

ECP/GR TASK FORCE ON PRIORITIES FOR PHASE VII

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

General

1. A total of 28 replies were received. The replies represented the views of:
 - 13 National Co-ordinators (Denmark, Slovenia, Switzerland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Sweden, Hungary, Yugoslavia FR, Italy, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ireland);
 - 8 Working Group Chair Persons (Barley, Beta, Inter-Regional Co-operation, Allium, Umbellifer, Vitis, *In situ*, On-Farm and Avena);
 - 4 Working Group Vice Chair Persons (Allium, Barley, Potato, Prunus);
 - 5 Database Managers (Avena, Beta, Triticale, Allium, and Umbellifer),
 - 6 representatives from Network Co-ordinating Groups (Vegetable, Forages, Cereals, Industrial Crops and Potatoes, Fruit and Grain Legumes);
 - 1 NGO.
2. Not all respondents answered all questions. The figures in brackets in the text below indicate the number of respondents making the particular points.

Section A. Developments in Science and Technology

Question 1: Which areas or new initiatives of science and technology are of key importance to the conservation and utilisation of PGRFA both now and in the future?

3. The most important issues identified, in rough order of priority, were:
 - Molecular marking (21)
 - Bioinformatics (15)
 - Methodologies for *in situ* and On-farm conservation (12)
 - Characterisation and evaluation techniques (12)
 - Genomics (9)

3. Also considered important were:

- Storage methods (cryopreservation and *in vitro*) (8)
- taxonomy (6)
- biosafety (including genetic integrity of collections and GMO contamination) (5)

4. Other issues mentioned included:

- genetic transformation
- seed physiology
- identification of duplicates
- regeneration
- pathogen cleaning
- collection management procedures
- organic cultivation
- biodiversity in agro-ecosystems

Questions 2 and 3: Does ECP/GR take sufficient account of these developments in its current planning and activities? If not, how can these be integrated into ECP/GR activities for Phase VII?

5. There was strong support (8) for work related to genomics, molecular markers and evaluation. There was a specific suggestion to develop crop specific marker technology manuals. Some felt that this could be integrated into existing crop specific networks. Others advocated the creation of a new thematic network on biotechnology. One noted the need for use of modern technology, but argued that basic non-technological activities should be completed first.
6. There was also strong support (7) for further work on *in situ* and on-farm conservation, including conservation techniques and agro-ecology.
7. Continuation of work on bioinformatics was considered important to others (6), including a gap analysis exercise.
8. Other suggestions included the creation of a network on cryopreservation and slow growth storage, co-ordination with the IARCs and activities to increase public awareness.

Questions 4 and 5: Are there any key groups/institutions that should be specifically consulted on these issues? Should any be invited to become observers to the Steering Group?

9. Most recognised the value of inviting specific experts to take part in Working Group meetings on an *ad hoc* basis. A wide range of possible expertise was identified.
10. Some did not want additional observers to be invited to join the Steering Group. However, a number of proposals were made, including IPGRI, UPOV, EUCARPIA and the EC Commission.

Section B. Developments in International Policy and Economy

Question 6: Should the restricted range of crops covered by the Multilateral System of the IT impact on priorities for ECP/GR activities?

11. All respondents said no. The Multilateral System of the IT was a political decision. Many crops not covered by the Multilateral System are of extreme importance to Europe. ECP/GR must cover all material of potential use for food and farming, particularly that at risk of genetic and/or habitat erosion or where knowledge is limited.
12. One suggested that guidelines for genebank managers on the consequences of entry into force of the IT could be developed. Another suggested that ECP/GR should actively promote the expansion of the list of crops under the Multilateral System. It was also suggested that ECP/GR could consider setting up a Multilateral System for all PGRFA open to European and any other countries wishing to join – which could become part of the IT.

Question 7: Are there other international political or economic developments that should be taken into account in ECP/GR priorities and activities?

13. The highest number (7) considered that there were no other international developments which needed addressing, given that the priority for ECP/GR was conservation of PGRFA and that priorities should address the specific needs of crops rather than be subject to short term political interests. However, a number of issues were identified by some as important, particularly IPR regimes, GURTs, and WTO, which restricted

exchange of germplasm. Other developments identified included the CBD, Biodiversity Protocol, EU Habitats Directive, the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, the European Plant Strategy, all developments related to European agriculture, EU enlargement and lack of funding.

