

Views and ideas Bert Visser, March 7, 2012

With inputs and comments from Lorenzo and Jan, 11 April 2012

## 1. The type and number of operational groups (i.e. Networks, Working Groups, Network Coordinating Groups, etc.)

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SC Report: Structure

Various options were considered:

(a) keep the Networks, dissolve the Working Groups;

b) keep the Working Groups, dissolve the Networks;

c) maintain only three Networks (ex situ, in situ and information/documentation).

Ad hoc Working Groups/ad hoc Task Forces could be established.

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The following 9 networks (number of working groups in brackets) are currently operational:

1. Cereals Network (3)
2. Forages Network (-)
3. Fruit Network (3)
4. Oil and Protein Crops Network (1)
5. Sugar, Starch and Fibre Crops Network (4)
6. Vegetables Network (6)
7. Documentation and Information Network (-)
8. In situ and On-farm Conservation Network (2)
9. Inter-regional Cooperation Network (-)

Questions Bert:

- How many countries actively engage in each of these groups?

How to define active engagement?

What are reasons for non-active engagement? (e.g. language; culture; experience with international meetings; seniority in technical area; insensitive chairmanship of meetings for active participation; ?)

- Participants in meetings: see separate table already provided by Lidwina
- Involvement in network coordinating groups: 21 countries: Germany (10), UK (6), Czech Republic, Italy and Netherlands (5), Spain (4), France (3), Finland, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey (2), Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia.
- Nomination of WG members: All countries
- Which percentage of the budget is allocated for meetings of the Networks and Working Groups?

### Phase VIII

- Coordination, including administrative support 28.33%
- Staff travel 1.27%
- Steering Committee meetings 3.62%
- Network operations (meetings, actions), including scientific support 34.78% (26.55% EXCLUDING SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT) (20% ONLY FOR MEETINGS)
- EURISCO (contribution) 1.63%
- AEGIS project (coordination and activities) 16.68%
- Newsletter for Europe (contribution) 0.59%
- Bioversity 13.09% (i.e. overhead charges)
- 100.00%

- Can we explain the differences in the number of WGs per Network? Do we think these are relevant?

The differences were not defined by design, except the initial 6, that were selected at the origin of ECPGR. Then the growth in number mainly reflects the spontaneous requests to create WGs, as expressed by existing or emerging groups of interest and subsequently agreed upon by the SC.

It should be noted that regularly remarks are made that no WG exists for important crops like maize, rye, rice, .... Currently, there are no clear arrangements in place on how to deal with these 'gaps'.

Regarding the relevance of different coverages of crops or groups of crops by WGs it can be noted that there is certainly an 'unequal treatment' of crops without a WG compared with those that have a WG, especially in cases where the WGs play an important role in coordinating technical matters (as in the case of AEGIS).

- Can SC dissolve the WGs and allow for crop-specific sessions in the Network meetings (from 9 Netw.+ 19 WGs to 9 Netw.)? What are advantages and disadvantages? Can we limit participation of each country to only 1 – 3 working groups?

We don't think that we should limit or restrict participation of countries in WGs, since "national representation" is an important factor if we want that each country contributes to the European Collection with its own material.

In case we accept this aspect of 'national sovereignty' it might be more important to ensure that participants from a given country in WG meetings actually see their role also as representing the country. This would require a true commitment of the country to support national coordination and thus strengthen national representation.

A conscious decision was made when creating AEGIS to base the involvement of countries on a formal basis through the signatures of the MOU and the AMAs. In order to allow this formal commitment to be 'implementable' it will be critically important to facilitate active participation and engagement of ALL members in meetings. Taking this logic yet another step forward one could argue that the technical knowledge for a given crop is actually being bundled, harmonized and coordinated by the respective WGs and that this expertise has been incorporated in the foundation of AEGIS establishment and operation.

Reduction of the number of WGs can make ECPGR less heavy and less dispersed. However, if we accept the need for "national representation", the Network representatives will have a heavier task, having to deal with several crops. This could easily lead to a shortage of expertise at the regional level on a given topic at meetings and certainly would weaken the aforementioned harmonization and coordination of technical aspects both at the regional as well as national level.

If the WGs are eliminated and only Networks remain, one option could be to invite at the meetings a combination of "national representatives" (one per each country, to be selected by the NC and funded on a country quota, and "ad hoc experts", when needed to complement any missing expertise and to be selected by the Chair and funded with a "Network quota".

