not start measures for its implementation. On the other hand, AEGIS provides a mechanism for regional cooperation in the implementation of the Treaty in the European Region. The European Commission (Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection) was informally approached by the Task Force members with a proposal for collaboration in the implementation of the Treaty. As a result, the European Commission organized an inter-service consultation, involving representatives of the relevant Directorates-General.

The communication efforts undertaken by the Secretariat and supported by Bioversity in 2008-2009 also led to the adoption of three significant research topics on agricultural biodiversity in the Seventh Framework Programme. This included the call for proposals on the strengthening of the European research infrastructure for the conservation and use of PGRFA, for which the AEGIS proposal was submitted in December 2009. The European Commission sought and received technical advice from the Secretariat in preparation of these calls.

Issues / Outlook

36. All efforts undertaken with the European Commission and other EU institutions need to be supported by promoting and influencing similar messages through Ministries of the Member States as well as through international interest groups, especially if the objective is to obtain long-term funding for genetic resources activities. In addition, the European Parliament could be approached. Communication with the European Union institutions needs to emphasize the importance of PGRFA for the wider socio-economic issues – food security, nutrition and health, and well-being.

2.8 Measurement of impact

The Secretariat is accountable for the implementation of the workplan and management of the budget according to the Steering Committee decisions at the start of each Phase, i.e. the organization of meetings, the implementation of a number of actions, the preparation of a number of reports, etc.

Regarding the internal monitoring of progress of Network activities, this has traditionally been reviewed by the Steering Committee on the basis of descriptive progress reports provided by the Networks for the “Mid-term” and “End of Phase” Steering Committee meetings. As of Phase VIII, all the Networks are operating according to a project that each of them has developed with the requirement to indicate outputs and milestones. It will therefore be possible to analyse the success of the Networks in a more quantitative and objective manner.

Issues / Outlook

37. There is no objective mechanism in place to measure the impact that ECPGR is making for PGRFA in Europe, i.e. to verify to what extent ECPGR is successful in reaching its objectives and whether these efforts are having a quantifiable impact. Indeed, the objectives of ECPGR refer to actions such as “facilitate”, “encourage”, “increase” and “seek” and there is no clear baseline of the status of conservation, use, collaboration and shared responsibility that is measured against progress at the end of each Phase. It can be argued that the impact of ECPGR could be indirectly measured by indicators such as the increase of member countries, the increase of Working Groups, the increase of available data in EURISCO and Central Crop Databases, the number of ECPGR-driven project proposals approved for funding by the EC and

in general by the rate of satisfaction expressed in stakeholders' analyses such as the one carried out within the framework of the current external review.

38. In summary, the general perception of the European countries, expressed by the National Coordinators on the basis of feedback from their national programmes, is generally positive to the extent that the Programme has been re-confirmed Phase after Phase for 30 years. ECPGR has never tried to measure its general impact on PGRFA in Europe in more quantitative terms. The analyses made by FAO on the State of the World and the implementation of the Global Plan of Action can also be used by ECPGR to analyse the impact that it has had on the state of European PGRFA. However, these analyses are also made on descriptive terms and are not based on an objective baseline and measurable indicators.

2.9 AEGIS

The AEGIS initiative, started in 2004, is a response to the need expressed on various occasions (notably at the European Symposium for the implementation of the Global Plan of Action in Braunschweig, Germany in 1998) for enhanced cooperation to sustain *ex situ* collections through sharing responsibilities. This is an attempt to formalize cooperation in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of the conservation and use of PGRFA at the regional level. This initiative has received wide support by the Steering Committee, thus becoming the highest priority of Phase VIII, directly absorbing 17% of the ECPGR budget, plus channelling most of the activities of the Crop Networks in this direction. AEGIS is completely built within the ECPGR operational and management framework and its strategy, formalized through the signature of Memoranda of Understanding with each member country, allows covering most of the objectives of ECPGR. As such, the risk (or opportunity) perceived is that ECPGR might entirely convert itself into the AEGIS implementation mechanism.

The AEGIS development and implementation activities are being coordinated by the AEGIS Coordinator, working half-time on AEGIS matters, in close consultation with the ECPGR Coordinator. The job description for this position includes the coordination of the activities, such as the quality management system development, identification of the most appropriate accessions, concept development, providing technical inputs and advice to Working Groups, National Coordinators, etc. and to contribute to the creation of adequate awareness. The recently established AEGIS Advisory Committee provides the immediate oversight over the establishment and operation of AEGIS as well as over the implementation of the Competitive Grant Scheme.

