



**REGIONAL MEETING TO PROMOTE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
GLOBAL PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE  
OF PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

**Manila, Philippines  
15-18 December, 1998**

**REPORT**

**Note**

This document includes the main report of the meeting. At present, annexes, appendices and background presentations are not included.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The regional meeting to promote implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in Asia and the Pacific was held in Manila, Philippines, from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1998. The meeting was convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutes (APAARI), and the CGIAR's System wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP), hosted by the Department of Agriculture and the Philippine Council for Agriculture and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCARRD) of the Republic of the Philippines and organized with the assistance of the International Plant Genetic Resource Institute (IPGRI).

2. Representatives and observers from each of the following countries attended the meeting: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Niue, Palau, the Philippines, Samoa, Thailand, Tonga, and Vietnam. In addition, a number of representatives of regional and international organization attended the meeting. A list of participants is attached (Appendix 1).

## **OPENING CEREMONY**

3. Welcome remarks were made by Mr Nerius I. Roperos on behalf of the Department of Agriculture. He stressed that the holding of the workshop in the Philippines has helped the country's agricultural sector in promoting the Government's interest in playing an active part in the implementation of the GPA.

4. Mr Kenneth W. Riley on behalf of IPGRI briefly described the composition and role of the CGIAR and the SGRP in advancing the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. It was noted that the SGRPs is a cross-cutting programme that includes the genetic resources activities in the various CGIAR Centres and that IPGRI is the convening centre for SGRP.

5. Mr R. K. Arora on behalf of APAARI discussed the objectives and functions of APAARI and its role in promoting the implementing the GPA, especially information dissemination in the regional and sub-regional level.

6. Mr Virander Sibal, on behalf of FAO, discussed FAO's role through the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources in the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA as a forum for current negotiations between countries on the revision of the International Undertaking, with the GPA as a key aspect of the system.

7. Mr Cezar M. Drilon, Jr., Under-Secretary, Department of Agriculture of the Philippines, delivered the opening address in behalf of Acting Secretary William D. Dar. He underscored the need for sustainable and equitable conservation of biodiversity for human development. He outlined the initiatives that the Philippines has undertaken in the furtherance of PGRFA conservation, IPR, plant variety protection, access and community and indigenous peoples' rights.

## **PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

8. The following were elected by acclamation:

Chair: Mr Carlos B. Carpio, the Philippines

Vice Chairs: Mr Pasril Wahid, Indonesia, for Workshop I

Mr Madhasudan Upadhyay, Nepal, for Workshop II  
Mr Joeli N Vakabua, Fiji, for Workshop III

Rapporteur: Ms Teresita H. Borromeo, the Philippines

9. The programme of work was then adopted (Appendix 2). There were background presentations on the Global Plan of Action and a review of the status of its implementation. Three main topics, namely National Programmes, Community PGRFA Management, and Regional and International Collaboration, were addressed in workshops I, II and III, respectively. For each, a number of presentations were made. Following this, critical issues were identified and discussed in small working groups, which were then reported back to the Plenary.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE GPA AND STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

10. Mr H. David Cooper, International Conference and Programme for Plant Genetic Resources, FAO, presented an overview of the Global Plan of Action for the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA which had been adopted at the International Technical Conference in Leipzig, June 1996. He emphasized that it was agreed at Leipzig that the implementation of the Plan is the responsibility of all stakeholders.

11. Mr Kenneth W. Riley summarized the state of implementation of each of the four areas of the GPA in the region based upon the reports provided by various countries in each of the four sub-regions (South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific). Priority needs and constraints were identified based on these reports.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### *Theme 1: Strengthening National Programmes, Strategies and Policies*

12. A number of presentations were made:

- Mr P.L. Gautam of NBPGR, India, addressed the key components of a national programme, based on the model of the Indian national plant genetic resources system. He identified conservation strategies, exploration and collecting, germplasm exchange and plant quarantine, utilization, institutional capacity building, documentation and information management and human resource development as key components.
- Mr Crisanto R. Escano, on behalf of the Philippine National PGR Committee, described the Philippines' experience to promote the involvement of all stakeholders in the policy formulation, planning, and implementation of PGRFA activities and at the national level. He emphasized the development of a national PGRFA program involving all stakeholders in order to orchestrate integrated and complementary PGRFA activities.
- Mr Mohamed Senawi of Malaysia described the development of national legislation for effective conservation, use and exchange of PGRFA in his country.
- Mr Paul Quek of IPGRI-APO described information systems for national programmes. He emphasized that the diversity of users, and rapid improvements in hardware and software dictates the corollary diversity of PGRFA documentation

systems. He also envisioned that data exchange and capture will eventually be through the internet.

