

European Strategy on the conservation and use of PGRFA

Discussion paper (21.11.2014 DRAFT)

ECPGR Secretariat

Why a European Strategy?

ECPGR agreed for Phase IX on a Long-term Goal (*National, Sub-regional and regional Programmes in Europe collaboratively, rationally and effectively conserve ex situ and in situ PGRFA, provide access and increase utilization*) and six Outcomes or Objectives (i.e. *AEGIS, EURISCO, in situ and on-farm conservation, financial resources, relations with users and sustainability of the Secretariat*) and is in the process of finalizing a logical framework, including Outputs, Activities, Responsibility, Indicators and Assumptions for each of the Objectives.

The agreed Objectives for Phase IX are priorities for this Phase, addressing a limited timeframe period that does not reflect necessarily any long-term thinking and perspective. Therefore, it would be important for ECPGR, as a long-term Programme, to address all relevant aspects related to the conservation and use of PGRFA in Europe in a comprehensive and coherent manner and to frame all relevant aspects into a long(er)-term strategy document. Such a document can serve as a guide to ECPGR membership and its governance bodies in making day-to-day decisions more strategic and future oriented.

The current Phase IX Objectives of ECPGR will only be a partial contribution to the current long-term goal, and the mobilized resources are probably insufficient to even reach the Phase IX Objectives. Therefore, it seems legitimate to try to raise the bar and to define which Strategy in Europe might be more conducive to actually reach the long-term goal.

In order to initiate the development process of such a Strategy, it will be important to obtain Steering Committee support for the development of a Strategy. Furthermore, the current rather abstract and technical long-term goal of ECPGR requires a verification step; namely, the goal has to be checked against the existence of a shared will to treat the European genetic resources as something that needs to be cooperatively safeguarded and used. Once it is verified whether and to what extent this long-term goal is shared by the ECPGR countries, it will then be possible to identify the most suitable organizational, structural, legislative and financial mechanisms that should be set up or modified.

The scope of such a Strategy should ideally include all PGRFA occurring in Europe, either in nature, in farmers' fields or in genetic resources collections/genebanks and should address questions on how to relate to relevant genetic resources world-wide. It covers all forms of regional (and where relevant international) activities related to their conservation and the facilitation of their use, including the interfaces between them and the respective stakeholders involved, as well as important relationships to be strengthened and nurtured (such as with the European Commission and Union, the Global Crop Diversity Trust, and others). Such a document should also provide guidance to the national PGRFA programmes in deciding on how best to organize and implement national and local activities in order to maximize the contributions to regional and, where applicable, to global commitments and instruments.

A Strategy document will build on the past achievements and experiences, and also on earlier recommendations that have been prepared to formulate or support the formulation of a European Strategy. Such recommendations were included in the following documents or made in a particular context:

- In the 'Strategy Paper on the ECPGR Relationship with the European Union/European Commission' of the Task Force on EU matters it is recommended in 2012 that '... this person [i.e. the ECPGR representative] or body should approach the Commission to explore the development of a EU Strategy on GRFA and offer ECPGR assistance in developing it [i.e. the Strategy].
- During the preparation process of the evaluation of the GENRES Programme, at various informal occasions, EC officers expressed interest to understand what would be the (long-term) vision of ECPGR for European PGRFA.
- The recently published discussion paper 'Towards a European Plant Germplasm System The third way' produced by the EU funded PGR Secure project hints to the need for an integrated Plant Germplasm System.

Proposed development process

- Considering the intention of developing a long(er)-term strategy and making it a guiding document for decision-making at the different levels on conservation and facilitation of use, it is proposed to ensure a participatory process in shaping the Strategy document.
- It will be required to prepare a proposal on the development of a European Strategy and to obtain the endorsement from the Steering Committee. This proposal should describe the process and contain a draft table of contents of the new Strategy.
- To ensure efficiency and effectiveness during the drafting period, it is proposed to assign the leadership of the preparation process to the ECPGR Secretariat, working closely with a relatively small group of experts and under the direct supervision and guidance of the ExCo.
- One specific point that will need clarification would be the involvement of the European Commission/Union in the drafting process itself or in a more supervisory capacity? A decision on this point might require a visit to Brussels and either a 'round-table' discussion with the various entities interested/involved or through a formal letter to the Agriculture Directorate.
- As a possible timeframe, it is proposed to aim at a final Strategy document before the end of Phase IX.