Issues / Outlook

39. There is a risk that areas of ECPGR that are not covered by AEGIS, such as for example *in situ*/on-farm conservation and inter-regional cooperation might suffer. It is on the other hand an opportunity for ECPGR/AEGIS to possibly become a well integrated, rational and efficient conservation system in Europe, that could permanently attract funds for long-term conservation from legally committed members and possibly in the future also from the EU.

2.10 EURISCO

The final output of an EC funded project called EPGRIS (European Plant Genetic Resources Information Infra-structure) was the establishment in September 2003 of EURISCO. This is the European Plant Genetic Resources Search Catalogue. It provides online access to information included in the National Inventories of Plant Genetic Resources (NIs) of European countries. These NIs are implemented and maintained by National Focal Points (NFPs) of individual European countries as a contribution to the implementation of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and other international mechanisms such as the FAO Global Plan of Action, the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). Following the mandate and guidance given by the ECPGR Steering Committee, since 2004 EURISCO is hosted, maintained and further developed by Bioversity International, on behalf of the Secretariat of ECPGR and in collaboration with and on behalf of the National Focal Points (NFPs) for the National Inventories (NIs).

As of 2004, ECPGR has included a line in its budget (currently € 9000 per annum) in order to contribute to the further development of EURISCO through actions such as providing training to the National Inventory Focal Points and improving the upload mechanism, and improving the Web interface and user friendliness of the Catalogue. Data sharing agreements are signed between Bioversity and the institutions responsible for National Inventories whereby Bioversity takes the commitment to compile into EURISCO the data uploaded from the NIs and to provide public access to the EURISCO database via a Web site, and maintain this Web site and its user interfaces in consultation with and on behalf of the NFP of the NI.

The Steering Committee has assigned to the Documentation and Information Network Coordinating Group the responsibility to act as specific advisory body with the function to monitor progress in the development and maintenance of EURISCO, as well as to provide advice to Bioversity International for the further development of EURISCO.

As of December 2004, Bioversity has appointed a EURISCO Coordinator, working at 50% for EURISCO, to manage and support the further development of EURISCO, to provide helpdesk assistance to the National Focal Points, to contribute to the maintenance of the EURISCO Web site and to organize training. Bioversity has included the management and development of EURISCO among the tasks and responsibilities of the "Understanding and Managing Biodiversity" (UMB) Programme and various UMB staff members have provided technical inputs to EURISCO.

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40. In 2007, the Centre-Commissioned External Review (CCER) of UMB noted the need for EURISCO to receive increased attention by Bioversity and recommended that the Regional Office for Europe should take the overall responsibility to secure further improvement and use of EURISCO. The last part of this recommendation was not taken up by Bioversity, although, as of 2009, the ECPGR Coordinator became co-supervisor of the EURISCO Coordinator. It is felt that there is still room for improvement of the internal mechanisms at Bioversity, in order to support and ensure a more effective management of EURISCO.

2.11 Communication strategy

Among the most visible products of ECPGR, there are the printed and electronic reports of the Working Group meetings. These reports, now no longer disseminated in printed format, used to contain the meeting's discussion points and recommendations, as well as a series of articles prepared by the Network members on the status of the collections and/or on technical and scientific issues. The reports were carefully edited, requiring intensive consultation with the authors in order to improve papers written by non-English mother tongue authors. The printed reports, with their colourful covers, became a catchy and well visible product of the Networks' activities, as well as an occasion to publish in a well presented format information that would not be suitable for peer reviewed journals yet important for the overall implementation of ECPGR activities at the European level.

Although the ECPGR published reports have been among the major outputs of the WGs' activities with a positive image impact, as indicated for example by the appreciation shown by the stakeholders' analysis, a strategic decision was taken in 2008 to eliminate this type of service in order to allow the limited resources of the Secretariat to be better channelled towards supporting the Networks in their action points and workplan implementation. During Phase VIII, reports of meetings will only include discussion and recommendations and will only be available in electronic format. Country status reports and other articles will only be provided online, as received (with no editing).

