

CGIAR System-wide Genetic Resources Programme

Some issues for discussion

Background

1. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) calls on international organizations to assist national governments in the implementation of its provisions. The Centres of the CGIAR collectively make up the world's largest international effort to conserve and use agricultural biodiversity. However, the fragmentation of this effort among autonomous Centres, each pursuing its own objectives and strategies within its own policy framework, has, in the past, led to certain inconsistencies and a failure to capitalize on the benefits of operating in a more coherent way. Such benefits include increased programme efficiency and effectiveness, and the ability to attract additional and more secure funding.
2. The need for system-wide approaches to genetic resources has been recognized within the CGIAR for several years:
 - The Inter-Centre Working Group on Plant Genetic Resources (subsequently the Inter-Centre Working Group on Genetic Resources - ICWG-GR) was established in 1987 to promote coordination, information exchange and the development of joint strategies and policies. In 1992 IPGRI agreed to provide secretariat services to the ICWG-GR and the Biodiversity REM was initiated to promote information exchange.
 - In 1991 the Centres agreed to collectively negotiate an agreement to bring the in-trust germplasm collections under the auspices of FAO. It was agreed that a common text would be developed, to be signed by all Centres.
 - In discussions on the follow-up to UNCED, IPGRI was designated by the Centre Directors in 1993, as "lead centre" for biodiversity.
3. TAC, in its paper on 1994-98 resource allocation for the CGIAR recommended the creation of a system-wide programme on the conservation of genetic resources with IPGRI as "convening centre". At the US\$ 270 million vector it was recommended that US\$ 1.0 million be allocated to this programme, rising to US\$ 2.0 million at the US\$ 280 million vector. The system-wide programme was seen as a set of collaborative activities, additional to the on-going programmes of the individual Centres.
4. In late 1993/early 1994 the TAC Stripe Study on Genetic Resources in the CGIAR strongly endorsed the development of a system-wide approach. The Panel recommended the creation of a single institution (combining IPGRI and the centre GRUs). A counter-model proposed by the Centre Directors and endorsed by TAC envisaged the creation of a system-wide programme comprising independently managed GRUs, with a lead centre and the ICWG-

GR as the main advisory body. At the CGIAR Mid-Term Meeting in New-Delhi in May 1994, the following decisions were made:

Quote

- * The "in trust" status of CGIAR collections is reaffirmed, with the understanding that the collections will be placed under the umbrella of an international agreement.
- * The Genetic Resources Units at the centers will be elevated to Program status or equivalent and will take on a wider mandate than the servicing of the Center breeding programs at the centers.
- * Centers will receive separate funding for genetic resources work which will not be fungible across their other activities.
- * The Intercenter Working Group on Genetic Resources (ICWG-GR) will be the CGIAR steering committee to guide policy and management of genetic resources.
- * IPGRI will be the lead center on genetic resources programs and the IPGRI Director General will be director of the system-wide Program on Genetic Resources. IPGRI will provide a small secretariat for the ICWG-GR. Resource allocation will be TAC's responsibility.
- * A standardized information system and database will be developed for the genetic resources of the CGIAR.

Unquote

5. Thus the term "system-wide programme" has been defined in two different ways:
 - a) as a programme of activities additional to the current Centre-based programmes, and
 - b) as a programme combining all existing and new activities on genetic resources within the CGIAR system.
6. While there is a strong need for the CGIAR to move collaboratively in new strategic directions (*e.g.* to expand its research on *in situ*/on farm conservation), a greater degree of integration of current activities would enhance the ability of the system to have an impact that goes beyond that which can be achieved by the Centres acting independently. However, agreement still needs to be reached on the extent and nature of such integration. Some envisage only the enhancement of existing coordination mechanisms within a common policy framework. Others foresee the creation of a system-wide programme having a common goal and strategy, and with responsibility and accountability for the overall performance of the programme being vested in a single institution. There are also many intermediate possibilities with differing implications for the autonomy of participating Centres. It is expected that this will be clarified over

the coming year, but until there is a common understanding of what is meant by a "system-wide programme" the exact roles and responsibilities of the various elements cannot be finalized.

7. IPGRI was requested, at short notice, to prepare a funding request for the system-wide programme. The request proposes to allocate resources:
 - a) to the development of mechanisms to promote coordination and help integrate existing GR activities within a system-wide framework, and
 - b) to the development of new collaborative activities.