Question 8: What role should ECP/GR play in facilitating the establishment, development and monitoring of national programmes?

14. All saw a role for ECP/GR here but there was a range of views as to what that role should be. Most (14) believed that ECP/GR should provide a forum for sharing information, experience and tasks, and other forms of collaboration, e.g.:

- Identification of common ways to meet international obligations;
- Facilitating exchange of material;
- Identification of common solutions to common problems;
- Establishing guidelines on issues that affect trans-boundary transfer of genetic resources;
- Developing relevant educational programmes;
- Common projects relevant to national programmes.

15. Some (4) believed that as a platform for the implementation of the GPA, ECP/GR had an important advisory role to play both in the establishment and implementation of national programmes. Others thought that ECP/GR should focus on the interactions between national programmes and should only become involved in national programmes themselves if specific advice was sought by a member country.

16. Other views included:

- The link between ECP/GR and national programmes was an absolute need, but it was up to national co-ordinators to ensure it happened;
- ECP/GR should raise awareness of the importance of PGRFA given that national programmes would continue to be under-resourced;
- The main objective should be to organise a European system to avoid duplication of effort, maximise efficiency and release resources for activities currently under-funded, e.g. *in vitro* culture or cryopreservation;

- ECP/GR should be recognised as a competent body to provide objective advice on the regional dimensions of biosafety.

Question 9: To what extent should private breeders impact on ECP/GR priorities?

17. A wide range of views. At one end the view was that breeders were the largest user community and should therefore have a major role in the setting of priorities (9). Also, with ever decreasing government funding, financial and technical assistance from the private sector became more important and this meant that the public and private sector should come closer together. At the other end, the view was that the private sector should have no influence at all on priorities and that ECP/GR was a public sector body that should respond to public demands (4). Or that, given that the private sectors interest was in profit and short rather than long term needs, their influence should be small (5).

18. A majority (16), however, felt that breeders had some role to play in the setting of priorities. It is argued that:

- While breeders and gene banks had different objectives and time-scales, collaboration should be encouraged;
- As important stakeholders, breeders were welcome advisors and collaborators, but account had to be taken of the fact that not all member countries had a significant breeding sector;
- Breeders should continue to have observer status on the Steering Committee and, where appropriate, continue to take part in the activities of working groups, including valuable input into projects.

19. Other views expressed included:

- Breeders should have influence over borders – dislocation between collections and relevant breeders can put collections at risk;
- Breeders should only have influence on priorities concerned with evaluation and utilisation, and only to the extent that they provide technical and financial assistance.

Question 10: To what extent should the importance of crops on the market be reflected in ECP/GR priorities and activities?

20. There was a roughly equal split between those that considered that markets should have no or very limited effect on ECP/GR priorities (14) and those that advocated a balanced and flexible approach (11).
21. Those against argued that all PGRFA was important. Markets change due to a variety of factors, including consumer demand, climatic events disease, war etc. The time-scale of conservation activities was much greater than for commercial cultivars. It would therefore be dangerous to link PGR conservation to markets. We should seek to conserve the widest range possible of PGRFA. Priorities should be linked to biological factors such as threatened species and the level of genetic diversity, and should recognise the role of conservation as insurance against future needs and to provide a defence against potential loss of diversity that could result from setting priorities by market forces alone.
22. Those favouring a balanced approach noted that it was much easier to get funding for important crops. Economic factors were therefore important and market trends should be monitored and taken into account. However, it was important to give due weight to minor and under-utilised crops and to long term needs.

Question 11: To what extent should ECP/GR be considering non-food/feed crops?

23. A small majority (14) believed that ECP/GR should take a broad view, subject to priorities and available resources. All PGR was important and secondary and tertiary gene pools would become more important as gene technology developed. There was also an important traditional production of such crops in some countries.
24. A smaller number of respondents (9) argued a case by case consideration. The concept of agriculture was broadening and multifunctionality was important. There was a need to consider the potential usefulness of species: medicinal, aromatic, ornamental, environmental, amenity, landscape, biomass, fibre and other industrial use crops.

25. A minority (5) saw this as a secondary issue for ECP/GR for the medium terms. It was important for ECP/GR not to lose its focus. Priorities had to be set in the light of available resources and as such these crops were no a priority now.