- Can SC opt for three Networks only that undertake Ad hoc meetings and use Task forces?  
It will very much depend on what we actually want to achieve through ECPGR. Therefore, a detailed discussion on the goal and objectives that have been agreed upon by the SC in Bratislava and the way they can/should be implemented and what is needed in terms of functions/structures/mechanisms/instruments in order to achieve the goal/objectives. In addition, it is important to identify the prerequisites at the national and regional level that have to be fulfilled to allow the agreed structure etc. to become functional.  
Keep in mind the need for “national representation” for AEGIS implementation and for national inventory development (i.e. EURISCO).
- What are the advantages and disadvantages? (Rationale: no meeting because the Network/WG exists, only meetings when members take initiatives. EUFORGEN [3 working groups only] and ERFPA [2 working groups, 3 task forces] have adopted this model.) Can we limit participation of each country to only one Network?

See above and no clear rationale of limiting participation of each country to only one network, if national representation is necessary. I don't think that it has ever been the case of organizing meetings because the networks/WG exist. The objectives, as mandated by the SC, have always come first and the meetings have been the implementation mechanism of choice. Whenever achievements have been limited, the reason is more to be found in the insufficient time available to the delegates at home, while meetings have been the most productive and catalytic milestones of each WG.

In case we want to use EUFORGEN and AnGR as possible ‘models’ for ECPGR it is important to realize that there are many fundamental differences between the two of them and ECPGR. Both, FGR and AnGR are much ‘smaller’ with respect to the genetic diversity, in fact FGR is usually treated as ‘one pool’ of species that can be conserved more or less in the same manner. In the case of AnGR the diversity out in nature and on farms is very limited and much less complex compared to PGRFA. Therefore, the importance of ex situ conservation is of relative limited importance. Also, both areas are relatively new compared to PGRFA, certainly policy wise and/or politically.

- Do we need proportionality (participation in networks/WGs based on contribution/size)?  
Not in principle, but de facto it is a fair mechanism when the number of slots for participation is limited by available funds. However, it should be mentioned that there is a strong negative correlation in Europe between the economic importance/strength as well as the development status of their PGRFA conservation infrastructure of a country and the amount of ‘original’ genetic diversity they harbour.
- How to avoid meetings where many are observers rather than participants?  
Although it should be the national coordinators’ responsibility to nominate responsible, dedicated and empowered delegates, this has not always been the case. Roles and tasks should be made clearer to the delegates – a certain degree of difference between more proactive delegates and listeners is part of nature and is not necessarily a problem.

In general, it seems to be fair to state that the strength/weakness of the coordination of PGRFA at the national level has a huge impact at the degree of representation of a given country at WG meetings. It looks like that in many cases participants do not come to meetings to represent their country but that they see participation as their own personal interest. Furthermore, the cultural background of individual participants, the weakness of command of the English language, lack of experience with ‘international meetings’ and possibly other factors contribute to this.

It has also been observed that some Chairs of WG meetings have not made a strong effort to invite participants to actively engage.

Possibly triggered by one or more of the factors above, the topics on the agenda are not always of 'common interest' to all participants, are the issues and topics that matter to the most active ones, etc.

- How to guarantee geographic/political representation?

The example of the ExCo is a good one.

Regarding the political representation it would greatly help if the individuals that participate in meetings clearly represent the interest of their respective country in order to get 'the most out of it'. This representational role would be strengthened by obtaining a better (and possibly more formal) recognition of the time and energy that individuals put into ECPGR and the participation in meetings in the institutional/national context. This could be achieved by getting the time that individuals spend on ECPGR matters accepted as part of the 'job' rather than to see this as an activity that is regarded as 'an extra'.

## **2. The type and number of managing bodies (i.e. Secretariat, Executive Secretary, Executive Committee, and Steering Committee)**

I believe we need all these bodies and the ExCo is a clear improvement. Note that the Executive Secretary is not yet in place. It is hard to economize on these bodies. One can only economize on their operations (relation to hosting arrangement!).

Questions Bert:

- Can we stop subsidizing all participants of all meetings? If not, is this another reason to economize on number of participants?

All participants should have equal opportunity to participate when they have a national representative role. Self-funding could however be encouraged. At the start of a Phase, each country might ideally pledge, beyond its regular annual contribution, also the self-funded participation in the SC meetings. It could be argued that the degree of self-funding will increase if 'countries' see concrete benefits flowing from participation. This in turn will depend on the effectiveness of the participation and of the representation, i.e. how much of the national agenda a participant is able to 'move to the regional agenda'. This would require that we achieve a much higher level of task and responsibility sharing as that we have been able to achieve until today.

