

ECP/GR: how to move to a next mode?



Bert Visser and Jan Engels
Bonn, March 29, 2006

Contents

- revisiting ECP/GR's first two decades
- analysis of progress in regional collaboration
- AEGIS: a step towards closer collaboration
- proposal for an additional AEGIS case study
- concluding remarks

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

ECP/GR: its inception

- initiated through EUCARPIA, founded in 1980
- aim
 - to facilitate long-term conservation and promote utilization of PGRFA in Europe on a cooperative basis
- organization
 - broadly focused network groups on crops and general themes
 - coordinating efforts, creating synergies
- funding
 - self-funded by member countries; unique feature!!

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

ECP/GR: major successes

- collaboration between national programmes forged
 - sharing of information among members
 - European core collections for 6 crops (crop groups) established
 - EU funded projects (incl. characterization and evaluation)
 - safety duplication increasingly realized
- developing standards and common formats
 - common minimum descriptor lists adopted
 - European Central Crop Databases: 60
 - EURISCO (resulting from EPGRIS)
- spirit of collaboration
 - meetings instrumental in creating necessary atmosphere

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

ECP/GR: impact

- distribution of knowledge
 - information on “who is doing what in Europe?”
 - procedures for detection of duplicates established
 - agreed standards and procedures used
- basis for possible avoidance of further duplication of tasks and collections
 - implicit and re-active
- a first step towards a more rational regional conservation system
 - no rationalization without information

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

ECP/GR: apparent limitations so far

- sharing knowledge hardly surpassed
 - joint documentation the most far-reaching step towards collaboration
- concrete task sharing
 - very limited, except EU GENRES projects (= small!)
 - little joint regeneration
 - limited joint storage
 - little joint characterization and evaluation
 - limited division of tasks (attribution of crop gene pools for conservation)
- symptom
 - meetings scored as result rather than as instrument to results

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Analyzing progress within ECP/GR

- task sharing is such a rational goal
- why has progress been slow and limited?
- can bottlenecks be removed?
- how to convert reservations into commitments?

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Motives and mechanisms preventing progress

- technical considerations
- political considerations
- implications of close collaboration for users
- implications of close collaboration for national capacity
- current constraints and ways towards progress

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Technical considerations

- divergent or ill-defined quality standards hamper collaboration
 - lack of trust
- general improvement of operational quality needed
 - gradual raising of shared standards
 - explicit quality goals
 - work plans with timelines
- principles and criteria for identifying the most appropriate samples
 - decision tree for identification of MAS
 - development and adoption of the decision-making process

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Political considerations

- PGRFA are a matter of national sovereignty
- participating countries need to agree on access and benefit-sharing provisions for regional collections
- sMTA of the IT may form a model to be used for non-Annex 1 crops
 - IT MLS effectively extended to cover all collections
- in line with former EUR negotiating positions

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Implications for users

- some user groups need facilitated access
 - strong preference for own language
 - short geographical distance an asset of national genebanks
 - knowledge of production systems instrumental
- agreement on brokering role of national genebank
 - between user and foreign genebank on access to germplasm and/or information

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Implications for national capacity (1)

- concern to be “left out”
 - less well-endowed genebanks get further marginalized
 - lack of financial and physical resources is real, hence..

- possible solutions:
 - ALL facilities and expertise are needed
 - identification and use of strengths of all
 - minimum quality standards
 - budgets for upgrading of facilities/expertise necessary

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Implications for national capacity (2)

- some examples of national strengths:
 - a genebank may be strong in one crop but not in another crop
 - a genebank may lack proper storage facilities but may have strong crop expertise and regeneration facilities
 - a genebank may be in a centre of diversity and be well positioned to undertake field acquisition
 - a genebank may have proper facilities but its regeneration might be very expensive
 - a genebank might be climatically unattractive but possesses strong documentation expertise
- think of ECP/GR as a multinational company: carry out tasks where this is most efficient
- focus on your strengths, not on your weaknesses!

