

Bioversity International response to the Report of the External Review of ECPGR as host of the ECPGR Secretariat

Introduction

The first external independent review of ECPGR, commissioned by the Steering Committee, took place during the first half of 2010. The review panel members and two representatives of the Steering Committee were hosted at Bioversity International's Headquarters in Maccaresse from 16-23 July 2010.

Bioversity took active part in the organization and implementation of the External Review. The Review Panel had teleconferences with a range of ECPGR partners and face to face meetings with the ECPGR Secretariat team, Bioversity's senior management and other staff, as well as with partners located at FAO headquarters in Rome.

Response

Bioversity has a long history of involvement with the European Collaborative Programme, actually since its inception as a UNDP funded project in 1981. Bioversity and its predecessors have always been very supportive of the Programme and keen to host its Secretariat as the objectives of the Programme have been very complementary to those of the Organization. This complementarity had allowed for the creation of synergies in a number of disciplines, including the development of joint projects and an impressive series of high quality and widely respected publications. More recently, the strategy of Bioversity had placed the use of agricultural biodiversity for better nutrition and for sustainable agriculture more explicitly at the heart of its agenda, and decreased the emphasis on and investment in regional collaboration and strengthening of national programmes as an objective per se.

Nevertheless, the close collaboration with the European Programme remains of significant interest to Bioversity, due to the rich presence of genetic resources in Europe, documentation facilities and expertise, conservation and breeding expertise as well as several policy prototypes related to genetic resources that have made Europe an interesting laboratory of techniques and processes that can be extended or adapted to other regions.

Bioversity welcomes the overall direction of the recommendations, i.e. the evolution of ECPGR into a fully institutionalized programme/network while, at the same time, taking strategic responsibilities for the conservation and use of plant genetic resources in Europe, in particular through the creation of more accountability among its membership. Bioversity has observed this evolution in this direction over the past ten years or so, in fact it has taken place in close consultation with and support from Bioversity. Consequently, Bioversity welcomes this development and offers its further support, without reservation.

The above mentioned institutionalization of ECPGR includes important aspects such as the provision of a platform to the European Union and its Commission for coordination and agenda setting, as well as overseeing the implementation of agreed workplans of priority activities on the conservation and facilitation of the use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

Due to the increasingly recognized relationships between the different genetic resources sectors, in particular of crop, forest and animal genetic resources and the synergies that can be generated when managed in a holistic manner, Bioversity offers its legal and technical expertise towards an evolutionary process that would, in the long term, integrate all these sectors using a natural approach.

Bioversity sees the proposed function of an Executive Director as one step towards facilitating this collaboration process and supports the proposed creation of such a position, especially if it were to serve all sectors of genetic resources. Such an approach would allow taking full advantage of lessons learnt in one sector and applying those to the others. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the European Commission would welcome a closer collaboration, or even some form of coordination at a strategic level, between these three principal components of agricultural biodiversity and it is likely to strengthen the position of each Network in the negotiation process with the Commission by playing an increasingly important role in the coordination and implementation of European responsibilities by the coordinated Networks.

In view of the fact that genetic resources information management is one of the priority areas of Bioversity's strategy, and given the fact that EURISCO is one of the key components of the global information system (GENESYS) that is being developed, Bioversity is interested to continue its engagement in the further development and operation of EURISCO as a significant contribution to ECPGR.

As already mentioned, Bioversity is keen to continue the hosting of the ECPGR Secretariat. However, due to the changes in the funding mechanism and rules of the CGIAR, this can only be done on the basis of full costing in the long term. This would mean that some of the contributions in kind made by Bioversity until now would no longer be possible unless it identified financial support for them. Furthermore, considering the future institutionalization of ECPGR, including the possible creation of an Executive Committee and the appointment of an Executive Director, Bioversity is prepared to review current hosting arrangements, administrative procedures, reporting lines and the status of the Secretariat and to bring these in line with the spirit of the Review Report.