

# CGIAR

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## **Mid-Term Meeting 1999 May 24 - 28 Beijing, China**

<h3><b>The Third System Review: From Proposals to Practice</b></h3>
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### **Report of the Genetic Resources Policy Committee (GRPC)**

This document is issued as background to Agenda Item 8 – Committee Recommendations and Reports: Report of the GRPC.

# CGIAR Genetic Resources Policy Committee

## 9th Meeting

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai, India

### Meeting Report

**Participants:** M.S. Swaminathan (Chairman), F. Begemann, A. El-Beltagy, R. Bertram, G. Hawtin, N. Olembo, T. Reeves, S. Sastrapradja, H. Shands, U. Barwale Zehr  
**Absent:** B. Bengtsson, J. Benz, M. Zimmermann

#### **Enlarging the Basis of Food Security: the Role of Underutilized Species:**

A consultation was held immediately prior to GRPC-9 to explore the current and potential role of the CGIAR in collaborative research and related activities on underutilized crops. The consultation, held at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai, India, was organized by the GRPC with financial support from IFAD and USAID. It was attended by 53 participants from twelve countries and nine CGIAR Centres. A summary report of the consultation, produced by MSSRF, is provided as an annex to this report and will be made available to participants at the CGIAR Mid-term meeting in Beijing. It is planned to publish the full proceedings soon.

In considering the conclusions and recommendations of the consultation, the GRPC highlighted the following points:

- Many of the CGIAR Centres are already engaged in conducting research, and research-related activities, on a large number of underutilized (also known as ‘minor’, ‘neglected’, ‘promising’) species. This work needs to be better documented and communicated within the system and to partners.
- The Centres have an important role to play both in collaborative research on underutilized crops, and in promoting awareness of the value of these crops for food and nutritional security, to support employment and income generation, and in crop diversification and sustainable farming systems.
- Feedback on the recommendations of the consultation will be solicited from TAC, GFAR and other relevant bodies.
- There is a need for the Centres to develop pilot projects on underutilized crops that cover the full spectrum of activities from conservation, breeding and production to processing, marketing and consumption.
- A significant impediment to greater use of underutilized species is a lack of information about their potential, characteristics, and uses. CGIAR databases, such as the System-wide Information Network on Genetic Resources (SINGER), help to address this problem, as can the databases held by other organizations such as FAO and the International Centre for Underutilized Crops (ICUC).
- There is a particular need to conduct more economic and policy research on the role and potential of underutilized crops in farming and food systems.
- Work on underutilized crops within the CGIAR might benefit from the creation of an inter-Centre “platform” or “forum” to provide a focus and coordination mechanism for activities in this area. IPGRI would be a logical Centre to take on such an initiative.

#### **System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP):**

The GRPC reviewed recent activities and issues relating to the SGRP:

- In response to the recommendations of the EPMR, the SGRP is further focussing its priorities and strategies through developing a logframe for the programme.
- The GRPC strongly endorsed the SGRP's efforts to prepare a proposal for special funding from the CGIAR. The proposal, to be submitted to TAC, has as its objective the upgrading the Centre

genebank facilities and operations. Plans for the upgrade include improving the quality and quantity of data available on SINGER.

- The GRPC endorsed SGRP's plans to provide leadership in developing a shared vision for a global *ex situ* conservation system. Such a vision should help to resolve some key bottlenecks in the re-negotiation of the International Undertaking. It would also help to clarify, and gain acceptance for, the role of the CGIAR Centre genebanks in a global system. The process of developing the shared vision will call for specific studies and wide consultations with all stakeholder groups.
- It was agreed that the IPGRI Board of Trustees is the logical body to maintain technical and management oversight of the SGRP, in line with normal CGIAR governance practice for System-wide programmes. The Inter-Centre Working Group on Genetic Resources (ICWG-GR), the SGRP's steering committee, should maintain close links with the GRPC, but this is probably best done through the Programme Leader of SGRP, an *ex officio* member of the GRPC.

### **CGIAR System Review:**

The Committee's discussion of the follow-up to the CGIAR System review focused on the following points:

- The GRPC was pleased to note that ISNAR is establishing a Central Advisory Service on Intellectual Property (IP) for the CGIAR. One of the Advisory Service's first tasks will be to study the need for setting up a "wholly-owned subsidiary" of the Centres to handle IP for them. It was also noted that the Centres plan to conduct IP audits.
- With respect to the CGIAR's Guiding Principles on IPR, the CDC's Sub-committee on IPR, chaired by the Director General of CIMMYT, is currently working on:
  - revising the language to make the Principles less tentative,
  - developing more precise definitions of the terms "germplasm" and "related information" as contained in the agreements signed with FAO, and
  - defining what constitutes a derivative – i.e. establishing the minimum that must be done to designated germplasm before a recipient is able to claim intellectual property protection.

