

ECP/GR TASK FORCE ON PRIORITIES FOR PHASE VII

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This analysis considers the issues under two main headings – **the mode of operation and communication within ECP/GR** and the **setting of priorities**. The analysis is based on the results of a questionnaire sent to National Co-ordinators, Network Co-ordinators, Working Group Chairpersons, Working Group Vice Chairpersons, Database Managers and the Internet Group. A full summary of the results of the questionnaire is at Annex I.
2. A number of recommendations are made. A summary of them is at Annex II.
3. The recommendations include proposals for a procedure for setting priorities and objectives and how their achievement can be monitored. A summary of the proposed procedure is at Annex III.

I. MODE OF OPERATION AND COMMUNICATION

Structure

4. It is clear that most respondents considered Working Groups as the most important element of ECP/GR structure and that available resources should be prioritised for such meetings. However, most also saw the need for a flexible approach with either the Working Groups or the Network Co-ordinating Groups determining structure. Full Network meetings were not widely supported, but if convened the view was that they should concentrated on longer-term strategies.

Recommendation 1

Before the end of each half Phase Network Co-ordinating Groups should, in consultation with Working Groups, determine the division of work between the Working Groups and the Network Co-ordinating Group for the subsequent Phase. The results should be communicated

as a proposal to the mid-term or end of Phase meeting of the Steering Committee.

[Purpose: to provide the Steering Committee with information for budgetary purposes.]

Recommendation 2

Before the end of years 1 and 3 of each Phase, Network Co-ordinating Group should assess and monitor progress of Working Groups against targets and, as appropriate, to provide guidance to them.

[Purpose: to give the Network Co-ordinating Group a role in helping Working Groups to achieve their objectives; and to improve co-operation, communication and exchange of information within a Network.]

Recommendation 3

Meetings of full Network Groups should only take place where a need is identified and should concentrate on crosscutting issues and/or longer-term strategies.

[Purpose: to limit costs and to ensure that available resources are prioritised for Working Group activity.]

Modus operandi

5. Most respondents considered the existing *modus operandi* to work reasonably well, including the 2-tier membership with attending and corresponding members. However, a significant number had some doubts, particularly about the 2-tier membership of Working Groups and the reduced opportunity this provided for corresponding members to contribute to the decision making process. Several expressed the view that without equal ownership of decisions there was a risk of reduced inputs in kind.

Recommendation 4

Taking into account the various suggestions made on how to resolve this problem, the Steering Committee is invited to consider the following options, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

- a) Revision of the existing key for countries to nominate attending and corresponding members.**
- b) Encourage corresponding members to make greater use of the facility to provide reports and written comments for consideration by the Working Group.**
- c) Each country to define its members for each Working Group, with no distinction between attending and corresponding members. On the basis of a quota of participants assigned to each country, a maximum number of ECP/GR-funded participants per country could attend the meetings of each Phase, with the option to send self-funded participants to the remaining meetings. (e.g. out of 30 meetings that might be programmed for a phase, country X/Y/Z would be allowed to send ECP/GR-funded participants to 25/20/15 meetings, with the option to send self-funded participants to the remaining 5/10/15 meetings.**
- d) An increase in Member Country subscriptions sufficient to enable one participant per country to attend each Working Group meeting. To enable proper budgeting, each Member Country should nominate the Working Groups in which they would like to participate.**
- e) If funding is not sufficient to enable full participation in nominated Working Groups (either because of no increase in subscription or an increase is not sufficient), the Steering Committee might like to consider the following options:**
 - A maximum amount of support to be provided for each Working Group, leaving it to the Working Group to decide who should benefit from support and to what extent. This could, for example, be on a rota basis; or**
 - Allow corresponding members to attend at their own expense.**

Co-ordination and communication between Working Groups and within and between Networks

6. Although there seems to be recognition that communications could be improved to beneficial effect, there were significant differences of opinion over how this might be achieved. The main concerns were the cost of the different opinions (taking resources away from Working Group meetings) and lack of resources available to chairs, vice-chairs and database managers to take on extra responsibilities. Bearing in mind these concerns and the options identified in answers to the questionnaire, there could be a case for limited reporting, prior to each meeting of the Steering Committee, which would help communication between Working Groups and help the Steering Committee in its work. In addition, where common problems or concerns were identified by Working Group Chairpersons, *ad hoc* meetings or e-discussion between them to address such issues could be useful.