Delegation of sub-regional responsibility could also be introduced (the ExCo is already a nice example of this type). More sub-regional consultation should take place in such case.

- Can we compose the SC on an elected, rotational basis, thereby reducing the number of participants at any moment in time?

As has already been stated before, this aspect is closely related with the role and responsibilities the National Coordinators play in their respective country and by NOT participating on a regular basis the existing weakness could further increase! I fear that the above weaknesses of being participant or observer in meetings applies also to the NCs!

It could work if there were more frequent occasions of meetings, but in the present context (one meeting every 2-3 years) a rotation would mean that many countries would completely lose the ground of what ECPGR is about as well as easily disappear from the scene.

- Can we combine meetings with other meetings (FAO Commission, Treaty), to economize on travel spending?

Any suitable occasion should be considered. However, usually the request is the opposite, i.e. to organize SC meeting away from these other commitments, since people need to focus on each meeting without too much overload of items – the extended length of the travel to Rome would also become excessive – and Rome would become the preferential destination for the SC meetings, while countries take pride in organizing meetings and inviting their peers to see their respective locations (it is part of the diversity).

### 3. The funding mechanism for operations of these groups

My controversial opinion: ECPGR' structure is a carousel: moving from the one planned meeting to the other. Meetings are not organized because its members initiate these on specific topics and with prepared documents, but because they are planned by the SC every five years.

My counter-argument: ECPGR' structure may seem to be a carousel, but it has its good reasons to be. As above said, the objectives have always come before the meetings and the meetings have consciously been selected as the most suitable way to carry these out. In other words, meetings respond to the philosophy and the belief that only through participated and wide regional collaboration it is possible to make sure that all the national collections and data remain available and collectively improve their status of conservation and use. The alternative is to delegate the task to one or few countries. This alternative would likely be much more efficient and cheap. ECPGR could probably be dissolved in that case and you then need a completely different animal.

The best answer will come from a clearer understanding and agreement on what we exactly want to achieve through ECPGR. We possibly have yet to move to more formality (as in EU funded projects) and that we have a system in place that would allow to 'punish' non-performance of agreed commitments!?

Questions Bert:

Can we have only meetings based on concrete proposals including budgets?

Yes we can and we have already gone that way to a large extent in Phase VIII. This does not eliminate the need to have national representation, owing to the nature of AEGIS, for example, where you need to reach consensus on the European Collection accessions and on the quality standards.

Can we have ExCo to decide whether to subsidize meetings or not?

Yes we can (but it will have to be on transparent and convincing grounds and using the total budget pledged by all countries possibly instead of a quota system. The latter might have to be based on contributions to the European cause rather than on the amount that a country contributes). This can probably eliminate the feeling that meetings are organized just for the sake of meetings.

Can it be based on yearly rounds (call for proposals or agenda items) and subsequent prioritization by ExCo or SC? (Less needed if only three networks remain).

Yes, it can, but this will not reduce the request for representative meetings as long as there is a need to reach consensus on the above mentioned items.

In fact, the agenda setting aspect is important (as mentioned above), as it tends to be driven by those that are most active and that leads to domination...

#### 4. The mechanism for nomination of experts/members in these groups

Questions Bert:

Should participants be experts or country representatives?

In some cases the country representatives are necessary. In other cases maybe not. There could be a combination of both. If countries would have a more vested interest in ECPGR this question will be logically addressed at the national level.

Should they be elected by their countries or be proposed by ExCO, taking into account sub-regional representation, or a combination thereof?

Don't think that ExCo can have any role or competence in selecting WG members. Some role for selecting ad hoc experts could be given to the Chair.

As stated above, countries with a strong interest in ECPGR and in (the relevant) WG meetings will make sure that they are well represented in order to get the most out of a meeting. Therefore, I think that this question (as the previous one) are part of the question in how far we want/have to build on national strength and thus on national sovereignty.

#### 5. Other details of the groups' operations.

Questions Bert:

Can crops specialists not be self-organizing?

Yes they can, but my impression is that they benefit from coordination and facilitation support from the Secretariat, especially as long as there are some rules of the system to be followed.

Why do they need ECPGR to collaborate?