Section c. Setting priorities

Question 12: Do you agree with the approach given in the chapeau to Section C? If not, what is your preferred approach?

26. Over half (16) agreed with the approach, some noting that resources were already spread too thinly. Others (11) were more sceptical, raising a number of points of caution, including:

- Fear of working groups breaking up with essential contact lost between members
- Progress depended more on frequency of working group meetings and the efficiency of chairman and database managers, rather than priorities
- Progress depended on funding. Without guaranteed funding it was unclear what SC priorities might achieve.
- SC priorities must be broad-based, leaving it to WG to decide detail
- WG must be involved in any priority setting exercise

27. One respondent suggested a mixed approach with certain issues identified as on-going (e.g. collecting, conservation, documentation) and others prioritised (e.g. new technologies for conservation, characterisation, evaluation)

28. A small number wanted the *status quo* retained, the SC should steer, it was not a scientific advisory body.

Question 13: How should priorities be set? By Network, Working Group, crop, issue?

29. The majority (17) approved of a bottom up approach with priorities set at the crop, issue or Working Group level. These could then be put through the Network Co-ordinating Groups to the Steering Committee to note or for adoption. Several (6) noted the need for the Steering Committee to set broad priorities within which specific priorities would be set at a

lower level. A smaller number felt that the Network Co-ordinating Groups should have a determinant role. One suggested that consideration should be given to establishing priorities also by production system (e.g. extensive, organic).

Question 14: Should priority setting cover the whole of Phase VII, the first half only or a mixture of the two according to activity?

30. The majority (12) favoured a flexible approach with the decision being left to Working Groups. A significant number (8) preferred priority setting to be linked to the whole Phase but with clear milestones and a mid-term review and possible adjustment. It was noted that 2 years was too short a period for most projects, 3 years often being the optimum for National programmes. One felt the need for a link between WG priorities and National Programmes. Only a small number (3) expressed a preference of priorities to be set for half phases only.

Question 15: A main objective of Phase VI was to expand the number of species dealt with by ECP/GR under a limited number of Networks. Did this function, in particular with regard to the priorities given within Networks to the different Working Groups, crops and issues?

31. A significant number (8) thought the objective had been achieved, the new networks having worked well resulting in useful links and productive proposals. However, a similar number felt that either the objective had only been achieved to a limited extent or that the new networks had reduced resources for existing groups with negative effect and had increased the workload of Network Chairs and Vice Chairs.

32. Other views expressed included:

- Expansion was good provided that it did not jeopardise existing activities
- The life of working groups and networks should be linked to the achievement of objectives.
- Structure was not so important and could be rigid and inflexible, creating problems. More important was the opportunity for personal contact to exchange ideas, stimulate work and increase the recognition of the need for European co-ordination.

33. Question 16: What should be the main priorities for Phase VII?

34. A very wide range of views. Those issues with most support were:

- Documentation. Databases - establishment, completion, improvement, maintenance, control of accuracy, adding characterisation and evaluation data, better and integrated data management, complete infrastructure for automatic up-dating of CCDBs, realise EPGRIS project. (13)
- Development and use of high tech for characterisation, conservation, evaluation and utilisation (molecular markers, genetic biosafety, genetic drift and shift assessment). (10)
- Greater collaboration, rationalisation and specialisation of activities and collections through task sharing, to maximise efficient use of human and financial resources, formation of core collections. (9)

35. Other issues, in rough order of support included:

- Collection and gap filling (4)
- Characterisation, including passport data and morphological information (4)
- Evaluation (4)
- *In situ* and on-farm gap analysis, conservation and management (4)
- Stronger links between national programmes in Europe, integration of countries, particularly Eastern European countries, not yet members of ECP/GR (3)
- Strengthening conservation capacities, particularly for field collections (3)
- Increase awareness of importance of PGR conservation at all levels (3)
- Increase utilisation (3)
- Regeneration and regeneration standards
- Greater co-operation with other stakeholders (NGOs, private sector)
- Complete existing work, then consider appropriate follow-up activities
- Convince governments of value of funding core functions of gene banks
- Focus on WG activity and the role of the individual member of the WG and their contribution to national programmes.
- Maintenance of PGR
- Multiplication
- Assess the needs of gene bank customers
- Continuation of Phase VI, extending activities to all PGRFA

- Collaboration with relevant regional and global initiatives
- Production of biotech products
- How to respond to ‘omics’
- Re-evaluation of ECP/GR structure to incorporate the ecosystem approach

Question 17: Should the Steering Committee set detailed priorities/objectives or should they be of a broad nature, allowing Networks to determine the detail and how broader objectives might be achieved?

