

Terms of Reference for the operational bodies of the European Cooperative Programme for Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR)

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Introduction

ECPGR is a collaborative Programme among European countries, aimed at ensuring the long-term conservation on a cooperative basis, and facilitating the increased utilization, of crop genetic resources in Europe. The Programme, which is financed by the participating countries and is coordinated by a Secretariat at Bioversity International, operates through broadly focused Networks dealing with groups of crops or with general themes related to plant genetic resources. ECPGR is guided by a Steering Committee, consisting of the National Coordinators.

These Terms of Reference for the various operational bodies of ECPGR were compiled upon request of the ECPGR Steering Committee during its 9th Meeting held in Izmir, Turkey in October 2003 and have been updated to reflect developments since then. The present document (version 3 and dated October 2008) is based on the practice and decisions accumulated over the years for the operation of the ECPGR Programme (the Programme) and it was approved for the first time by the Steering Committee in April 2004. Since ECPGR is a flexible programme, this text may need revision by the Steering Committee and it is therefore considered as a permanent Working Document.

National Coordinators

The Member Countries of ECPGR are represented in the ECPGR Steering Committee by “National Coordinators” who represent their respective countries within ECPGR on behalf of the respective Ministries. They are responsible for coordination of all ECPGR-related activities within the Member Countries, between the respective country and the ECPGR Secretariat, presently hosted by Bioversity International, and between Member Countries.

The National Coordinators are responsible for nominating members to represent their country's interests in the various Working Groups and in other ECPGR groups and task forces. They nominate the National Inventory Focal Person¹. They are expected to maintain close contact with their country's Working Group members to monitor progress and identify potential problems with ongoing work.

It is the responsibility of the National Coordinators to obtain necessary governmental commitment to the Programme in general and, more particularly, to take steps to obtain the support required by the national institutes to allow them to contribute to the implementation of the Programme through active participation and through contributions in kind (maintenance of databases, maintenance of collections, collecting, etc.). These activities are the basis of the success of the Programme.

The National Coordinators may also delegate part of their tasks to subsidiary bodies which provide technical support, so-called “technical National Coordinators” or “technical National Focal Persons”, as appropriate and in consultation with the appropriate ECPGR body.

¹ *National Inventory Focal Persons hold responsibility for the creation and/or the development and/or the coordination at national level of PGR inventories. They are expected to ensure the appropriate flow of data to the European catalogue, EURISCO. Their role is essentially technical, but they are also expected to give clearance for the on-line publication of country passport data. The possibility that the National Inventory Focal Person coincides with the FAO WIEWS focal point should be taken into consideration as a possible way to enhance complementarity with the FAO World Information and Early Warning System on PGR (see <http://apps3.fao.org/wiews>).*

Steering Committee

The **Steering Committee (SC)**, consisting of the National Coordinators, is responsible for guiding the ECPGR Programme. The European Commission is invited to nominate a representative as a full member of this Committee. Bioversity International, the European Seed Association (ESA), EUCARPIA, FAO, the Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen), the South East European Development Network on Plant Genetic Resources (SEEDNet) and an NGO representative are invited as observers.

The SC holds the overall responsibility for the Programme; it approves its budget² and provides overall technical and policy guidance to the operations of the Programme. The SC reviews the progress made by the Working Groups and other groups within the Networks or other ad hoc actions, and takes decisions regarding their general scope and the establishment or termination of Working Groups (WGs). It approves and provides guidelines for ad hoc activities. It mandates and oversees the Secretariat to carry out its decisions.

The SC meets twice during a five-year Phase (during years 2 or 3 and 5). Between meetings, the SC makes use of a dedicated listserver to communicate and take management decisions. All decisions are taken unanimously.

During the *Mid-term Steering Committee meeting (year 2 or 3)*, the SC will:

1. Review the progress made in pursuance of the programme of work, in particular by the Networks, during the first part of the Phase and provide guidance for the remainder of the Phase;
2. Evaluate proposals from Network Coordinating Groups (NCGs), related to the subsequent Phase;
3. Determine which WGs will be prioritized for funding in the subsequent Phase, considering priorities established by NCGs and such issues as the SC deems appropriate;
4. Establish broad priorities and objectives and the funds to be allocated to each Network/WG in the subsequent Phase;
5. Approve a budget proposal for the subsequent Phase.

