

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

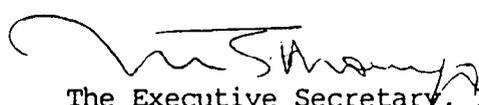
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Via delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy
Cables: FOODAGRI ROME - Telex: 610181 FAO I
Telephone: 57971

PR 3/32

DATE: 13 September 1988

TO: Members of the Technical Advisory Committee
Centre Directors

FROM:  The Executive Secretary, TAC

SUBJECT: Support by the CGIAR for Work on Plant Genetic Resources
- Operational and Technical Issues and their Policy
Implications

As agreed at TAC 46, attached please find for your information and perusal a copy of the above-mentioned issues paper (AGR/TAC:IAR/88/4 Sup.1), which will serve as a background document for discussion at future TAC/Centre Directors joint working group meetings on Plant Genetic Resources.

cc: Centre Board Chairpersons
TAC Chairman
CGIAR Secretariat
TAC Secretariat

AGR/TAC:IAR/88/4 Sup.1

TAC Working Document
(for TAC Members and
Centre Directors only)

CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SUPPORT BY THE CGIAR FOR WORK ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

OPERATIONAL AND TECHNICAL ISSUES AND
THEIR POLICY IMPLICATIONS

TAC SECRETARIAT

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

September 1988

SUPPORT BY THE CGIAR FOR WORK ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

OPERATIONAL AND TECHNICAL ISSUES AND THEIR POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Further Development of Work on Genetic Resources in the CGIAR

Consideration of the further development of work on plant genetic resources in the CGIAR raises a number of operational and technical issues, some of which have policy implications. Many of these issues have already been identified in recent papers presented to TAC and discussed jointly with the Board Chairpersons and Centre Directors. ^{1/}

As a consequence of these discussions, an ad hoc inter-Centre working group has been established which reports to the Centre Directors. The consensus was that this group should concentrate on the technical and operational issues. The more general issues with policy implications should first be discussed by a joint TAC/Centre Directors group and problems resolved by reference to the Centre Directors, the Boards of Trustees or TAC, as appropriate. It is expected that issues of this type will be identified from time to time by the inter-Centre working group and referred, in the first instance, to the Centre Directors. Issues that have already been identified are summarized below, together with the mechanisms suggested by TAC for their resolution.

Issues for Consideration by the Inter-Centre Working Group

There is a continuing need for more effective collaboration among the major institutions involved in work on plant genetic resources. The CGIAR institutions have already done much to foster collaboration on a world scale through cooperative programmes and international networks. TAC sees the creation of an inter-Centre working group as an important means of fostering closer collaboration among the CGIAR institutions as well as between the CGIAR institutions and those outside the System. Of the issues already identified, TAC considers that a number could profitably be discussed by the inter-Centre working group and recommendations made accordingly. The issues listed below are in their approximate order of priority:

-
- ^{1/} - Plant Genetic Resources in the CGIAR (AGR/TAC:IAR/87/7)
 - CGIAR Policy on Plant Genetic Resources (AGR/TAC:IAR/87/16)
 - Centre Directors' "Statement on Common Policies on Plant Genetic Resources Activities in the CGIAR". Document presented at TAC 44, Washington D.C., USA, 19-24 October, 1987.

- (i) The establishment of formal mechanisms within the CGIAR System for assembling information, reviewing responsibilities, improving communication and identifying further issues on all matters relating to the conservation of plant genetic resources.
- (ii) The dissemination of information and the promotion of public awareness on matters related to the conservation of plant genetic resources.
- (iii) The development of inter-Centre mechanisms for joint inter-Centre collaboration in working with national systems in the collection, evaluation and storage of germplasm, as well as in training.
- (iv) The feasibility of establishing computer networks for data gathering and interchange.
- (v) The definition of specific problems in research; review of the capacity of the System to undertake research and how its research capacity might best be exploited.
- (vi) Problems of plant health and quarantine in relation to efficiency in the interchange of germplasm.
- (vii) The importance of wild species and primitive forms (relative to other accessions) in work on genetic resources by the commodity Centres.

Other Issues

Ownership of gene banks. The ownership of gene banks held by the commodity Centres is partly conditioned by their agreements with their host countries. These differ considerably among Centres and are summarized in the attached Appendix.

TAC considers that this issue should be given high priority by Boards of Trustees. Where necessary, Boards should seek to revise their agreements with their host countries to ensure that, in the event of the Centre ceasing to operate, the provisions made for the future of germplasm collections are consistent with CGIAR policy. In general, provision should be made for samples of all accessions to be transferred to an alternative gene bank, if conditions arise that prevent the Centre from continuing its operations. The alternative gene bank should be nominated by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the CGIAR.

Funding of Genetic Resources Units. The priority accorded to the work of the Genetic Resources Units (GRUs) has varied among Centre managements. Consequently, there are considerable differences in the extent to which the commodity Centres have invested in the structure and physical facilities of their gene banks. Some of them, for example, do not yet fully conform to the standards defined by the IBPGR.