Recommendation 5

Working Group Chairpersons should be asked to provide a short standardised report, which could be developed from that produced for the purposes of this review, one month prior to meetings of the Steering Committee. Such reports should be made available through the ECP/GR list-server for the benefit of other Working Groups.

[Purpose: to provide useful information to the Steering Committee and to improve communication between Networks and between Working Groups.]

Recommendation 6

Where considered appropriate and acting on proposals from Network Co-ordinating Groups, developed in consultation with Working Groups, the Steering Committee should, subject to availability of resources, convene *ad hoc* meetings of Working Group/Network Chairpersons to consider and advise Working Groups on the handling of common problems.

[Purpose: to consider common problems and, where appropriate, to identify common solutions.]

Recommendation 7

A list server should be created to enable greater co-ordination and communication between Chairpersons of Networks and Working Groups through e-discussion.

[Purpose: to provide a forum of e-discussion on a continuing basis.]

Recommendation 8

Working Group and other reports should be published on the ECP/GR website in order to improve the information flow within and between Working Groups and Networks. This could produce cost savings by reducing the number of printed versions.

[Purpose: to cut costs, releasing resources for other purposes.]

Working language

8. The majority believed that the working language should continue to be English only. The cost of providing translation of documents or interpretation during meetings would be too high.

Project Funding

9. There was overwhelming support for the Secretariat to take on a more pro-active role to identify funding sources, subject to sufficient resources being available.

10. Although most respondents would have liked to see direct funding of projects by Governments or a switch from in-kind to financial commitments, this was not seen as politically feasible and risked diverting resources away from national programmes. Any increased funding would have to come from elsewhere.

11. All considered increased support under the EU GENRES regulation as one option to explore and, in this respect, ECP/GR should seek a more

formal relationship with the EU Commission. [NB Now is a good time to promote such links, given that the GENRES programme is in the process of being revised.] Other potential multilateral sources of funding should also be explored, in particular the opportunities that may arise from the proposed Global Conservation Trust.

12. There was also strong support for the development of a more formal arrangement with the private sector, but with the caution that this should not compromise ECP/GR's independence.

Recommendation 9

With the aim of providing the Secretariat with the resources necessary to become proactive in the identification of new and additional funding sources, the Steering Committee is invited to consider the following options, which are not intended to be mutually exclusive:

- a) **Subscriptions from Member Countries should be increased.**
- b) **All current expenditure of the Secretariat should be examined to identify potential savings.**

Recommendation 10

The Secretariat should seek to establish more formal arrangements, e.g. an MOU, with the EU and the private sector over project funding. Similar arrangements should be sought with other potential multilateral funding bodies, particularly with the proposed Global Conservation Trust.

[Purpose: to improve certainty and stability of funding for projects.]

The role of the Secretariat

13. A large majority considered that the Secretariat should continue in its current role. The only additional role identified widely by respondents was that of a more proactive role in identifying funding sources – see **Recommendation 9**.

Observers on the Steering Committee

14. There were differing views on the need to expand the range of observers to the Steering Committee and a number of suggestions were made. However, given the need to work closely with the EU and the private sector [note in particular **Recommendation 10**], there is a strong argument in favour of inviting the European Commission to become a full member of the Steering Committee and for the private sector to continue to participate as observers. Similarly, many respondents wanted close co-operation with NGOs and their continued presence as an observer to the Steering Committee seems appropriate.
15. There was also support for the private sector and NGOs to attend meetings of Working Groups as observers, although there was concern about the possible negative impact of special interest groups in some cases.
16. A number of respondents saw merit in inviting specific experts (e.g. in genomics, bioinformatics, on farm conservation etc.) to attend meetings of Working Groups when such expertise was not available from within Working Group members.