The proposal falls far short of being a funding request for a system-wide programme as defined in 5b above, but does provide elements to enable the system to move strongly in this direction. TAC, at its special meeting in Davis, California, 28-31 August, endorsed the proposal as submitted by IPGRI and recommended that it be funded by the CGIAR at the level of \$0.8M for 1994, \$1.74M for 1995, and at \$1.0M annually thereafter until 1998.

The System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP): Elements of a Vision

8. If the System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP) is to become a truly effective component of the emerging global genetic resources system, it is critical that all parties to the Programme share a common vision of the goals they are collectively trying to achieve, and how they intend to work together to achieve them. The following paragraphs (9-14) suggest elements on which to base an objective and mission statement for SGRP. These need to be refined and agreed to by all parties.
9. The SGRP is a multilateral programme and an integral component of the global effort to conserve and use biodiversity. It aims to support national efforts, especially in developing countries, and works with partners at the local, national and international levels. The SGRP encompasses *ex situ* collections of genetic resources of the world's major food and forage crops, maintained in trust by the Centres of the CGIAR for present and future generations. Through research, it also seeks to develop improved technologies, strategies and policies for both the *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of useful and potentially useful plants and animals for agriculture, forestry and fisheries. In addition, the SGRP aims to contribute to the global effort to conserve and use biodiversity through training and the provision of information.
10. The SGRP comprises the individual genetic resources programmes and units of the CGIAR Centres, operating collectively under a common policy framework, endorsed by an inter-governmental body, and contributing to common goals through a shared strategy.
11. Through efficient and effective facilities and management, the genebanks strive to provide optimum security for the germplasm conserved within them.

Samples, free from diseases, pests and other contaminants, are provided upon request for scientific and other purposes to all who seek access to them.

12. The SGRP participates actively in global biodiversity information exchange systems. An information network on the germplasm conserved in the CGIAR Centre genebanks provides the SGRP with the ability to respond to information requests at Centre, crop and CGIAR system levels. This information, together with the results of the research on conservation technologies, strategies and policies are made available without restriction.
13. The SGRP also undertakes collaborative research and training on both *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation aimed at expanding the knowledge base on genetic resources and developing improved conservation systems appropriate to the needs of developing countries. Such activities involve one or more Centres working in partnership with other organizations, at the local, national and international levels.
14. Recognizing that conservation is not an end in itself, the SGRP strives to promote the effective use of genetic resources in developing countries to achieve social, economic and environmental objectives.

Programme Elements of the SGRP

15. The overall scope of the SGRP needs to be very carefully defined and agreed to by all parties. For example: are pre-breeding and/or evaluation activities included or are they more logically part of crop improvement? Is it important that the same boundary definitions are applied by all Centres and for all commodities? How should livestock, aquatic and forest genetic resources be divided between the SGRP and other relevant system-wide programmes on livestock, aquatic resources and forestry?
16. The matrix structure to which the CGIAR is moving will undoubtedly introduce complexities of a whole new order of magnitude. The SGRP cannot become a self-contained "entity" within the CGIAR; there must be mechanisms for linking and coordinating with other system-wide programmes and for linking with institutions and programmes outside the CGIAR.
17. While agreement is still needed as to which of the current CGIAR genetic resources activities will be encompassed within the SGRP, a decision is also needed as to which new programme elements should be undertaken. The funding proposal submitted to TAC (see 7. above) listed a number of possible areas suggested by various Centres, e.g.:
 - safety duplication of all collections
 - regional initiatives on agrobiodiversity/*in situ* conservation
 - collaborative research on economic and policy aspects of genetic resources

- collaborative strategic and applied research on conservation technology and seed physiology
- the establishment of training consortia

It is expected that it will only be possible for the SGRP to allocate "seed money" for many of these activities, with the bulk of the funding coming from complementary sources. It will be necessary to develop transparent and effective mechanisms for setting priorities among the many possible topics.

18. The New Delhi decisions call for the development of a "standardized information system and database". This system is seen as a network, linking the databases of the various Centres with one or more nodes providing international electronic access. Such a network, which is expected to build upon and link the systems currently in place at the Centres, should be operational within the next 18 months to 2 years. All relevant Centres will be fully involved in the network design and implementation. An effective, readily accessible information system should greatly facilitate access to genetic materials by those outside the CGIAR, and should contribute substantially to the transparency of the CGIAR's trusteeship of the genetic resources held in its genebanks.