13. Following plenary discussion, small working groups were established to examine the following subjects:

- National program coordination/involvement of all stakeholders
- Planning and linking of PRGFA program to biodiversity and agriculture
- Capacity building
- Policy and legislation

14. The issues and recommendations drafted by each working group were presented in the plenary session. The results of the deliberation are presented in Annex 1. The main points of discussion in the plenary were as follows:

- Strengthening national programs, including participation of different stakeholders
- Promoting capacity building in the informal sector
- Tapping the capabilities of relevant institutions, e.g. ISNAR, IPGRI, for developing training modules
- Strengthening regional capacity for PGRFA information management and documentation
- Options of national programs for developing *sui generis* system for plant variety protection
- Access through appropriate mechanism/legislation, e.g. *sui generis* system
- Need for closer interaction between quarantine and PGRFA sectors for effective and safe exchange of PGRFA and in harmony with biosafety

#### *Theme 2: Strengthening Community PGRFA Management*

15. Ms Wilhelmina Peregrina of SEARICE discussed the programme on community management of PGRFA in South East Asia. She presented the various research activities of CBDC, including participatory plant breeding and participatory varietal selection in Bohol, Philippines, Mekong Cantho, Vietnam, Nan, Thailand and Sabah, Malaysia. She stressed that conservation must be always linked to utilization.

16. Mr Tim Robertson of CARE presented the establishment of farmers' field schools as a strategy in strengthening community management in Bangladesh. This strategy has improved the nutrition and socio-economic status of the farming communities.

17. Mr Farhad Mazhar of UBINIG presented the principles of community genebank and on-farm conservation of crop genetic resources through community participation, emphasizing the role of traditional technology used by women. The principles of the farmers' movement to produce healthy environment and happy life were discussed.

18. Mr Raul Boncodin of UPWARD-CIP-PCARRD presented the activities of the UPWARD programme in on-farm root crops genetic resources conservation, including the use of home and school gardens as local germplasm repositories.

19. Mr Anil Suibedi of LI-BIRD, Nepal described the role the participatory plant breeding and participatory varietal selection in the development of farmers' preferred varieties. He

emphasized the advantages of these methodologies in diversity generation, conservation and use by farming communities.

20. Mr Damaso Callo of the Department of Agriculture described the community IPM program in the Philippines. Through farmer field schools, farmers have applied ecological knowledge to crop management, reducing the need for chemical pesticides.

21. Mr Charito Medina of MASIPAG, Philippines presented the MASIPAG programme as an alternative option for PGRFA conservation and utilization and as a means of empowerment of farmers over their genetic resources.

22. Mr Jean Louis Pham presented on-farm conservation as a component of the project on the safeguarding and preservation of the rice genepool. He further discussed the genetic and socio-economic aspects of on-farm conservation.

23. Following plenary discussion, small working groups were established to discuss the following topics:

- Field level methodologies to strengthen farmers PGRFA management
- Strengthening farmers seed supply and conservation system
- Sustainability issues, institutionalization of *in situ* conservation initiatives
- Constraints and opportunities to linking formal and informal sectors

24. The issues and recommendations drafted by each working group were presented in the plenary session. The results of the deliberation are presented in Annex 2. The main points of discussion in the plenary were as follows:

- Need for traditional varieties to be popularized and multiplied in formal seed production programs as well as to provide added-value mechanism for traditional varieties
- Increased access of farmers to PGRFA; a mechanism should be adopted to provide access to PGRFA

*Theme 3: Strengthening Regional and International Collaboration, with Emphasis on Promoting the Use of PGRFA*

25. Mr. Michael Jackson of IRRI presented SGRP's role in implementing the GPA. The Programme encompasses the independently managed and funded Centre programmes on biodiversity and related activities on genetic resources and capacity development.

26. Mr. N. Murthi Anishetty of FAO presented FAO's role in facilitating implementation of the GPA through supporting the CGRFA in its role of monitoring and guiding the implementation of the Plan by all actors/stakeholders. He further proposed a multi-donor programme to facilitate the implementation of the Plan.