The conclusions of the CDC Sub-committee will be brought to the attention of the GRPC for its consideration and endorsement. FAO is also being consulted in this process, and the endorsement of the FAO Commission (CGRFA) will eventually be required.

- It was noted that the Consultative Council, which met in Brussels in January, had identified the continuing need for an independent CGIAR body to maintain an overview of genetic resources policy issues and provide advice to the members and Centres. The Council thus recommended the continuation of the GRPC, but requested the DG of IPGRI, in consultation with GRPC members and other stakeholders, to re-examine the Committee's terms of reference and composition. The GRPC discussed new Terms of Reference, as proposed by the DG of IPGRI, and suggested some changes for incorporation in the final version to be submitted to MTM'99.

### **Re-negotiation of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources:**

In preparation for the FAO Commission meeting in April, an Informal Expert Group met in Montreux, Switzerland in January 1999, with the aim of advancing the re-negotiation of the International Undertaking (IU) through informal discussions. A paper was presented by IPGRI entitled "The Potential Contribution of the CGIAR to the Development and Operation of a Multilateral System for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture".

The CGIAR's involvement is increasingly seen as vital to the viability of any future multilateral system developed under the IU. The Expert Group's discussions in Montreux on this topic included:

- the need for mechanisms for formally bringing the in-trust germplasm collections under the IU, for example by the Centres signing a specific annex that would supersede the current agreements with FAO, but that would probably contain similar terms and conditions,
- the possibility of the Centres providing conservation facilities for species included within the scope the new IU but that are not now included within their mandates,
- the role of the CGIAR as a mechanism for providing benefits to countries that contribute genetic resources to the multilateral system. Such benefits might include, for example, the provision of improved germplasm, information, training, research partnerships and the transfer of technology.

The GRPC wishes to point out to CGIAR members the significance of the evolving dialogue around the renegotiation of the IU. The Commission's negotiations, if successful, will result in a legally-binding international instrument that regulates the terms and conditions of access to be applied by all signatory countries to an important sub-set of PGRFA. This sub-set is likely to include most of the crops of concern to the CGIAR. Such an outcome will undoubtedly present some very real opportunities for advancing the CGIAR's mission, both as a result of its status and role being more fully accepted by the international community, and also because it would present the possibility of more stable, longer-term funding for the Centres. However, any outcome that places even part of the work and the germplasm of the CGIAR within a formal global multilateral system, will have important implications for CGIAR governance. It is also likely that new mechanisms will be needed to link the CGIAR more directly and transparently with the inter-governmental body that will oversee the IU – probably the CGRFA itself. The dialogue already underway between the CGIAR and the CGRFA needs to be maintained and even intensified, especially in those areas most affecting the Centres.

The GRPC noted that the current uncertainties surrounding the negotiations are having a negative effect on the work of many Centres. The acquisition and exchange of genetic resources is becoming more difficult. It is critical for the Centres that the negotiations be concluded as soon as possible. The outcome of the April meeting of the FAO Commission, where the negotiations on the IU are set to continue, will be reported to CGIAR at MTM'99 in Beijing.

#### **Situation at the N.I. Vavilov Institute of Plant Industry (VIR), St Petersburg:**

It was reported to the GRPC that the situation at VIR continues to cause concern internationally. A letter has recently been sent by the Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences to the Chairman of the CGIAR seeking the CGIAR's help. Not only is the safety of the VIR seed collections still compromised, but research has almost ceased. There is particular concern about the future of the herbarium

It was noted that in 1997, the CGIAR, through IPGRI, helped set up the VIR International Consultative Group (VIR/ICG). The Group is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and chaired by the Nordic Gene Bank. It has prepared a report, based on a number of missions to VIR, which outlines options for meeting the institute's long-term needs. The report was presented to the Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences in August 1998 and an official response is expected soon. Once this has been received, the detailed planning of further support to the institute can begin. It is intended to again make an appeal to donors to provide support directly, bilaterally or through the Trust Fund set up in the World Bank.

The GRPC recommended that if an appropriate response is received to the VIR/ICG's report, the CGIAR should consider leading, or at least participating in, a high-level mission to Russia with the aim of exploring further ways in which the CGIAR might most effectively contribute to the institute's stabilization.

#### **IPR Awareness:**

IPGRI will liaise with the CGIAR Secretariat concerning the production of a "package" of information on the CGIAR's principles on ethics and equity, in-trust germplasm and intellectual property rights.

It was brought to the attention of the Committee that one of the Centres had not yet endorsed the new system-wide Material Transfer Agreement as agreed at ICW'98. The DG of IPGRI was requested to explore the matter with the Centre concerned to try to help resolve the matter, and to report back to the GRPC accordingly.

#### **Next meeting:**

The time and place of the next meeting will be decided following agreement at MTM'99 on the new Terms of Reference and composition of the Committee.