Another information window is the ECPGR Web site (including the AEGIS Web site), providing information related to meetings, publications, members' contact details, as well as newly agreed workplans and other meeting outcomes. Public awareness during Phase VII was facilitated by the production of an ECPGR brochure, created with the support of the Bioversity Publications Unit. ECPGR activities are regularly communicated to the Steering Committee through annual reports as well as, during the year, through a dedicated listserver kindly maintained by the Nordic Genetic

Resource Center. Through the listserv, the Secretariat sends updates and relevant information, as well as requests for advice regarding the management of ECPGR. Decisions have often been taken by consensus through this electronic tool, thereby increasing the flexibility of the decision mechanism process, including budgetary decisions.

Finally, all major activities carried out by ECPGR are regularly reported through articles published in Bioversity's Regional Newsletter for Europe, a product of the Regional Office for Europe which is published in two printed issues per year and distributed to over 3000 contacts in Europe and beyond.

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41. The demand for **ECPGR meeting reports** increased together with the number of Working Groups and reached a dimension that went far beyond the available staff resources, which had not increased proportionally. The consequences were a backlog of the ECPGR publication production and reports published with 2-3 years' delay, resulting in the strategic decision described above to reduce this service.
42. The **Web site** maintenance is a complex and time-consuming task that has been carried out by the Secretariat staff (formerly by a part-time Scientific Assistant and currently by the Programme Assistant) with helpdesk assistance provided by Bioversity. The site is in the process of being transformed into a more user-friendly environment (Content Management System), with the expectation to better automate the update of the contacts, meetings and publication pages, to simplify the text and to free up time to provide more frequent and punctual updates about activities happening in the various Networks.
43. The rate of **support that can be obtained from the Bioversity Communications Unit** in the future is decreasing and uncertain, since this unit is being restructured and the trend in Bioversity is that every service provided internally needs to be individually funded. Overall, the rate and flexibility of support from the Communications Unit has decreased in the last few years also due to the work overload of that office.

3. SECRETARIAT'S COMMENTS ON THE STAKEHOLDERS' ANALYSIS

Following the consultation carried out in March 2010 through an email (SurveyMonkey) questionnaire and completed by 310 (43%) of 719 contacted ECPGR stakeholders, a few comments and reflections can be made as listed below:

- **Strategy and mode of operation**

It is comforting to see that there is a broad acknowledgment of the relevance and effectiveness of the strategy and mode of operation of ECPGR, especially indicating that it is considered correct to operate as a pan-European Programme involving all the countries and operating through Networks and Working Groups carrying out agreed workplans with their own resources as inputs-in-kind. The Steering Committee oversight and the coordinating role of the Secretariat are also appreciated.

However, some weak points of the above scenario have been identified by the analysis:

- a. In order for the ECPGR Programme to work properly, an effective coordination and support system at the national level is necessary. The ECPGR Working Group members would need to be empowered as true country representatives, and be enabled to speak at the regional level on behalf of their country, ensuring that the Networks' agreed workplans can be carried out at the national level. In reality, this is only true in a few cases, while in other cases Working Group members operate as individuals with little connection with a national strategy. In a number of countries it is difficult to obtain the necessary financial and operational support to implement the agreed activities at the national level, possibly due to weak national coordination, limited authority and/or lack of financial and administrative support. Strong, well-coordinated and well-funded national programmes are therefore a premise to the effective operation of ECPGR in its current mode of operation.