27. Mr. BhagMal of IPGRI-APO presented an overview of crop and regional networks to implement GPA priorities. He presented the existing regional and crop networks, their accomplishments and what each of them aims to achieve in the future. He also emphasized IPGRI's input and future role in PGRFA networks.

28. Mr. R.K. Arora of APAARI discussed APAARI's role in implementing the GPA, its objectives, functions and its perspective plans as they impact on the GPA. He further cited APAARI's activities that have direct bearing on PGRFA conservation and utilization.

29. Mr. Joeli. Vakabua of Fiji discussed the need for strengthening regional collaboration in the Pacific. This was based on a meeting of the Pacific countries held during the course of the meeting.

30. Mr. Wang Shumin of China presented how international collaboration has benefited PGRFA conservation and use in China. He enumerated the researches conducted by China in collaboration with FAO, IPGRI, USA and Australia on collecting, germplasm and information exchange, establishment of core collection, regeneration methods and ultra dry seed storage. He appealed to all the countries in the region to initiate collaboration on PGRFA activities.

31. Following plenary discussion, small working groups were established to examine the following subjects:

- crop gene pools and crop networks
- the role of regional networks
- the supporting role of international organizations
- international agreements which affect the exchange of genetic resources.

32. The issues and recommendations drafted by each working group were presented to the plenary (Annex 3). The main points of discussion in plenary were as follows:

- the need for close linkages between genebanks and users
- linkages between farmers, NGOs, NARS and the IARCs
- IPRs and other policy issues
- The need for a Pan-Asia network to bring together different PGRFA networks operating in the region

**Synthesis of conclusions and recommendations**

33. Based on the presentations, working groups reports, and plenary discussions, including a final synthesis session, the following conclusions and recommendations were agreed.

#### *Strengthening of National Programmes*

34. The meeting emphasized the importance of creating broad-based and integrated national committees, and of widening stakeholder involvement in PGRFA programmes (Annex 1A) and planning (Annex 1B). The optimal composition and size of committees will depend on specific country situations.

35. It was noted that strong national committees can be useful platforms for developing project programme proposals and for sourcing funding to implement these. National committees should be able to assist in the development of consistent national policies and legislation which may be undertaken in different ministries, and support priority setting and planning of PGRFA activities undertaken in different sectors.

36. With respect to ex situ conservation, it was noted that it was sometimes difficult for countries to sustain national genebanks, and that there were certain advantages in sharing efforts. This applies particularly to small states, or those with insufficient capacity to maintain their ex situ collections. On the other hand, the practical and political difficulties involved should not be underestimated. A pragmatic approach might be to start with regional or sub-regional activities of direct benefit to national programmes (and to farmers in particular), and for sharing arrangements to evolve within these collaborative efforts.

37. It was noted that the informal sector (farmers, their communities and organizations) contributes to the total conservation efforts could, and this could be further developed as part of national complementary conservation strategies. This might include linkages between national collections and conservation at the community level, on farm and/or in community genebanks. Regeneration of accessions by farmers might facilitate the regeneration in sites close to the points of collection and also help reduce costs

38. On the other hand national programmes may facilitate the restoration of genetic materials lost from farmers fields following disasters such as flooding and drought, by provision of materials and relevant information. Communication between formal and informal sectors is crucial in matching available resources to needs, and in providing early warning of such needs.

39. Lack of sustained funding for conservation activities in many national programmes was noted as a constraint. It was agreed that closer linkages between genebanks and crop improvement-research centers might result in both improved use, as well as more sustained funding. Other opportunities to link multiplication and selling of seed of desired diversity from a genebank could be channelled into sustained funding.

#### *Strengthening of Community Management of PGRFA*

40. The important role of farmers, their local communities, and civil society organizations in the conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA was reaffirmed, and the opportunity to strengthen this in order to improve rural food and livelihood security, as well as to contribute to the total national effort was identified. Similarly the role of formal ex situ collections as a back-up to on farm conservation was noted.

41. It was agreed to document best practices and develop techniques and methodologies (such as participatory varietal selection, participatory plant breeding, community seed banks, and farmer field schools, diversity fairs and farmers cross visits; see Annex II-A) with a view to strengthening farmers' capacities in this regard, and to promote farmers' access to different varieties/PGRFA as per their needs. Key principles in these approaches should include ecological understanding and empowering farmers as decision makers in managing genetic resources.