36. Almost unanimous agreement (25) that the Steering Committee should concern itself only with the general political lines, setting broad priorities and objectives. However not much agreement on the process. The following ideas were suggested:

- The Steering Committee should approve priorities/objectives proposed by Working Groups
- Networks/Working Groups should be free to determine the detailed priorities and objectives. In this case, one respondent suggested that a log frame analysis would be required.
- Network Co-ordinating Groups should set the priorities in consultation with members.
- The Steering Committee should maintain oversight of activity through reports from Working Groups and Networks provided in a common format.
- The steering Committee should give special attention to funding

Question 18 Linkages between the formal and informal sectors are not as strong as they could be. How could this be improved?

37. Several (8) wanted closer co-operation by inviting the informal sector to meetings of Working Groups and involving them in projects. A smaller number (5) felt that an open attitude should be maintained, inviting the informal sector to participate in activities where appropriate. Others (6) felt that linkages should be developed first at the national level, perhaps between National Co-ordinators and NGO federations. *In situ* and on-farm conservation were areas where it was felt that the informal sector had a role to play.

38. Other comments suggested that the informal sector was not a driving force for PGR work and that care should be taken when opening up Working Group activity to special interest groups. Another thought that involvement would depend on funding.

Section D. Mode of Operation and Communication

Question 19 (a): Is the current *modus operandi* satisfactory?

39. The majority considered that, given available financial resources, the current *modus operandi* was satisfactory. However, a number of interesting and relevant comments were made, including:

- Full Working Group meetings were the most productive format
- The two-tier membership of Working Groups (attending and corresponding members) was creating serious problems. All members must have equal input into decisions to ensure all have ownership otherwise there was the risk of reduced inputs-in-kind. Face to face meetings also promoted bilateral co-operation between institutions.
- Working Groups needed more expertise available at times
- Support for *ad hoc* actions to respond quickly to problems
- One suggested that Networks would be better structured around production systems and ecosystems rather than species

Question 19 (b): How could the current *Modus Operandi* be improved?

40. A wide range of ideas, the most supported ones being:

- Increase funding and inputs-in-kind (4)
- All country representatives should be allowed to participate in Working Group meetings (3)
- Attendance at Working Group meetings should be open to all, but reimbursement of travel costs capped (2)
- Participation in Working Group meetings should be open to corresponding members, but at their own expense (2)

41. Other ideas included:

- Experts (e.g. microbiologists, chemists etc) should be invited to assist at Working Group meetings when needed.
- In special cases (e.g. during a change of personnel) two attending members from a single country should be funded
- Working Groups should meet more frequently to keep up motivation for inputs-in-kind
- The idea of e-meetings should be explored
- More Working Groups should be organised alongside other meetings (e.g. ISHS, EUCARPIA) to improve collaboration
- Better communication channels between Working Groups and National Programmes
- A more rational approach to organising Working Group meetings, clearer objectives and tasks, Working Groups to expire when tasks complete
- Higher focus within Networks on applying for and obtaining funding

Question 20: How could Co-ordination and Communication between Working Groups and within and between Networks be improved?

Would Short Annual Reports by Working Group/Network Chairpersons help?

42. A slight majority (12) thought that reports would help, perhaps in a simple standardised format and distributed via the listserver. Others (9), however, were strongly against. There was already a degree of information overload and Chairpersons could not do more without additional resources. There was a suggestion that the Secretariat might produce an overview from time to time or that Network Co-ordinating Group Chairpersons might produce a short progress report. One suggested the creation of Crop Newsletters.

Would regular meetings of all Chairpersons of Networks and Working Groups help?

43. There was reasonable support (12) for this, provided such meetings were focussed on issues rather than reports from Working Groups. They should be established only when a need was identified. E-discussion was an alternative suggestion. Others (6) considered such meetings would be

too expensive, reducing resources for Working Group activity. There was a suggestion that a regular ECP/GR wide conference (perhaps every 2 years) along the lines operated by EUCARPIA would be better, and could also replace Network meetings.