- b. Funds to carry out agreed activities are lacking. This is indeed one of the principles on which ECPGR is operating, i.e. relying on national funds and inputs-in-kind to carry out activities. Obviously, at a time of reduced national investment for genetic resources, the entire Programme is suffering. This scenario might change in the event that conservation of genetic resources becomes a regional (rather than national) activity and adequate funding is secured from other sources, for example from the EU. The AEGIS initiative is moving in this direction, trying to create consensus for a regional management of the European Collection and to secure funding support from the EU.
- c. The Steering Committee has become a large group (43) of people and institutions which might lack sufficient flexibility in decision-making and that is seen, by some, as dominated by a few pro-active west European country members. It is also viewed by some as too much a political body, which would be distant from the practical problems of the Networks. Despite its size and absence of a "permanent" leading Chair, the Steering Committee has been effective in taking reasonably quick decisions, always by consensus, every time the Secretariat has requested its intervention. It is however true that the SC might acquire more dynamism if a leader and/or an Executive Committee could be established, while at the moment the Steering Committee gets involved in the ECPGR management only when solicited by the Secretariat. The advantages of creating an Executive Committee should be balanced against the risk of increasing the distance between active (and perhaps dominant) National Coordinators and the rest of the NCs of the Steering Committee. The perception that a few countries drive the wagon and the others more or less follow is probably over-exaggerated. The dynamism that a number of Coordinators (incidentally western and northern Europe, perhaps used to working together) inject into the Programme could rather be seen as very beneficial and not inspired by political and geographic interests. It should however be possible to find ways to enable those National Coordinators who are less vocal (for cultural or other reasons) to provide an increased contribution to the decision-making process. The criticism that the Steering Committee takes decisions that are "too political" is a rather naïve and misleading one. So-called "politically correct" decisions are conducive to maintaining consensus among all the members and this is based on the acknowledgment that each country participating in ECPGR should have equal value and opportunity to contribute to the general objectives. Therefore, meetings and actions are planned with the aim of including the participation of various geographic areas of Europe. For the critics, this is an inefficient procedure and a waste of money since they would prefer to involve in the meetings a few experts and problem-solvers from the most advanced institutions. It should however be noted that genetic resources are held under the sovereignty of each respective country and that the genetic resources activities are currently embedded in a strongly politicized environment. It would be naïve to pretend that this factor can be disregarded. Moreover, ECPGR is operating with a spirit of collaboration among all its members and with the aspiration to build capacity in countries and institutions that are currently lagging behind, for whatever reason. The pragmatic approach of delegating the conservation of genetic resources to one or a few central elite institutions may seem to some to be the most logical from a technical point of view, but consensus for such an approach is not nearly in sight and would not be a politically attractive proposal. An appropriate, politically correct dimension for ECPGR operations is therefore essential at present, to ensure that genetic resources from the entire region will be properly conserved, their use facilitated and that they will remain available to all. However, this does not mean that money should ever be wasted on irrelevant and inconclusive travels or meetings.

- **Objectives**

The objectives of EPGR are all considered relevant to the vast majority of the stakeholders (percentages above 90% for all the objectives). ECPGR is generally considered effective in meeting these objectives (percentages between 71 and 90%) and is also considered fairly cost-efficient (percentages between 57 and 70%). It should however be noted that ECPGR has the objective to "facilitate", to "strengthen", "to encourage", "to increase" and "to seek" and, therefore it is not making itself (and could not make itself) accountable for the actual conservation and use of PGRFA (which is left to the individual countries). Some stakeholders correctly point out that there is a

discrepancy between the possibility to reach the ultimate aim of these objectives (such as the actual effective conservation and use) and the resources that would be needed to reach that result.

While ECPGR is trying to “upscale” itself with the AEGIS project, at least regarding the *ex situ* conservation, it should be clear that the current structure and philosophy of ECPGR is not designed for the Programme to be accountable for reaching result-oriented milestones, even though it will now be possible to measure the results of Network through the achievement of the Network outputs which depend on the commitment and good will of the national delegates. The success of ECPGR (and its survival over time) is probably due to the effective (but not easily measurable) “facilitation/catalyzation/prioritization/agenda setting” action that meetings, reports, guidelines, descriptors, databases and a network of contacts have provided to the genetic resources community in Europe.

Specific remarks were made regarding the lower effect of ECPGR in promoting *in situ* and on-farm conservation (which are even more clearly national responsibilities that cannot be “delegated” to other countries), as well as in promoting use through the involvement of breeders and in raising public awareness. Should these areas be reconfirmed in the future as appropriate domains for ECPGR to get involved in, appropriate strategies and resources should also be defined, in order to identify the specific actions where ECPGR could be most effective in their undertaking.

- **Priorities**

The choice of priorities defined by ECPGR meets a very large consensus among the stakeholders, especially the relevance of “Documentation and information” (97%) and of “Characterization and evaluation” (96%). The priorities are considered adequate (87%). The effectiveness of ECPGR in meeting its priorities is also considered rather high (between 69% for “*In situ* and on-farm conservation and management” and 89% for “Documentation and information”). Obviously, the priorities also reflect the same dilemma as the ECPGR objectives, in the sense that the Programme can only direct the Networks to work towards the priorities, but cannot guarantee the performance of the various Networks and national programmes.