During the *End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting (year 5)*, the SC will:

1. Review the activities during the current Phase and progress made so far;
2. Assess opportunities for future activities, considering inter alia proposals from NCGs;
3. Adopt a programme of work for the subsequent Phase. The SC can accept proposals from the NCGs or request modifications;
4. Approve the final budget for the subsequent Phase.

ECPGR Secretariat

The ECPGR **Secretariat** is currently provided by Bioversity International as appointed by the Steering Committee.

The responsibilities of the Coordinating Secretariat are:

1. To ensure the implementation of the Programme in accordance with the mandate given by the SC;
2. To coordinate the activities carried out in the framework of the Programme;
3. To be responsible for the financial management of the Programme;
4. To provide progress reports on a regular basis;
5. To provide technical and financial reports to the SC for approval;
6. To provide support to WGs and ensure that the agreed workplans are carried out;
7. To provide support to NCGs and, where necessary, to assist in preparing evaluation on Network activities and the formulation of workplans and priorities;
8. To initiate ad hoc activities in accordance with guidance provided by the SC;
9. To gather and distribute information;

² *Formal decision concerning payment of member annual contributions is taken by the competent authorities within each country.*

10. To assist in the formulation of project proposals for joint activities and to implement projects, as agreed by the SC;
11. To search for donors to support particular elements of workplans and ad hoc activities;
12. To provide a link with other regions;
13. To contribute to raising public awareness about the Programme and its activities;
14. To undertake any further activity as agreed mutually with the SC.

At the outset of a new Phase, the Coordinating Secretariat will:

1. Provide the SC with a calendar of the meetings foreseen for the entire Phase, in order to allow the member countries to plan their participation in WG meetings.

Before the Mid-term Steering Committee meeting (one month prior to the meeting), the Coordinating Secretariat will:

1. Provide the SC with a compilation of the NCG reports on progress made by each Network during the first half Phase;
2. Provide the SC with a compilation of all the proposals received from the NCGs related to the subsequent Phase;
3. Prepare a document for the SC containing information on new policy developments in international fora, mainly compiled on the basis of information and opinions collected from National Coordinators and observers in the SC. The background document will include all relevant information on developments in the EU and in international fora that might impact on ECPGR activities, including the views of involved sectors regarding priorities for the future;
4. Provide information on the current status of the ECPGR finances.

Before the End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting (one month prior to the meeting), the Coordinating Secretariat will:

1. Provide the SC with a compilation of the NCG reports on progress made by each Network in the current Phase;
2. Provide the SC with a compilation of all the revised and detailed proposals received from the NCGs related to the subsequent Phase;
3. Update the document containing information on new policy developments and make it available to the SC in a revised form, with the purpose of verifying the choice of priorities made in the previous Mid-term meeting;
4. Provide information on the ECPGR finances at the end of the current Phase;
5. Provide a draft budget for the subsequent Phase.

Networks

The Networks are broad organizational structures that accommodate different types of activities contributing to the general objectives of the Programme. The Networks are crop- or theme-oriented. The Networks are the structural elements through which progress of the Programme is reported and priorities are set.

Network Coordinating Groups

The **Network Coordinating Groups (NCGs)** are groups of a maximum of 5-10 people, established within each Network (crop and thematic) and composed of the Working Group or Task Force leaders plus a number of other co-opted Network members.

In the specific case of the Documentation and Information Network, the NCG is composed of National Inventory Focal Points and European Central Crop Database Managers who are appointed to reflect a geographical balance and to combine diverse expertise (including NordGen and SEEDNet representatives) and 4 ex officio representatives (EURISCO Coordinator, IT host at Bioversity International, ECPGR Coordinator and *In situ* and On-farm Conservation Network representative).

Each NCG is coordinated by a *Network Coordinator*, selected by the Group among its members and with the task of delivering the NCG outputs to the ECPGR Secretariat and to the ECPGR Steering Committee. In order to ensure proper functioning of the NCGs, the Group members have to commit part of their time to this coordinating task.

The responsibilities of the Network Coordinating Groups are:

1. To formulate proposals, in consultation with WGs, or in the case of thematic networks, with other active groups, for the attention of the SC on WG priorities and activities, following the planning and prioritizing mechanism established by the SC;
2. To define the WGs to remain prioritized during the 5-year Phase, according to the planning and prioritizing mechanism established by the SC.

