

4. Modus Operandi and governance

Lead questions:

- *is the current network and working group structure optimal and effective?*
- *Are appropriate linkages and partnerships in place?*
- *Is the Steering Committee a 'Steering Committee' and how effective is it in its role? Does it have the proper tools for governance?*

(23) The current network structure and participation mechanism seems to be largely adequate, allowing flexibility to Networks and National Coordinators respectively to establish workplans and determine priorities (e.g. which Working Groups should meet and who should participate). As activities are carried out on a voluntary basis, accountability and commitment remain relatively low, however. In a Programme with this size and limited resources, it may no longer be possible for all the Working Groups and Networks to have "statutory meetings". **Meetings should rather be linked to concrete (thematic or crop related) initiatives or projects.** The Review Panel recognizes the importance of activities of Working Groups and Networks, independently of whether they physically meet.

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(29) The increasing size of the membership of ECPGR and the provision that each participating country is represented in its Steering Committee has made decision making on a consensus basis in this Committee very challenging. With agreement from the Steering Committee, the Secretariat has responded to this challenge by consulting National Coordinators through email and by encouraging the Network Coordinating Committees to take more initiative and responsibility. On an *ad hoc* basis a reduced number of National Coordinators has been convened by the Secretariat as a kind of sounding board. The Review Panel has received feedback from representatives of several countries from across Europe criticizing the functioning of the Steering Committee for its lack of transparency and inclusiveness. This weakness needs to be addressed as a high priority to ensure that all participating countries retain a high level of ownership of the Programme. **The Steering Committee should adopt rules of procedure to make its functioning and decision making more transparent and inclusive.** It should consider extending the length of its meetings to allow for more discussion of proposals, and require the Secretariat to propose options for discussion rather than decisions for endorsement. Although, an increased formalization of Steering Committee proceedings may lead to longer, more difficult and more costly meetings, this is the price to pay for a truly multilateral system/programme. At times, the preparation of option papers by sub-Committees may be useful. In addition, existing regional subgroups (e.g. SeedNet) should be encouraged, if they wish, to pre-discuss the agenda of the Steering Committee and participate in the proceedings in a more active way.

From: ECPGR: Secretariat's overview of its current status, issues and future perspectives. A synthesis document prepared for the Independent External Review, June 2010

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.

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.

Effectiveness of ECPGR's Flexibility, Network Structure, and Steering Committee's Leadership (Question 16)

Results: (310 respondents)

- **Effectiveness Steering Committee in its role of providing leadership and direction**
Very effective: 32%
Somewhat effective: 36%
Not effective: 9%
Don't know: 24%
- **Current network and WG structure**
Very effective: 46%
Somewhat effective: 39%
Not effective: 4%
Don't know: 11%
- **Programme being flexible at re-aligning itself with external changes**
Very effective: 27%
Somewhat effective: 53%
Not effective: 5%
Don't know: 16%

Twenty-five respondents made comments to this question:

- *Sounds to be a high number of networks and working groups.*
- *The output of the working groups are generally too low; the productive ones are not sufficiently supported, the SC is too political and not sufficiently output oriented, many WGs have members that do not speak English - effective groups are not sufficiently supported.*
- *Number of WGs too large in proportion to funding. The SC has acted accordingly, asking Networks to prioritize and this has caused a lot of frustration.*
- *The structure is ok but participation of single members is not ok. Wrong representatives in WG, no mandate to do work for WG.*
- *With the current WG structure the minor crops and minor crop gene pools may not receive enough attention. Steering committee leadership is lacking and is based on the "strong individuals" or countries.*
- *Networks and Secretariat sometimes seem to be more important and effective than SC. On the national level the effectiveness of NC depends basically on his/her position in the country.*
- *There are good examples [programme being flexible] - WIEWS-EURISCO, MLS-AEGIS, CBD-in situ/on-farm Network.*
- *The Steering Committee in practice has little time to discuss issues and a very limited option to actually not adopt items presented.*
- *The Networks & WGs are very effective in terms of output in relation to cost. The SC is dominated by a few country representatives and does not encourage active development of the other partners.*

- *Flexibility sometimes is an issue because of a big overall structure of the network and rapid changes occurring.*
- *Little political awareness; organization too static and dispersed.*
- *Former structure having Crop working groups and Thematic networks was more effective. Crop networks have little if any contribution to increase effectiveness of the programme.*
- *Some important crops not covered by networks or working groups, some central crop databases inactive or not adequately staffed/funded.*
- *Steering Committee should appoint a few members to be contacted by WG/NCG members and to make quicker decisions.*
- *Flexibility is only given in regard to some outer factors (however, the Biodiversity Convention is already a rather "old" change and climate change is a "modern" slogan. The internal development (e.g. development of new conservation technologies) is not considered by flexibility. If the Steering Committee (as it is my impression) is only able to act during its meetings, flexibility is not enough.*
- *The Steering Committee needs to be composed by members that are technically relevant, and that are supported by their national politics in matter of PGR. The communication between SC members and their national representatives in the WGs needs to be improved.*
- *Crop-specific Network structure (with few cross-cutting Networks) should be maintained in order to prevent ECPGR from losing its priorities. New challenges to be incorporated in NW tasks instead of creating more NWs and WGs.*