The question about the respective balance that *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation should receive from ECPGR is often put on the table and could be an element for discussion and clarification for the near future of ECPGR. A possibly important “formally agreed” priority that is currently missing is “Lobbying with the EU” institutions. It could be debated whether this is an appropriate function for ECPGR and under which terms it should be carried out, but it is clear that it is an important action that should be promoted for the benefit of the PGR community.

Even though the priorities can only be addressed somehow indirectly by ECPGR, it is noticeable that ECPGR is considered by a large majority of respondents (87%) the appropriate Programme to support these priorities. It is evident that ECPGR is perceived as a unique and appropriate framework in Europe, which is trustworthy for its independence, reliability and efficiency, having developed over the years its valuable assets such as its network of contacts and experience in their coordination. It obviously also remains with its limitations, being powerless as regards the possibility to actually enforce the implementation of any regionally agreed workplan.

- **Funding mechanism**

The mechanism of establishing contributions on the basis of UN rates has been so far accepted by the countries without major issues being raised. The country quota system, which is strictly linked to the annual contribution, is sometimes seen as not fair enough, since the participation of each country in the Programme is not based on the relevance, potential and skills of its PGR national programme, but rather on its economic status. A collaborative programme such as ECPGR might consider a different approach, ensuring participation of all relevant partners, independently from the level of their financial contribution to the Programme. The country quota system is also rather complex and costly in terms of monitoring and administration of its implementation.

- **ECPGR management and use of funding**

The general perception is that the Programme is efficiently managed by the Secretariat (80%), but it is also said that the cost of coordination is too high and a higher proportion of funds should go to activities. It is possibly true that the coordination is currently expensive, since it is provided by an international organization. Alternatives that would reduce the cost of coordination could be considered, but the analysis should take into account all aspects of the costs and benefits of operating from Bioversity International and its geographic location in Rome versus any other alternative (see 2.5 “Hosting arrangements”).

In relative terms, the current resources of staff available to the Secretariat are perceived by the Secretariat as being hardly sufficient to fulfil all the required tasks. The stakeholders’ opinion is somewhat different since 50% think that these resources are sufficient and 5% that they are too generous.

- **Network structure**

Even though the current Network and Working Groups structure is considered effective by 85% of respondents, it should be remarked that the expansion of ECPGR, leading towards the attempt to cover most of, if not all, the crops and to create permanent structures with country delegates for each crop, is on the one hand an expression of the success of ECPGR, on the other it is the “curse” that has made it expensive to coordinate as well as generating demands that cannot be satisfied. This situation has required the SC to take corrective measures, such as prioritization of WGs and severe limitations of funding to be split across several users. This situation has created some friction between the Working Groups and the Steering Committee, since the WGs feel like they are given ambitious tasks without being provided with the appropriate resources. It has also strained the Secretariat, which has become the helpdesk for a multiplied number of stakeholders, groups and activities, without being proportionally reinforced in terms of staff support. The ECPGR strategy might deserve re-consideration in the future in order to implement a more manageable structure with manageable objectives.

- **Linkages and partnerships**

The stakeholders’ analysis focused its attention on the observers in the Steering Committee, which are not exhaustive of the various ongoing partnerships (see above, 2.7). Current observers are considered appropriate by the vast majority of respondents (90%). A few remarks were made about unbalanced geographic representation and the lack, for example, of a Mediterranean sub-regional organization. However, it should be considered that the Steering Committee is not a “political entity”, but a technical committee, even though it needs to operate within a political environment, as discussed above. Observers from sub-regional networks (NordGen and SEEDNet) offer opportunities for technical coordination with existing sub-regional initiatives. Similarly, all the other observers operate in the field of genetic resources in Europe with specific technical functions and none of them has a political role in the Steering Committee. The addition of other observers from research and agronomy societies, UPOV and Planta Europa has been suggested. Of these, Planta Europa is probably the closest one to the ECPGR objectives and its inclusion might be taken into consideration in order to engender a joined up conservation approach in Europe. Further strengthening of the partnership with the EU should also be sought, as discussed above in 2.7.