In addition, the NCG of the Documentation and Information Network has the responsibility to act as specific advisory body with the function to monitor progress in the development and maintenance of EURISCO, as well as to provide advice to Bioversity International acting on behalf of the ECPGR Secretariat, for the further development of EURISCO.

Before the Mid-term Steering Committee meeting (two months prior to the meeting), the Network Coordinating Groups will:

1. Provide the Secretariat/SC with an assessment of the progress made by the Networks. The reports, based on information received by the WGs, will be in standard format (provided by the Secretariat) and will indicate progress and constraints in reaching the planned objectives;
2. Provide the Secretariat/SC with a report reviewing the division of tasks within the Network in the current Phase and a proposal for the subsequent Phase which should include the following elements:
 - Prioritize WGs for the subsequent Phase;
 - Give a broad indication of activities to be pursued by WGs;
 - Prioritize these activities and identify funds required, either potentially deriving from ECPGR or from other sources or as inputs in kind. These activities might consist of meetings (WG, Network, ad hoc) or alternative actions (publication products, research, collecting, regeneration, etc.).

In order to deliver this information, all NCGs should hold a meeting during the first part of year 3 of each Phase (All Network Coordinating Groups Meeting).

Before the End-of-Phase Steering Committee meeting (two months prior to the meeting), the Network Coordinating Groups will:

1. Provide the Secretariat with an updated assessment of the progress made by the Networks during the second half of the Phase, based on the standard report previously provided (Mid-term meeting);
2. Provide, in consultation with WGs, as appropriate, the Secretariat/SC with a draft of the division of work within the Network in the subsequent Phase, including proposals containing the following elements:
 - Specific priorities and objectives;
 - Clear, measurable targets, dates for completion and estimates of funding required from ECPGR, based on funds allocated by the SC to each Network/WG.

NCGs are expected to deliver the above outputs mainly working through email communication, except for one regular meeting to be held during the first half of year 3. NCG meetings are self-organized. Alternatively, several NCG meetings can be held together in one location, during the first part of the third year, in order to benefit from the technical support of the Secretariat.

Network Coordinator

The **Network Coordinator** is selected by the NCG among its members, with the following role:

- Ensuring that the NCG composition is representative of the Network;
- Chairing the NCG meetings;
- Coordinating the preparation of the NCG proposals and planning;
- Delivering the NCG reports to the ECPGR Steering Committee via the ECPGR Secretariat;
- Liaising with the Secretariat for exchange of information.

The Network Coordinator is selected at the end of the All Network Coordinating Groups Meeting held during the first half of year 3 of each ECPGR phase and s/he exercises her/his role until the next election. The selection of the Coordinator is made by consensus of the corresponding NCG. In case of lack of consensus, a majority vote by secret ballot is organized by the Secretariat, or by the incumbent Coordinator, if the Secretariat is not present. Only regular NCG members attending the Network Coordinating Groups Meeting have the right to vote.

In case of resignation of the Network Coordinator at any time during the course of his/her term, the Secretariat provides for the selection of an "interim" Coordinator, following a NCG consultation via email correspondence. The selected "interim" Coordinator chairs the NCG until the next regular election.

Working Groups

The **Working Groups (WGs)** focus their activity on specific crops, crop groups or thematic areas. They are initiated following the approval of the Steering Committee.

ECPGR provides funding for the organization of WG meetings, the publication of the resulting reports and/or other actions, as proposed by the NCGs and approved by the SC, according to the available budget.

Working Group Members represent the country's interest in the genetic resources activities that the WG focuses on. Each WG is coordinated by a Chair and a Vice-Chair elected by the WG.

Each country is assigned a quota of funded participants to attend WG meetings organized by ECPGR in the entire Phase. When the country has exhausted its quota, it will still be possible for it to send self-funded participants to meetings of interest.

In addition to the quota assigned to each country, a quota is assigned to the *Working Group Chairs* to allow each prioritized WG to maximally benefit from the available expertise on that crop in the European region. The WG Chair quota allows the Chair of each individual WG to invite one additional expert from one of the ECPGR member countries to each WG meeting.

WG members and other scientists from participating countries carry out an agreed workplan with their own resources as inputs in kind to the Programme.