Structural Elements of the SGRP

19. The SGRP is composed of:

- Genetic resources conservation programmes, units and genebanks managed by the individual Centres
- The ICWG-GR as the steering committee
- A lead centre

In addition, the creation of a policy body and mechanisms for regional consultation need to be considered (see below). Partner organizations (NARS, Intergovernmental Organizations, NGOs, the private sector, etc), TAC, the Co-Sponsors, the Centre Directors, donors and the CGIAR Chairman all have important roles to play in the governance, planning and execution of the SGRP. There currently exists a joint TAC/Centre Directors Committee on GR, the future of which needs to be determined.

20. Operating a programme as complex as the SGRP will inevitably entail very high transaction costs. It is essential that every effort be made to keep coordination mechanisms as simple, efficient and cost-effective as possible.

Centre Programmes, Units and Genebanks

21. The Centre Directors have agreed that their GRUs should have a status that enables them to play a role that goes beyond servicing the needs of Centre breeding programmes. This enhanced status was endorsed by the CGIAR at the Mid-Term meeting in New Delhi. They are, or must become, significant actors within the global biodiversity conservation effort. The way in which this is to be accomplished remains to be resolved in several centres.
22. Almost all Centres, including those which do not have genebanks (*e.g.* CIFOR, ICLARM, ISNAR and IFPRI), are expected to participate in SGRP. In fact, the ICWG-GR already includes participation of all Centres, with the sole exception of IIMI.

Inter-Centre Working Group on Genetic Resources (ICWG-GR)

23. The ICWG-GR is the primary body concerned with setting priorities; coordination; information exchange; and strategy development. In addition, it is expected to play a significant role in policy formulation and advising on resource allocation
24. The ICWG-GR, while comprising membership from all concerned Centres, should not be an "inward-looking" body, but is also expected to play a significant role in linking with partner organizations outside the CGIAR.
25. Who does the ICWG-GR report to? Traditionally it has reported to the Centre Directors Committee, but this needs to be reviewed. Other reporting options include: to the lead centre; TAC; CGIAR; none, some or all of these.
26. The ICWG-GR, as the "Steering Committee" of the SGRP, is seen primarily as an advisory body to the Programme. However, clarification is needed as to those areas in which it might take on a decision-making or executive role.
27. The ICWG-GR is currently reviewing various aspects of its structure and operations, for example:
 - composition: number of participants/Centre; fixed or *ad hoc* membership; status of participants within their Centre.
 - status of observers (non-CGIAR IARCs, IGOs, NGOs, etc.)
 - duration of the Chair
 - need for an executive committee and/or sub-committees
 - frequency and location of meetings
28. The answer to these questions will depend on the agreed role and responsibilities of the ICWG-GR in relation to those of the lead centre. These can only be determined once the overall nature and governance of the SGRP have been agreed.

29. The ICWG-GR currently has a chairperson, elected from among the members for a two-year period. The question has been raised as to whether the director of SGRP, should chair the ICWG-GR. Again this issue can only be resolved once the roles and responsibilities of the ICWG-GR and of the lead centre have been agreed. Unless the ICWG-GR takes on major executive/decision-making functions, it is probably preferable to retain the independence of the chair, or assign this function to the DDG-Programme of the lead centre.

Policy Formulation

30. It has been agreed that genetic resources policies should be approved by an intergovernmental body operating under a system of one-nation-one-vote. However, the definition of "policy" needs to be clarified, and the roles and responsibilities of different actors in policy formulation and approval remain to be determined.
31. While the ICWG-GR is expected to have a significant, and primarily technical, input to policy formulation, it may be desirable to also have a separate mechanism for broader input to policy, e.g through establishing a separate body concerned with policy development, which would include on it a wide range of interests (TAC, donors, CDs, NARS, IGOs, NGOs, private sector, etc.). If it is agreed to establish such a body, a number of questions need to be addressed, e.g. should it be *ad hoc*, constituted to address specific policy issues as and when they arise, or a standing body? What is the role of the lead centre, and in particular its BOT in policy formulation? What should be the role of the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources which has a specified role in policy matters relating to the in trust collections under the terms of the Agreements with FAO? Is the Commission the intergovernmental body that will ultimately be responsible for endorsing policy? What is the role of the CGIAR in policy formulation and approval?
32. The Chairman of the CGIAR has a special role to play in policy development and in negotiations with organizations outside the CGIAR. However, the role of the Chairman vis-a-vis the lead centre, the ICWG-GR and any constituted policy formulation body needs to be clarified.

ICWG-GR Secretariat

33. At MTM'94 it was decided that IPGRI will house a small permanent secretariat for the ICWG-GR. Its functions are foreseen as being to:
- ensure coordination among the various elements of the SGRP
 - manage the Biodiversity REM
 - organize ICWG-GR meetings (logistics, preparation of documents, minutes, etc.)
 - provide a focal point for information both within and outside the CGIAR.