- **ECPGR outputs and impact**

The outputs of ECPGR are considered very useful (68%) or somewhat useful (29%). The databases clearly stand out as the most mentioned useful output, followed by guidelines, project proposals and Working Group meeting reports. These products are derived from a mixture of inputs-in-kind from national programmes and efforts from the Secretariat. A proper functioning of these entities is essential to guarantee continuing production of outputs by ECPGR.

ECPGR is also considered effective in reaching impacts, especially “improved *ex situ* conservation” (88%) and “strengthened links between PGR programmes in Europe (88%). It is considered very effective also in “increasing public awareness”, even though not many resources have specifically been dedicated to this, but all the publications produced, including the Newsletter for Europe, have

evidently contributed in a positive way to this objective. Among the least effective impacts, stakeholders quote the “improvement of *in situ* conservation” and the “improved collaboration with other regions”. Indeed, fewer resources have been dedicated to these aspects. A sharpened strategy with reasonable expectations for the impact that ECPGR should have in the various areas could be useful and help reviewing ECPGR’s impact in the future.

4. SECRETARIAT’S CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter summarizes the major conclusions and suggestions that the Review Panel might want to consider with regard to the operation and management of ECPGR:

- **STRATEGY**

1. Effective coordination and support to the conservation and utilization activities at the national level is necessary, in order to better support the regional activities. This is sometimes lacking and ECPGR efforts might need to be thought of to address this issue.

- **PRIORITIES**

2. The actual realization of an effective genebank integrated system (AEGIS) remains a high priority challenge for the near future, since the process will still require independent funds, additional to the regular budget of ECPGR as well as a strong coordination capacity. ECPGR will maintain a critical and essential role in this process.
3. The role of ECPGR and the realistic expectation from this Programme regarding a) “*In situ* and on-farm conservation”, b) “Promoting use through the involvement of breeders” and c) “Public awareness” should become sharper and better focused, including the identification of the actual actions that ECPGR should undertake.

- **FUNDING MECHANISM**

4. Technical support that is expected by the Networks from the Secretariat has proportionally increased with the expansion of the Programme, while resources in terms of Secretariat staff have not. Furthermore, workplans agreed by the Networks rely on inputs-in-kind that are not always available and, thus require more inputs from the Secretariat.

- **MANAGEMENT**

5. The governance mechanism provided by the Steering Committee needs to be reconsidered, making sure that this body can operate efficiently, without limiting the possibility for all the partners to exercise an equal influence in the decision-making process.
6. The country quota system is complex and costly in terms of monitoring and administration of its implementation. It bases the participation of each country in the Programme not on the relevance, potential and skills of its PGR national programme, but rather on its economic status. A different approach might be considered, ensuring participation of all relevant partners.

- **USE OF FUNDING**

7. The principle of dedicating a large part of the Networks’ resources to organizing representational Working Group meetings attended by country delegates should be critically evaluated. A different approach should be considered, if the Steering Committee could accept that participation on a national basis can be replaced by delegation of responsibility on the basis of expertise.
8. The costs of Programme coordination are perceived as high, but still insufficient to fulfil all the required tasks. It should be explored whether it would be convenient and opportune to reduce costs and/or tasks and/or to increase the budget.

- **STRUCTURE**

9. The current structure of ECPGR, comprising 9 Networks and 20 Working Groups, is not easily manageable with current resources and it may require revision.

- **HOSTING ARRANGEMENT**

10. Bioversity International in the Rome location as the host of the coordinating Secretariat has many advantages for ECPGR. However, the costs of the hosting arrangement at Bioversity are perceived by some stakeholders as being too high.

- **LINKAGES AND PARTNERSHIPS**

11. Continued communication and strengthened collaboration with the European Commission and other European Union institutions needs be sought, whereby ECPGR could become the operational and technical arm for the implementation at the regional level of an EC strategy on genetic resources. This type of arrangement would ensure full sustainability at the appropriate level of funding.

12. It should be defined whether “Lobbying with the EU Institutions” should be an appropriate function for ECPGR and under whose responsibility it should be carried out.

13. A strategy for collaboration either with the private sector or NGOs with specific objectives has never been formulated. A clear mandate to proceed in this direction could be useful in order to further strengthen these collaborations.

- **OUTPUTS AND IMPACT**

14. It should be possible to identify indicators that could measure the success of ECPGR. A sharpened strategy with reasonable expectations for the impact that ECPGR should have in the various areas within its scope could be useful and help the review of ECPGR’s impact in the future.

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