

Report of the CGIAR Genetic Resources Policy Committee

to the Mid-Term Meeting, Cairo, May 1997

The Genetic Resources Policy Committee met in Brazil on 25 and 26 April, immediately after the Workshop on Ethics and Equity. This report provides a brief summary of the outcome of the workshop as well as information on a few other items that the Committee wishes to bring to the attention of the CGIAR. The full minutes of the meeting will be distributed to CGIAR members soon.

Workshop on Ethics and Equity in Conservation and Use of Genetic Resources for Sustainable Food Security - Developing Guidelines for CGIAR

Introduction: Much of the CGIAR's scientific efforts are directed towards the conservation and improvement of biological resources. The CGIAR is also the major holder, in trust for the world community, of genetic resources that are essential to the present and future welfare of humanity. The CGIAR's mission of scientific research for food security, poverty alleviation and protecting the environment, and its role as a global trustee of critical genetic resources places the CGIAR in a position where ethical and equity concerns are of central importance. The first meeting of the Genetic Resources Policy Committee recommended that a workshop be convened to explore ethical dimensions related to genetic resources conservation and use. The objective was to contribute towards the development of a sound ethical basis for the work of the CGIAR in its relationships with farmers, communities, private companies, and national and international agencies.

The workshop was held 22-25 April in Foz do Iguacu, Brazil. It was hosted by the Brazilian Ministry of Science and Technology, with major funding provided by the governments of Sweden and Switzerland. Some 50 participants attended the workshop. These included representatives of NARS, international and national NGOs, farmer and community organizations, private companies, as well as

representatives of the CGIAR system and FAO. CGIAR Chair Ismail Serageldin was represented by CGIAR Executive Secretary Alexander von der Osten, who delivered the workshop's opening address on behalf of Mr. Serageldin. M.S. Swaminathan chaired the workshop and presented the keynote overview paper.

Workshop: The workshop was structured to promote a focused dialogue to arrive at a better understanding of how ethical principles and equity concerns can effectively underpin and reaffirm the humanistic mission of the CGIAR. The expectation was that the outcome of the workshop would provide major input into the process for developing a set of ethical principles for the CGIAR.

Major areas of discussion included:

1. Integrating ethical and equity considerations into activities concerning the use and conservation of genetic resources, as well as access to genetic resources, and to the benefits derived from them, in the context of CGIAR's trusteeship role.
2. Issues related to biosafety and bioethics in the use of biotechnology and genetic manipulation in agricultural research.
3. Partnerships between the CGIAR and the private sector in the conservation and use of genetic resources.
4. CGIAR's role in recognizing the contributions of local communities and farmers to the *in situ* on-farm conservation and enhancement of genetic resources, and in contributing to implementing the concept of Farmers' Rights.
5. Ethical issues or disparities arising when scientists work jointly with farmers in participatory breeding and selection.

Workshop participants formulated several statements of a generally applicable nature to address the overall mission of the CGIAR. In addition, they developed a number of specific suggestions for ethical principles based on the framework provided by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the FAO Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources (GPA), the FAO Code of Conduct for the Collecting and

Transfer of Plant Genetic Resources, the CGIAR Working Guidelines on Intellectual Property and other CGIAR policies. These suggestions covered the following three broad areas:

1. Biotechnology, Biosafety and Partnership with the Private Sector
2. Sharing the Benefits of Genetic Resources and Plant Improvement
- CGIAR's Trusteeship Role for *Ex Situ* Collections
3. Partnership with Farmers and Rural Communities

Follow-up: . A proceedings of the workshop will be published. The Committee also agreed on a process for refining and further reviewing the results of the workshop. A draft set of ethical principles are expected to be available by September 1997, for broad internal and external comment, including by the CGIAR Review Panel. It is intended that a final version integrating the reactions received will be ready in time for CGIAR review and endorsement at MTM98.

FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

The Commission met in December to continue the renegotiation of the International Undertaking to bring it in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity. The meeting focussed on the issues of the scope of the undertaking, access to PGRFA and Farmers' Rights. The Commission requested IPGRI, in collaboration with FAO and with input from Commission members, to prepare a paper outlining key options for scope and access and analysing their pros and cons. In line with this request, a paper has now been distributed to Commission members for the next full meeting of the Commission, to take place in Rome, 15 - 23 May 1997. **The Committee wishes to highlight the critical importance of advancing the negotiations at this meeting, especially as no further sessions have been scheduled until 1999.**

At its meeting in May, the Commission will also consider future action with respect to domesticated animal and forest genetic resources. In response to a request from the Commission, a report has been prepared by the CGIAR Centres outlining their activities in

genetic resources. The report focusses on the steps being taken by the Centres to implement the Global Plan of Action, the response of the Centres to the External Genebank Review, and its activities in forest, livestock and aquatic genetic resources.

At ICW'94, the Centres signed agreements with FAO bringing the in-trust germplasm collections within the International Network of *Ex Situ* collections under the auspices of FAO. These agreements were to run for an initial period of four years, and would automatically roll over unless either side serves notice of its desire to renegotiate or terminate the agreement at least 180 days in advance. The Inter-Centre Working Group on Genetic Resources (ICWG-GR), at its meeting at CIFOR in January, recommended that these agreements be allowed to automatically roll over and that any changes should only be considered once the International Undertaking had been renegotiated or there were some other significant developments in the external policy environment. This recommendation was endorsed by the Centre Directors attending the CDC meeting in Rome at the time of TAC 72. **The Policy Committee likewise endorses this as the most appropriate course of action.**

Other Meetings and Fora

The Committee discussed developments in a number of other fora, in particular within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the World Food Summit and the Committee on Trade and Environment of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Committee noted that the TRIPS provisions of GATT are scheduled for review in 1999, and in particular the provisions for intellectual property on biological materials. In view of the importance of this review for the CGIAR, **the Committee felt that it was important for CGIAR to provide input particularly in the areas of the impact of intellectual property on agro-biodiversity and the possibility of developing alternative *sui generis* systems.**

The Committee also noted that the CBD will be holding an open-ended meeting on biosafety and endorses continued involvement on the part of relevant CGIAR centers.

Further details of developments in these fora of particular relevance to the CGIAR will be contained in the Committee's minutes.

Systemwide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP)

The Committee noted the financial difficulties experienced by many of the centers in relation to their ability to fulfill their responsibilities as trustees of important genetic resources collections. In this connection, a secure long-term funding commitment is required. The Committee is pleased to note that the SGRP is undertaking a study to determine the costs of essential CGIAR genebank operations as a first step in defining immediate and long-term funding needs. **The Committee strongly endorses this undertaking as well as the SGRP's recognition that any CGIAR initiatives to secure funding must take place as part of larger efforts to identify total needs and develop a firm funding base for the evolving global system and the FAO Network of International *Ex Situ* Collections.**

A global operational plan for all genebanks - national, regional and international - needs to be developed in order to implement the relevant sections of the GPA. **The Committee recommends that the CGIAR takes a proactive role in developing such a plan.**

Future of the CGIAR Genetic Resources Policy Committee

The Committee agreed that it will address at its future meetings policy issues related to aquatic, livestock, forest and microbial genetic resources.

The Committee recognized that there will be an ongoing need for policy advice on genetic resources within the CGIAR, and recommends that this be addressed in the context of the CGIAR Review . As an input into this process the Committee plans to review its terms of reference at its next meeting scheduled for early September.

