

Minutes of the Inter-regional Cooperation Network Coordinating Group, 6 December 2007, Maccarese, Italy

Participants

Eva Thörn, Swedish Biodiversity Centre (CBM), Alnarp, Sweden (Chair)
Tiberio Chiari, Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare (IAO), Firenze, Italy
Lorenzo Maggioni, Bioversity International, Maccarese, Italy

Unable to attend

Ladislav Dotlačil, Crop Research Institute, Prague-Ruzyne, Czech Republic
Vladimir Meglič, Agricultural Institute of Slovenia, Ljubljana, Slovenia
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Introduction

The ECPGR Inter-regional Cooperation Network Coordinating Group (NCG) met on 6 December 2007 in Maccarese, Italy, at Bioversity International headquarters, following a joint ECPGR-Diverseeds-Bioversity Inter-regional Workshop on Crop Genetic Resources Networks held on 3-5 December. The objective of the NCG meeting was to review the outcome of the Workshop on Crop Genetic Resources Networks and its impact on the ECPGR Inter-regional Network, and to start making plans for Phase VIII of ECPGR.

Outcome of the Workshop and impact on the Inter-regional Cooperation Network

It was acknowledged that the Workshop on Crop Genetic Resources Networks held on 3-5 December (see Executive summary) had reconfirmed the importance of the Regional Networks for the establishment of a global system for plant genetic resources conservation, in line with the Global Plan of Action (GPA) and the International Treaty (IT). The presence of a spirit of cooperation across networks was also shown by the Networks' representatives, indicating the opportunity for strengthening reciprocal communication.

Sharing of responsibilities

The meeting showed that there may possibly be a new role for the ECPGR Network in Inter-regional cooperation in the near future. Keeping in mind the priorities established for Phase VIII of ECPGR (Sharing of responsibilities and capacity building; Documentation and information; *In situ* and on-farm conservation; Characterization and evaluation), the ECPGR Network will need to focus its efforts on cooperation onto the same priority areas.

In particular, it seems that "sharing of responsibilities" should receive the highest priority, since this is the opinion of the ECPGR Steering Committee and it also emerged as the most relevant item for cooperation between Europe and Asia during the discussion that took place in the context of the Diverseeds project.

Along these lines, it could be a natural role for the ECPGR Network to try to transfer to other regions similar views to those prevailing in Europe as regards the sharing of tasks, material and information. Facilitating and promoting the ratification and implementation of the IT could

therefore be an area of relevance. We should also take into account that when a larger number of countries implement the IT, this will also have an impact on the European region.

A possible specific action was discussed, when the group considered an offer recently made by Germany, with a proposed contribution of 10 000 euro. These funds would be earmarked to organize an inter-regional meeting between ECPGR and another Network, in order to bring together a few experts from Europe and the respective region, to exchange experiences as to how to make germplasm available to the Multilateral System, according to Art. 11.2 and 11.3 of the Treaty, and to facilitate the use of the Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA) within a country. The meeting would bring together 2-3 experts from Europe (ECPGR), together with selected National Coordinators from the region in question and a representative from the IT-Secretariat.

The NCG welcomed this offer and took note of a perfectly matching need that had been expressed in the preceding meeting by the Network Coordinator of SPGRC, South Africa.¹ The NCG therefore recommended that, upon confirmation of the offer from Germany, the meeting should be planned and organized in collaboration with SPGRC.

Exchange of information

Exchange of information across Networks was highlighted as a constant need, with special reference to ongoing projects and activities within the various Networks. Easy availability of this information was thought to offer plenty of opportunities for synergies and exchange of experiences. In particular, it may be possible to facilitate exchanges of human resources across Networks, to work on projects of common interest. An example is the need of the African Network GRENEWECA² to gain expertise in cryopreservation, while an EU-funded project on *Allium* cryopreservation is currently ongoing. Establishing these types of contacts could be a role for the ECPGR Network.

One constructive step will be for ECPGR to establish a Web portal that can offer information on ongoing activities within the Networks and therefore constitute a platform in which to find partners for cooperation. The NCG thought that such an initiative could be carried out as a result of sharing responsibilities within ECPGR and in collaboration with the Regional offices of Bioversity International. The implementation of this portal service was also seen as an important concrete output of which the Network could feel pride in its ownership.

In situ and on-farm conservation

Another useful area for cooperation, as highlighted during the preceding workshop, was “*in situ* and on-farm conservation and management”, which is an area where Europe could benefit from the experience of other regions. It was noted that “on-farm conservation” would mainly correspond to “participatory plant breeding” in many cases in developing countries and therefore it could be a strategic area to attract donors who would be interested to link conservation and development through use.

It was agreed that this item should be highlighted for further consideration, especially in collaboration with the ECPGR *In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network.

¹ SPGRC: Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Plant Genetic Resources Network

² GRENEWECA: Genetic Resources Network for West and Central Africa

Phase VIII of ECPGR

L. Maggioni reported to the NCG about the recent decisions made by the ECPGR Steering Committee in Riga, Latvia (September 2006). In particular the confirmation of the ECPGR priorities for the future, as well as the introduction of a new system for the project planning and monitoring of the achievements of the Networks were mentioned. The expected budget of the Network for Phase VIII could range from 100% to 125% of the budget received for Phase VII.

The NCG took note of the tasks ahead, in preparation for the Steering Committee meeting planned for September 2008 (preparation of progress reports and project planning for the next Phase).

Workplan

In view of the above considerations, the NCG proposed the following actions:

1. A European institution to provide the Web portal (Web site design and maintenance). Offers can be made by contacting the ECPGR Secretariat or the Network Coordinator, E. Thörn. (*Action: Network Coordinator to circulate the request*).
2. The ECPGR Secretariat will compile, with the help of the Bioversity Regional offices, a list of contacts of the PGR Regional Network Coordinators and will maintain this list on the ECPGR Web site. (*Action: ECPGR Secretariat*).
3. The ECPGR Secretariat will request Network Coordinators who wish to participate in this initiative to provide information on ongoing regional Network activities and specific needs. This information will be sent to the Web portal for uploading. (*Action: ECPGR Secretariat*).
4. A listserver dedicated to PGR Regional Network Coordinators will be set up (a request to offer this listserver as an input-in-kind will be made to the Nordic Gene Bank, which is already hosting three dedicated listservers on behalf of ECPGR). All the PGR Regional Network Coordinators will be welcome to subscribe to the listserver and send or receive information, questions, offers, requests, etc., both to and from other Network Coordinators. (*Action: ECPGR Secretariat*).
5. The GEN RES *Allium* project group will be informed about the need expressed by GRENEWECA to develop cryopreservation expertise in West Africa and the contact points of GRENEWECA and of the *Allium* project will be put in communication. (*Action: ECPGR Secretariat*).
6. The ECPGR National Coordinator for Germany will be informed of the recommendation of the NCG to organize with the German funds a small IT-related workshop in collaboration with SPGRC. (*Action: ECPGR Secretariat*).
7. The Inter-regional Cooperation NCG will prepare the progress report on Phase VII and the project planning for Phase VIII, upon receipt of specific instructions from the ECPGR Secretariat. (*Action: Network Coordinator to mobilize NCG members*).

Conclusion

The NCG proposed that Eva Thörn should continue with her role of Network Coordinator and she agreed, on condition that a decision to relieve her of this responsibility will be taken during the next meeting of the NCG.