There is also considerable variation in the extent to which the Centres have stimulated the exploration and collection necessary to

build up adequately representative collections of material related to their mandated species. In particular, the need for greater attention to wild species has been emphasized in several recent submissions to TAC and the CGIAR. 1/

In view of the high priority accorded to plant genetic resources by the Group, TAC considers that Centre Boards should review the work of their GRUs to ensure that gene banks are maintained to the agreed standards. They should also review the adequacy of current collections of material related to the Centres' mandated species. Deficiencies in these or other aspects of the Centres' work on plant genetic resources should be brought to the attention of TAC with appropriate requests for funding.

The respective roles of the IBPGR, the commodity Centres and the FAO Commission on Plant Genetic Resources. Several issues that have been raised relate essentially to the respective roles of the IBPGR and the commodity Centres and how the total effort of the CGIAR System should relate to the work of the FAO Commission. These issues are complex and are greatly dependent on mutual understanding and goodwill.

For example, although the Centres' GRUs have been concerned only with their mandated crops and related species, they now represent a valuable reservoir of expertise and experience that is more widely relevant to problems of conservation. There are few better places where trainees from developing countries can obtain practical experience and where the senior staff are well-placed to give broad advice and assistance to GRUs in national systems, extending beyond the crop species included in their own formal mandates. Moreover, the Centres may be expected to be in an increasingly stronger position to contribute to research on aspects of genetic resources, not only through their GRUs but also through other relevant programmes, such as those in cytogenetics and plant physiology. There is a need to consider, therefore, how the commodity Centres might become more involved in activities promoted by the IBPGR.

Similar considerations apply to the technical component of activities proposed by the FAO Commission. There is a need to avoid duplication in the overall activities of the CGIAR and the FAO and to seek ways of exploiting the complementary nature of the strengths of the two organizations. For instance, the complementarity of the work of FAO and IBPGR is ensured by the fact that the Director in charge of the FAO Commission also serves as a member of the Board of IBPGR, as well as of its programme committee.

In the first instance, TAC considers that these issues should be discussed and further clarified by the TAC/Centre Directors joint

1/ - J.G. Hawkes (1985). Plant Genetic Resources: The Impact of the International Agricultural Research Centres. CGIAR Study Paper No. 3

- CGIAR Policy on Plant Genetic Resources (AGR/TAC:IAR/87/16)

working group. The aim would be to formulate recommendations for strengthening inter-Centre collaboration and to propose a framework for discussions with representatives of the FAO Commission.

Implications of property rights for the continued exploitation of plant genetic resources. There is a need to monitor changes in legislation that might affect the freedom of action of Centres with respect to the interchange of germplasm and its exploitation in international breeding programmes. In this connection, TAC considers that the joint TAC/Centre Directors group should examine the statement made by TAC on this subject in 1982 to determine whether or not it still adequately reflects the views of the CGIAR.

APPENDIX

AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CGIAR COMMODITY CENTRES AND THEIR HOST COUNTRIES
AFFECTING THE LONG-TERM SECURITY OF THEIR GERmplasm COLLECTIONS

- CIAT A recent agreement (to be ratified) between CIAT and Colombia allows CIAT the right to export seed without restriction. This right is extended for one year after either party notifies the other of its intention to terminate the existence of the Institute.
- CIMMYT The existing CIMMYT agreement states that in case of termination, its assets shall become a part of the National Center for Agricultural Education, Research and Extension Plan Chapingo. A proposed revised set of statutes states "in case of dissolution, the assets of CIMMYT INT situated in the host or other collaborating countries shall be retained by such countries and used for similar purposes or distributed to institutions having purposes similar to those of CIMMYT INT in the respective countries after agreement between the governments of those countries and the Board in consultation with members of the CGIAR."
- CIP CIP is developing an inter-genebank cooperation system to conserve genetic resources of mandated crops. Complete duplicate copies should be deposited in genebanks in two continents.
- ICARDA In the ICARDA agreement there is no specific reference to the genebank. The basic host-country agreement states that, in the event of dissolution, the assets of the Centre shall be retained by the host country.
- ICRISAT The ICRISAT constitution states that, in the event of dissolution, the disposition of all assets, except any land within India and fixed capital improvement thereon, shall be determined by the CGIAR after receiving recommendations from the Governing Board of ICRISAT.
- IITA In the event of its closure, IITA will move its germplasm collections to safe storage at a place determined by the CGIAR, and will leave duplicates of them with Nigerian authorities if asked to do so.
- ILCA All unique genetic resources held by ILCA are duplicated outside Africa, at Kew. ILCA has an agreement with the Ethiopian Government for the unrestricted movement of germplasm, in or out of the country, as required. There is a proposed agreement with the Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Ethiopia) to duplicate all original Ethiopian material in ILCA's long-term store.

IRRI The IRRI agreement states that no part of the assets and property of the Institute shall inure to the benefit of or be distributable to its members and that, if the existence of the Institute is terminated for any reason, all its physical plant, equipment and other assets shall become the property of the University of the Philippines. IRRI will explore the host country's concurrence to send out a duplicate set of the entire rice collection to appropriate sites for storage in the event of dissolution of the Institute.

WARDA If WARDA were to wind up its activities, arrangements would be made by WARDA to relocate its germplasm collection in suitable centres within and outside the region. This agreement has been established with all WARDA member states, including the host country.