Recommendation 11

The European Commission should be invited to become a full member of the Steering Committee. ISF, FAO, IPGRI EUROMAB, NGB and NGOs should continue to be invited as observers to meetings of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee may wish to consider extending observer status to other organisations, e.g. EUCARPIA either on a permanent or an *ad hoc* basis, although it is recommended that this be kept to the minimum necessary.

Recommendation 12

Working Groups should consider inviting the private sector, NGOs and specific experts to their meetings in appropriate cases and on an *ad hoc* basis. The private Sector and NGOs should only attend on a self-funded basis.

II. SETTING PRIORITIES

17. A majority of respondents agreed that resources were currently too thinly spread. Several considered that expanding the number of species dealt with under Phase VI had reduced resources for existing groups with negative effect. It was widely agreed, therefore, that some sort of priority setting was needed. It was also recognised that this could mean that not all Working Groups would be active all the time, with Working Groups being set up or closed down according to priority needs. Concern was expressed, however, that the opportunity for personal contact was extremely important and that closed Working Groups could be very counter-productive from this perspective.

18. There was also support for the setting of clear objectives against which output could be measured. Most favoured detailed priorities being set by Working Groups, to be approved by the Steering Committee, within a broad framework of priorities and objectives set by the Steering Committee. Objectives could be set for the first half of a Phase or for the full Phase, as appropriate.

Recommendation 13

At their meetings before the end of the first half Phase (see Recommendation 1) Network Co-ordinating Groups will make proposals for Working Groups to be active in the subsequent Phase. The proposals should prioritise between Working Groups. They should also include a broad indication of the activities to be pursued by the Working Groups, prioritise those activities and identify the funds required. They should be communicated to the Secretariat at least one month prior to the mid-term review meeting of the Steering Committee.

[Purpose: to provide the information necessary for the Steering Committee to take decisions referred to in Recommendation 14.]

Recommendation 14

At its mid-term review meeting, on the basis of the proposals for priorities made by Network Co-ordinating Groups (see Recommendation 13), the Steering Committee should determine which Working Groups will be active in the subsequent Phase. The Steering

Committee should also set broad priorities and objectives, including the funds to be attributed to each Network/Working Group.

Recommendation 15

Prior to the end-of-Phase meeting of the Steering Committee, Working Groups to be active in the next Phase (see Recommendation 14), in consultation with Network Co-ordinating Groups as appropriate, should make proposals for specific priorities and objectives. Such proposals should include clear, measurable targets, dates for completion and an estimate of funding required. The proposals should be sent to the Secretariat and copied to Steering Committee members at the same time as the report referred to in Recommendation 5. The Steering Committee should adopt such proposals, provided they fit the broad priorities previously set by it and can be accommodated with available funds.

[Purpose: to enable the Steering Committee to approve detailed proposals on the activities of Working Groups in the next phase.]

Recommendation 16

The Steering Committee should consider making modest funds available to Working Groups that have no funded prioritised activity during any period, where they make proposals to promote continued contact between Working Group members by means other than through formal meetings.

[Purpose: to promote contact between members of Working Groups when inactive.]

Main Priorities for Phase VII

19.No respondent considered that the restricted range of crops covered by the Multilateral System of the International Treaty on PGRFA should impact on ECP/GR priorities and activities. Most also considered that there were no other international developments which needed addressing. However, some underlined the potential impact of IPRs, GURTs and the WTO on exchange of germplasm. Some also noted that EU legislation (e.g. Habitats Directive) and wider international initiatives (e.g. the CBD,

Biodiversity Protocol and the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation) could impact on ECP/GR activities. [NB A separate Task Force is considering the issue of material transfer agreements in the light of the CBD, the Bonn Guidelines and the International Treaty]

