

Proposal for a European conference during autumn 2002 – “National Plant Genetic Resources Programmes – Design and Implementation”

1. Background

More than four years have passed since the 1996 FAO International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources was held in Leipzig (Germany). At this occasion over 150 countries agreed to adopt the FAO Global Plan of Action (GPA) as a tool to realise the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity. These included:

- to ensure secure *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of genetic resources;
- to promote the utilisation of plant genetic resources in a sustainable manner;
- to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of PGR;
- to assist countries and institutions in setting action priorities; and,
- to strengthen existing programmes and enhance institutional capacities.

To assist in implementing these objectives the GPA identified building strong national programmes as a cornerstone. A first review of the progress of national programme development was made in 1998 at the European Symposium “Implementation of the Global Plan of Action – conservation and sustainable utilisation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture” in Braunschweig (Germany). While much progress was reported in several areas ranging from *ex situ* conservation and documentation of collected material to increased interest and awareness of decision-makers, lack of progress was reported for other areas. These included on-farm and *in situ* conservation, as well as lack of interaction between gene banks and the actual and potential users. This latter component, among others, was also identified as a potential threat for further implementation of the GPA in Europe.

2. Where are we now?

Meanwhile, countries in Europe continue to build their own national programmes that often leave them face-to-face with similar problems:

- What should be the true scope of our national programme?
- What measures do we have to take to involve all stakeholders?
- How can we improve our national ‘infrastructure’?
- Who should bear the responsibility of national co-ordination?
- What will be the legal status of the programme?
- Given the opportunity of new inventories and collecting missions, how will we safely manage more plant genetic material?
- Do we indeed have the capacity and competence to serve for full characterisation, documentation and information?
- How do we solve proprietary issues that may arise when collecting material?
- Do we need to develop a national PGR legislation?
- How can we secure solid funding for the implementation of our programme?
- How can we obtain more understanding and support from policy and decision-makers?
- How can we share conservation and characterisation responsibilities?
- Etc.

As we have been in touch with colleagues from many other European countries presently involved in the development or implementation of national PGR programmes we strongly feel that there is a need for a platform where questions of mutual interest, as above, can be discussed and experiences exchanged. This is not to say that we advocate identical solutions to national problems. We are fully aware of Europe as ‘a world in a region’ and

believe that by meeting and discussing person-to-person the current efforts could be inspired and improved. It is our firm belief that the ease and speed to implement the GPA could be greatly increased

3. Proposal

To assist in the current work – and bring about inspiration and ideas for the tasks lying ahead of us – we propose to arrange a three-day conference during the 2nd half of 2002 – tentatively in Sweden – where representatives of various stakeholders would meet and openly discuss common topics. The outcome of such a venue would be a greater understanding of each other's approaches – and limitations, suggestions for improvements and initiatives, guidance for the future work, and a broader acceptance and stronger support from decision-makers.

Some additional information:

Place of meeting:	S Sweden (in close vicinity of Copenhagen Airport)
Tentative date:	2 nd half of September – 1 st half of October
No. of participants:	maximum 150 (160 took part in the Braunschweig conference)
Organising committee:	Swedish Biodiversity Centre Banco de Germoplasma-Genética, Estação Agronómica Nacional IPGRI Europe Office
Local organisers:	Swedish National Programme for PGR Swedish Board of Agriculture Ministry of Agriculture
Professional organiser:	To be decided
Sponsors:	To be discussed

We call upon the attention of the Europe Group of IPGRI to consider this initiative and take further action for its accomplishment.

Yours sincerely,

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