They need ECPGR because the framework enables a fair mechanism for collaboration, as well as allows raising funds for joint action. Bilateral arrangements can easily be established among two parties. As soon as the number of partners increases, you need an honest (independent) broker to coordinate what is going on.

Furthermore, this and also the previous question can better or more meaningfully be answered if it is clear what exactly we want to achieve through ECPGR. If we would focus this discussion on AEGIS we have a common agenda of which coordination, harmonization of approaches and complementing each other's strength and weaknesses are key issues that need catalytic and coordination efforts to get done.

What is the impact of EURISCO and AEGIS on options for operational structure?

It is huge, since the need for national representation and consensus building comes in. Both initiatives would not be possible without ECPGR.

What is the impact of another operational structure on EURISCO and AEGIS?

We should find an operational structure that is conducive to implement EURISCO and AEGIS. Elements that are key to the operation of AEGIS are the formal agreements between countries and the clear role of WGs in the establishment and operation.



Network/Working Group	nr of participants	nr of country quota used	chair's quota used	Host	ECPGR secretariat	nr of self-funded	Local participants (self-funded)	nr attending with other funds	Other funds - note
<b>Vegetables Network</b>									
VegNet meeting 2009 Italy	63	46	6	1	2	5	3	0	
<b>Allium Working Group</b>									
Euralliveg (3 pax) 2011	3	n.a.*	0	0	0	0	0	3	Network funds
Meeting 2010 Greece	22	11	1	1	1	2	6	0	
<b>Brassica Working Group</b>									
Meeting 2010 Italy	20	13	0	1	1	2	2	1	IER funds
<b>Cucurbits Working Group</b>									
Meeting 2010 Georgia	14	9	1	1	1	1	1	0	
<b>Leafy Vegetables Working Group</b>									
Meeting was cancelled	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Solanaceae Working Group</b>									
Meeting 2012 Turkey	23	13	1	1	1	3	3	1	DB manager
<b>Umbellifer Crops Working Group</b>									
Meeting 2011 Germany	15	2	0	1	1	1	3	7	Aegis project
Meeting 2013 (forecast)	7	5	?	1	1	?	?	?	
<b>Documentation and Information Network</b>									
EURISCO meeting 2009 Czech Republic	9	n.a.*	0	1	0	0	0	8	Network funds
NCG meeting 2010 Italy	10	n.a.*	0	0	1	5	0	4	Network funds
PGR Secure meeting 2011 Lithuania	25	n.a.*	0	0	1	0	0	24	Network & Phase VII funds
<b>In-situ and On-farm Conservation Network</b>									
Wokshop with AEGRO meeting 2010 Portugal	54	37	0	0	3	12	0	2	Network funds
<b>Inter-regional Cooperation Network</b>									
Inter-regional Workshop 2009 (Uganda)	12	n.a.*	0	1	1	0	0	10	Phase VII funds
inter-regional workshop 2011 (Turkey)	29	n.a.*	0	1	2	8	4	14	Phase VII funds

**Totals** 567 308 14 22 28 64 41 90

\*not subject to country quota



### Countries and Country Quota during Phase VIII (30 March 2012)

Country	Quota Phase VIII	Quota used	remaining Quota
Albania	7	7	0
Armenia	7	6	1
Austria	11	11	0
Azerbaijan	7	7	0
Belarus	7	6	1
Belgium	11	6	5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7	7	0
Bulgaria	7	6	1
Croatia	8	3	5
Cyprus	8	7	1
Czech Republic	9	9	0
Denmark	11	7	4
Estonia	7	7	0
Finland	9	8	1
France	13	3	10
FYR Macedonia	7	7	0
Georgia	7	6	1
Germany	13	13	0
Greece	9	9	0
Hungary	9	9	0
Iceland	8	4	4
Ireland	9	7	2
Israel	9	5	4
Italy	13	12	1
Latvia	7	7	0
Lithuania	8	4	4
Malta	7	0	7
Montenegro	7	6	1
Netherlands	11	10	1
Norway	11	10	1
Poland	9	7	2
Portugal	9	8	1
Romania	8	7	1
Russian Federation	11	10	1
Serbia	7	4	3
Slovakia	8	7	1
Slovenia	8	8	0
Spain	11	9	2
Sweden	11	10	1
Switzerland	11	7	4
Turkey	9	6	3
Ukraine	8	3	5
United Kingdom	13	13	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>79</b>