20. There were mixed views on the extent to which breeders or the importance of crops on the market should influence priorities. Given that breeders are one of the main customers of the output of ECP/GR the balance of opinion seems to be that breeders should be consulted on priorities. This would also be important for the realisation of **Recommendation 10** above. In addition, given the relevance of the importance of crops on the market to the availability of funding for projects, this should also be taken into account. However, it was also clear that ECP/GR should take a broader and longer-term view of the importance of conserving all PGRFA. This broader view should also take into account the importance of non-food/feed crops including minor crops of traditional production systems in some countries.
21. In responses, 3 issues stood out as preferred priority actions. These were documentation, development and use of high technology and task sharing. This fitted well with responses to the questions on new developments in science and technology that might be integrated into activities for Phase VII, which focussed on genomics, molecular markers, evaluation and bioinformatics. There was also strong support for further work on characterisation and evaluation, and on *in situ* and on farm conservation and management. Further details of the views of respondents on priorities for Phase VII are given in the Annex I.

Recommendation 17

The restricted range of crops covered by the Multilateral System of the International Treaty should not affect ECP/GR priorities.

Recommendation 18

Although no specific action is currently necessary, ECP/GR National Co-ordinators should monitor developments in the EU and in other international fora that might impact on ECP/GR activities. If, at some future date, developments indicate the need for action within ECP/GR, this should be considered by the Steering Committee.

[Purpose: to ensure the Steering Committee is aware of new developments and their possible impact on ECP/GR activities.]

Recommendation 19

The private sector should be consulted and their views should be taken into account when establishing priorities. Similarly the importance of crops in the market place should also be taken into consideration. However, care must be taken in the weight given to these aspects in finalizing priorities. It is of the utmost importance not to lose sight of the broader and longer-term conservation issues which are a major part of the *raison d'être* of ECP/GR.

[Purpose: to ensure all relevant information is available to the Steering Committee when considering priorities. It would be for the Steering Committee to decide what weight to be given to information from different sources.]

Recommendation 20

Priorities for Phase VII should focus on 4 main issues:

- **Characterisation and evaluation for conservation (e.g. genetic integrity, genetic drift, diversity analysis), and sustainable utilisation of genetic resources (including for traits of agronomic importance) using *inter alia* modern technologies such as molecular markers, genomics and bioinformatics;**
- **Task sharing through collaboration, rationalisation and specialisation of activities and collections (formation of core collections, identification of most original samples) to maximise efficient use of human and financial resources;**
- ***In situ* and on farm conservation, including an analysis of material subject to *in situ* and on farm conservation, and development of conservation and management techniques in relation to the existing opportunities of *ex situ* conservation;**
- **Documentation - establishment, completion, improvement and maintenance of national PGR inventories, central crop databases,**

including validation of data, integration of characterisation and evaluation data, improved and integrated data management, completion of infrastructure for automatic up-dating and completion of the national inventories and the EURISCO catalogue in the EPGRIS project.

Recommendation 21

Although no respondent referred to it, the Steering Committee is recommended to reflect on the network structure, which could be modified to focus on the utilisation aspects of PGR as follows:

- **Cereals Network (no change)**
- **Forages Network (no change)**
- **Fruit Network (no change)**
- **Oil and Protein Crops Network (old Grain Legumes Network + rape + sunflower)**
- **Sugar, Starch and Fibre Crops Network (old Industrial Crops and Potato Network)**
- **Vegetable, Aromatic and Medicinal Crops Network (old Minor Crops Network + old Vegetable Crops Network)**
- **Documentation and Information Network (no change)**
- ***In situ* and On Farm Conservation Network (no change)**
- **Inter-regional Co-operation Network (no change).**

Recommendation 22

In making proposals for activities in Phase VII, Working Groups should restrict themselves to the 4 priority areas identified above. They should summarise progress to date in achieving those objectives and set out the necessary tasks and expected dates for their completion.

[Purpose: to ensure that Working Groups make relevant proposals for activity in Phase VII.]