

Cover letter

It is with eager anticipation that the Crop Trust and 11 CGIAR Centers of the Genebank Platform share this proposal. It presents the essential activities of the CGIAR genebanks of making available and promoting the use of the crop and tree genetic resources that they conserve on behalf of the global community. Identifying and using such genetic variation contributes fundamentally to enhanced productivity, sustainability and resilience of agri-food-systems worldwide. This work represents an essential global public service that the CGIAR is obligated to perform under international legal agreement. We welcome all participation and collaboration in making this important service even better.

This proposal builds upon the 'Genebank Options Paper', which was approved for support by the CGIAR Fund Council 13. We have responded to reviewers' comments by developing a more outward looking and receptive face to the genebanks, strong functional linkages with the other Platforms and AFS CRPs and a coherent strategy to strengthen the global system as a whole. The proposal template limits the freedom to elaborate what we perceive to be some important details of the Genebank Platform, but we hope that we have succeeded in conveying a strong sense of direction, collaborative action, organization and motivation towards continual, evidence-based improvement in service to users.

To sum up some of the highlights, the Genebank Platform aims to:

- ensure that genebank operations are fully sustained and strengthened within a validated quality management framework;
- ensure that all collections are available, safety duplicated and documented according to performance targets;
- gain efficiencies in operations that result in reduction of costs, using a science based and rationalized approach;
- build a strengthened community and framework for managing and making available accession data based on shared software, improved practices, and a global portal;
- strengthen the capacity and management of germplasm health units;
- provide a global response to the threats affecting *in situ* crop diversity through targeted, multi-crop collecting in partnership with NARS;
- strengthen the global system of institutes and instruments that contribute to the conservation and use of genetic resources globally based on priorities identified in revised 17 crop conservation strategies;
- develop a totally new experience for the genebank user based on modernized and ideally visual, information search tools and much enriched data;
- change the culture between genebank and user so that information flows more easily between them and adds value to the collections;
- ensure compliance across the system with international genetic resources policy;
- take full advantage of the new portfolio structure and other systemwide platforms to deliver sub-IDO 4.4. of increased conservation and use of genetic resources and Target 2.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

This proposal is the result of a group effort; we have made the most of the genomics, policy, phytosanitary, data management and germplasm conservation experts in the group. A key aim of bringing the genebanks under one umbrella is to exploit this wealth of expertise within the genebank community to enable all Centers to rise to the same high and exacting standards, and to strengthen the common goods that exist within the system for the benefit

of the whole. Important steps have already been made in this regard within the Genebank CRP, especially for conservation activities. The reorientated approach to the Platform with its Use and Policy Modules aims to give the genebanks more capacity to achieve change in its interaction with users to ensure stronger collaboration, exchange and use of the diversity in the collections.

The Platform follows the concepts conveyed in the 'Options Paper' with a strict adherence to supporting only essential operations of the genebanks. The revised governance and management structure is intended to ensure that the Platform complements closely the work of the other Platforms and the AFS-CRPs, and avoids unproductive duplication of activities or supporting work that the genebanks are not best placed to do. The genebanks look to and depend on the Excellence in Breeding Platform and AFS CRPs as the main generators of value adding data. However, it is important to remember that many crops or components of major crop gene pools are not the focus of the AFS CRPs. We propose here, as an initiative for 'uplift' funding, to comprehensively genotype all of the collections as a means to take a leap towards a vision of understanding and improving the diversity represented in the collections, bringing in a new level of quality control and management, and facilitating dramatically its use. While some may consider this to be a wild ambition right now, the time is fast approaching when such an initiative would only be what is expected of the CGIAR. Whether this ambition is realized or not, we remain highly reliant on the linkages described in Annex 4 and a healthy collaboration with our sister Platforms and CRPs within a fully-integrated CGIAR portfolio.

As a final note, I wish to recognize the efforts of all of the genebank managers and collaborators who took a role in developing and improving this proposal and particularly to the proposal Writing Team: Dave Ellis (CIP), Ruairaidh Sackville Hamilton (IRRI), Jean Hansen (ILRI), Lava Kumar (IITA), Charlotte Lusty (Crop Trust), Tom Payne (CIMMYT) and Peter Wenzl (Crop Trust/CIAT).

Sincerely,

Marie Haga
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Global Crop Diversity Trust