- produce SGRP reports and papers for external fora (e.g. FAO/CPGR, CBD)
 - input to the production of public awareness materials and fundraising.
34. The housing of the ICWG-GR Secretariat in IPGRI raises structural issues. To whom should the Secretariat report? What will be the relationship between the Executive Secretary of the SGRP, the lead centre and the Chair of the ICWG-GR?

Lead Centre

35. As pointed out earlier, the role, responsibilities and accountability of the lead centre need to be clarified and agreed to by all Centres and other components of the CGIAR System. However, it is expected that responsibilities will include leadership in the areas of: representation; liaison with non-CGIAR bodies; identification of policy issues and policy development; public awareness and fundraising; information systems; and development of a global research agenda.
36. Some envisage broader responsibilities, e.g. in ensuring adherence by the Centres to accepted genebank standards, making recommendations on resource allocations, and in financial and technical accountability for the SGRP. However, if any such responsibilities are accepted, it is essential that adequate mechanisms be in place to enable them to be fulfilled.
37. In carrying out its role as lead centre, a balance will have to be maintained between promoting the interests of SGRP and those of the Centre itself. There is significant potential for conflict, especially in areas such as fundraising.
38. What role is envisaged for the BOT of the lead centre in the SGRP? The need to clarify the Board's role in policy development has been mentioned above. Is the lead centre responsible to the BOT in carrying out this role, or is it directly answerable to the CGIAR? It would seem logical for the mandate of the BOT to include oversight of the Institute in its role as lead centre. However, this needs to be clarified and agreed to by all parties concerned.

Regional Consultations

39. The need for regional consultations with NARS, IGOs, NGOs, the private sector and other stakeholders was stressed by the Stripe Study Panel and endorsed by TAC, subject to financial considerations. The issue needs to be given further attention over the coming months. Wide discussions are needed involving all parties in order to arrive at broadly acceptable and cost effective consultation mechanisms. Options include the creation of standing regional advisory bodies (with participants acting either in an individual or representational capacity), *ad hoc* panels, or the use of mechanisms set up

RABs

through FAO/CPGR and/or the CBD. This issue might be best addressed through discussions held in the context of the International Conference and Programme on Plant Genetic Resources.

Animal Genetic Resources

40. ICLARM, ILCA and ILRAD already participate in the ICWG-GR. However, the genetic resources programmes of ICLARM and ILRI are still being developed. The nature and extent to which animal (livestock and aquatic) genetic resources activities are conducted within the framework of the SGRP needs to be determined. If the lead centre is to play a role in representing system-wide interests in animal as well as plant genetic resources, arrangements will be needed to ensure access to relevant expertise. Discussions are underway among the Centres concerned to see how this can best be achieved.

Resource Allocation and Funding

41. Over the coming months the CGIAR will have to develop mechanisms for resource allocation within the context of the proposed matrix. The New Delhi decisions on the SGRP stated that "resource allocation will be TAC's responsibility". However, many issues still need to be addressed. For example: will a single integrated funding request for the SGRP be submitted to TAC, or will each Centre submit independently? If a single request is presented, will this just be a compilation of individual requests, or will the SGRP itself be responsible for recommending funding levels to the various Centres and for ensuring balance among the various components, presumably within an envelope figure set by TAC? What are the respective roles of the ICWG-GR and lead centre in such a process? Should there be an "appeals" mechanism for Centres to raise their concerns if they disagree with the proposed SGRP allocations?
42. Agreement will have to be reached on what constitutes the "core" resources required/available for a system-wide programme. To what extent will Centres individually, or the SGRP collectively, be able to seek additional complementary funding for activities to be conducted within the overall SGRP framework? How can we continue to promote entrepreneurship in fundraising while ensuring SGRP priorities and strategies are respected?

Conclusions

43. Many issues remain to be clarified, and in particular the roles and responsibilities of the various components of the SGRP: the Centre GRUs, the ICWG-GR and the lead centre. However, the creation of SGRP presents some significant and exciting opportunities for advancing the CGIAR's contribution to global efforts to conserve and use biodiversity. The rate at which events have

moved over recent months have not allowed for adequate consultation with the many parties concerned and it is now essential that over the coming weeks and months we seek a wider input from all partners, both within and outside the CGIAR. We must secure the commitment of all to making the SGRP a success.

Geoffrey C. Hawtin
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