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Summary of current constraints

- feeling insecure
 - lack of political support and concern for own role
- atmosphere of indecisiveness
 - who can make which decisions?
- keep talking
 - ECP/GR as a meeting forum
- activities limited to technical aspects
 - growing number of technical working groups
 - little or no involvement of policy-makers in activities

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

ECP/GR: a possible road to progress

- new ways of collaboration
- possible reorganization of structure
- progress towards closer collaboration (a topic during last SC meeting in Izmir, 2003)

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

AEGIS: a novel ECP/GR initiative

- concept note submitted to SC in September 2003
- objectives:
 - to assess options to share responsibilities on an accession basis
 - to assess institutional capacities and bottlenecks
 - to outline (political and other) conditions to be fulfilled
- four model crops identified
- first full-fledged self-funded project
- genuine attempt to break the circle

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

AEGIS: Concept Note and Framework Paper

Some quotes from AEGIS Framework paper:

- “ECP/GR has only partially succeeded in facilitating a real prioritization of conservation activities (identification and safety-duplication of unique material, reduction of unnecessary redundancies, etc.)”
- “A conservation system that is not based on sharing information and germplasm, and that does not take advantage of the opportunity to grow germplasm where it is biologically, environmentally and economically the most adequate location for regeneration, characterization, evaluation and research, fails in cooperating effectively.”
- “Finding the best site for the job should result in a better use of prevailing specializations in terms of crops or conservation functions such as regeneration, documentation, taxonomic research and cryopreservation.”

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

AEGIS: a step in the right direction?

AEGIS Framework Paper proposes to:

- establish formal AEGIS membership of individual countries and thus, agreements on responsibilities
- identify unique and important accessions
 - also topic of the pilot phase
- designate these to AEGIS to form the AEGIS collection (as a European MLS)
 - a virtual collection of widely dispersed accessions collectively forming the integrated genebank system
- a vision at hand, steps taken, BUT.....!!
 - no barriers on the road ahead?

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

AEGIS: proposals for its future (1)

- follow-up technical work
 - finalize strategy towards AEGIS collections for 4 model crops
 - first component of AEGIS addresses *crop level*
- involve policy makers
 - political framework essential
 - mind shift from “national” to “European” collections
 - second component (proposed in Framework Paper): *country level*
- build experience with inter-genebank collaboration
 - standards development and task-sharing
 - complementing third component: *institutional level* (being proposed here)

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

AEGIS: proposals for its future (2)

- next ECP/GR phase: AEGIS project as an important element?
 - based on three inter-dependent components
 - clear work packages, deliveries and timelines needed
 - objective-oriented project planning instrumental
- third institutional component yet to be elaborated
 - additional case study in the new project framework
- to evolve into ECP/GR's centre piece

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Proposed new AEGIS case study: outline (1)

■ rationale

- make better use of existing facilities and expertise
- improve standards where necessary

■ objective

- contribute to the rational regional system

■ expected results

- identified task-sharing process and procedures
- technical collaboration between volunteer genebanks
- agreements on minimum standards
- protocols for collaboration adopted between genebanks

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Proposed new AEGIS case study: outline (2)

■ approach

- explain basic goals and options for institutional collaboration within AEGIS (framework for activities)
- inventory genebank interests for task-sharing in Europe
- which genebank, which activity, both needs and offers
- organize meetings between partners with mutual interests
- partners develop their own workplans and conclude contracts
- agreements and results documented and reported to AEGIS
- successful examples adopted as guidelines for others

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Proposed new AEGIS case study: outline (3)

- bottom-up operationalization of concept
- no re-allocation of germplasm
 - unless at specific request
- only one condition
 - germplasm and associated information that is subject to the collaboration should be available to third parties as if in the MLS of the International Treaty
- no other *a priori* prescribed procedures and conditions
- learning by doing

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Concluding remarks: expected impact of task-sharing

- better use of existing funds
- freed-up money used to improve quality of the work
 - including support for upgrading
- higher work satisfaction for staff involved
- major political signal
 - to our own policy makers at the national level (+ EU)
 - to our own funding sources
 - to other regions

Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands

Concluding remarks: ECP/GR the vanguard?

- ECP/GR into a new mode
- AEGIS as the vehicle
- a more rational regional system
- a justification for sustainable funding



Centre for Genetic Resources, the Netherlands