Other Ideas for Improvement?

44. These included:

- Strengthening the role of the Secretariat so that it was present at all Working Group meetings at which it could report on activities elsewhere (3)
- Information exchange on the ECP/GR website, through a “European PGR portal”, e-discussion, e-bulletins, more workshops (3)
- Address cross-cutting issues through *ad hoc* groups
- Annual Network Co-ordinating Group meetings to assess and monitor progress, with short reports going to other Groups
- Working Groups should meet more often
- Transfer of the Minor Fruits Working Group to the Fruit Network

Question 21(a): Do you prefer a rigid structure of Network Groups formalised by the Steering Committee?

45. A clear majority (21) favoured a flexible approach where either the Network or the Working Groups determined the structure through proposals to the Steering Committee. Within this approach some wanted Working Groups to have the flexibility to implement projects as they saw fit. Some saw a case to end Network Groups, which used up scarce resources better used by Working Groups. Others wanted a goal-orientated approach with groups set up on the basis of proposals for projects put to the Steering Committee. Groups could be shut down when the objectives had been achieved. A small number considered that Network Co-ordinating Groups should be responsible for structure.

46. One considered that structure was not the basic problem, which was the need to involve all members in activities – corresponding members were not sufficiently involved. Reducing meetings by one day might release funds to enable more to participate.

Question 21(b): Do full Network meetings contribute to federate and balance the dynamics, needs and resources of Working Groups?

47. The majority (10) thought not, but if convened, such meetings should be properly focussed, e.g. on longer term strategies. Several thought they utilised resources better given to Working Groups. One suggested that an ECP/GR conference would be more efficient and effective.

Question 22: How could project funding be improved?

48. Many (11) saw the need for the need for more GENRES or other external projects. Other ideas included:

- A modest increase in subscriptions for Phase VII
- Raise public awareness and promote closer links between the public sector, the private sector and NGOs
- Focus available resources on fewer activities
- Greater co-ordination between collections, perhaps leading to a “European Genebank System”
- Greater commitment from policy makers

49. Most (13) thought that it was for governments to decide if projects could be funded directly through ECP/GR, although several did not see this as a realistic possibility. It could also divert resources away from national programmes. A few thought that the Secretariat should seek to promote this.

50. Most (10) were unable to indicate if countries could switch from inputs-in-kind to financial commitments, but several (7) made clear this would not be possible.

51. Most (10) considered that the ability of countries or institutions to make additional inputs-in-kind was also a matter for governments. This might depend on the priorities selected for Phase VII. However, several (6) made clear that institutions were not able to do more. Few felt that task sharing would help.

52. All but one felt that the Secretariat should be more pro-active in identifying new and additional funding resources, subject to the

Secretariat having the resources to do so. One felt that this was a role for national co-ordinators.

53. All felt that ECP/GR should seek more formal relations with potential multilateral funding bodies, such as the EU. It was recalled that ECP/GR was a platform for the implementation of the GPA.

54. A strong majority (17) favoured the development of a more formal arrangement with the private sector. However, the need was underlined to avoid any possible compromise of ECP/GR's independence. A small number (4) opposed formal links for this reason. Some suggested links should also be made with EUCARPIA.

Question 23: Should resources be devoted to providing translation of documents and interpretation during meetings? If so, into which languages?

55. Most (18) felt that English was sufficient. It would be too costly to do more. Most international scientific meetings operated only in English. Informal help might be provided by those able to do so or voluntary contributions could be considered.

56. A small number (3) felt that this issue should be considered on a case-by-case basis. A similar number argued that, despite the cost, a 1 or 2 year transitional arrangement providing Russian translation would help involve East European Countries. Two countries felt that a special case should be made for Russian, which was an official UN language. However, only one East European country saw a need for anything other than English.

Question 24: Should the role of the Secretariat change?

56. Almost all felt that the Secretariat should continue to carry out its existing functions, although one argued that it could reduce its direct participation in Working Group meetings and another said that Networks could be left to organise their own meetings.

57. Beyond a more formal role in identifying possible funding sources, other activities identified for the Secretariat included:

- Help in developing project proposals

- A greater co-ordinating role to link activities to projects (e.g, Framework Programme 6)
- More lobbying to raise awareness of the need for conservation and sustainable use of PGR
- Pro-active support and initiatives for network activities, including for thematic networks