The Groups' activities are based on crop-specific European databases, managed by one of the participating institutes. These databases have the dual role of providing users with information on the germplasm maintained in Europe, and providing the Groups with a tool allowing them to take informed decisions and make recommendations regarding the management of national collections (priority setting, rationalization, safety-duplication, etc.).

Current activities of the Working Groups should aim at completion of these databases and should focus on the following priority areas as endorsed by the SC as future ECPGR priorities for Phase VIII:

1. Task sharing and capacity building;
2. Characterization and evaluation (including use of modern technologies);
3. *In situ* and On-farm conservation and management;
4. Documentation and Information.

A high level of activity is ensured by the establishment of detailed workplans during the meetings and intensive interaction between the Secretariat, the Working Group's Chair and Vice-Chair and its members between meetings.

It is expected that approximately 10 WGs within the Crop Networks remain prioritized during a 5-year Phase and that they meet once or twice during a 5-year Phase.

Working Group's Chair and Vice-Chair

The role of the **Chair** is the following:

1. Formulate the meeting's agenda in consultation with the Secretariat and the WG members;
2. Chair the Working Group meetings, with the objective of establishing a workplan with clearly defined responsibilities;
3. Oversee the implementation of the WG's workplan, in liaison with the Secretariat, whenever appropriate;
4. Provide information to the WG members on ECPGR events and mode of operation;
5. Encourage involvement of all the WG members in the WG initiatives;
6. Be proactive in proposing activities for the WG, following the priority areas for action, as indicated by the Steering Committee;
7. Contribute to the coordination of the Network, as a member of the NCG, i.e. helping to identify priorities and to propose the budgets;
8. Three months in advance of the SC meetings, provide the respective Network Coordinator with reports on progress made, including an assessment of what has and has not been achieved, identifying the constraints in reaching the planned objectives. These reports will be used to prepare Network reports for the SC.

Each Working Group selects a Chair amongst its members. The Chair is selected at the end of each regular meeting and s/he exercises her/his role until the next election. The selection of the Chair is made by consensus. In case of lack of consensus, a majority vote by secret ballot is organized by the Secretariat, or by the incumbent Chair, if the Secretariat is not present. Only regular Working Group members attending the meeting have the right to vote.

In case of resignation of the Chair at any time during the course of her/his term, the Secretariat provides for the selection of an "interim" Chair, following a WG's consultation via email correspondence. The selected "interim" Chair leads the WG until the next regular election.

The Chair selects the **Vice-Chair** amongst the WG members and seeks the consensus of the WG members on her/his choice. The Vice-Chair has a supporting function in the implementation of the Chair's tasks.

Task Force

The Steering Committee recommends and initiates the establishment of Task Forces in order to fulfil certain tasks. The members of a Task Force are appointed by the ECPGR Secretariat based upon suggestions received from the National Coordinators. The Task Force leader will be selected like a Working Group Chair.

The mandate of a Task Force is described in detail in a work plan including milestones and deliverables. In addition, a Task Force has an allocated budget to fulfil the given task. Task Forces and their work are reviewed during every regular SC meeting.

Procedures of the Reviewing Process:

- A. The assigned task has been executed by the Task Force, then the Task Force will be dismissed.
- B. The task has not been achieved but the completion of the task will be in the foreseeable future, then the mandate may be extended by the SC.
- C. The Task Force identified further areas of activities, which cannot be achieved in the given timeframe. The SC may therefore recommend the transition of the Task Force into a Working Group.

Database Manager of an ECPGR Central Crop Database (ECCDB)

Database Managers of ECPGR (European) Central Crop Database are identified by the institutions managing the respective database on behalf of ECPGR. They are ex officio members of the Documentation and Information Network and can be invited to the appropriate Network meetings.

The Database Managers are in charge of the development of the crop databases, including:

1. Adoption of agreed passport and characterization descriptors for the database structure;
2. Collect data according to the appropriate format or data flow mechanism, preferably from EURISCO;
3. Preparation and update of the ECPGR database Internet entry page, in liaison with the Secretariat;
4. Display of the data in an on-line searchable form and as downloadable file(s) from the respective ECPGR entry page;
5. Further development of the database as a crop portal and as a tool for germplasm collection analysis, in agreement with decisions and priorities defined by the WG;
6. Analysis of the available data for gaps, duplications and other objectives, according to the needs of the WG (i.e. definition of Most Appropriate Accessions for "A European Genebank Integrated System – AEGIS").