42. The need to strengthen farmers' seed supply systems, and to adapt the seed regulatory framework to accommodate seeds developed from both formal and informal sectors.

43. There is a need to strengthen documentation of local and indigenous knowledge, recognize it appropriately, and promote use of the local knowledge in effective conservation of PGRFA both in formal and informal sectors, as well as to support research on role of farmers/farming system in conserving genetic diversity in the farm. (see also Annex II-B).

#### *Linkages Between the Formal and Informal Sectors*

44. While there are some common objectives between the formal and informal sectors, the need to understand the differences in perceptions, methodologies, approaches, methods of assessment, etc. was acknowledged. It was realized that the two sectors can be mutually beneficial and complementary in achieving the goals of food and nutritional security on sustainable basis through conservation and sustainable use of PGRFA. The contribution of the informal sector in terms of socio-economic considerations and biodiversity conservation should be recognized rather than regulated. The constraints and opportunities to linkages are noted in Annexes II-C and II-D.

#### *Human Resource Development and Capacity Building*

45. There is a need for training and capacity building in both the formal and informal sectors, and it was agreed that greater emphasis should be placed on the informal sector and on human resource development rather than on developing infrastructures.

46. Recent implementation of technical training courses on a variety of topics related to PGRFA in the region was noted. It was suggested that these curricula be developed as modules that could be used in developing follow-up courses. Additional courses in *in situ* conservation and participatory methods were recommended to be developed.

47. Specific proposals for capacity building are provided in Annex IC, and for the supporting role of international organizations in Annex III-C.

#### *Regional Networks*

48. It was agreed that the sub regional PGRFA networks (RECSEA-PGR, SAN-PGR and EA-PGR) play a useful role in fostering collaboration, in particular in facilitating information exchange, and in developing joint project proposals (Annex III-B) that can lead to strengthening national programmes. However, there is concern as to the sustainability of some networks, and the need for national commitment to generate core funding to provide for the basic running costs of the network was highlighted. With well functioning networks

there would be improved possibilities of sourcing funds for the development and implementation of regional activities. The provision, through APAARI, of a pan-regional umbrella for the existing sub regional networks will help consolidate and rationalize existing activities of the networks. It is also suggested that existing PGRFA networks should develop links with other geopolitical groups (e.g. SAARC, ASEAN, etc.) to strengthen PGRFA component of such organizations.

49. It was agreed that the informal sector should be involved in the regional networks and that links should be encouraged with informal sector networks (SANFEC).

50. The particular situation of the small island developing states of the Pacific was recognized. The proposed regional network for the Pacific was strongly endorsed. The suggestion to place the existing ex situ collections under a regional collection agreement should be pursued. The conclusions of a meeting of countries of the Pacific sub-region are provided in Annex X.

#### *Management of Crop Genepools*

51. It was considered that germplasm exchange may be facilitated through crop genepool-specific mechanisms. The positive experience of crop networks such as COGENT and the Sesame Network in this regard was noted (Annex III-A). Since components of a genepool may be conserved on farm as well as ex situ it was agreed that farming communities be involved in crop networks. The importance of information exchange was highlighted.

52. IPGRI was encouraged to develop further the *InfoBase* on national programmes and to link it to national information systems (including accession level information on the germplasm held by members of crop networks), and with the World Information and Early Warning System.

#### *Policy Issues*

53. It was noted that some of the relevant provisions of different International Agreements (such as the CBD, WTO agreements on TRIPS, SPS etc.) may not always be in conformity with each other. Further, it was recognized that because of the emerging IPR regimes, fear of biopiracy and delay in finalization of International Undertaking on PGRFA, the exchange of germplasm among the nations has now become very restrictive. It was therefore recommended that:

- (a) Opportunities should be grasped to reconcile the provisions of different international agreements in order to further the objectives of the CBD and facilitate implementation of the GPA. These include:

- (i) review of TRIPS 27.3(b); and
  - (ii) the revision of the International Undertaking. The negotiations should be completed at an early date so that the access to PGRFA/technologies on PGRFA (including the outstanding issue of ex situ collections), realization of Farmers' Rights and suitable mechanism for benefit-sharing are ensured, and above all, an agreed Multilateral System of Germplasm Exchange is put in place.
- (b) National legislation and regulations (such as that concerned with access, IPRs and the seed sector) should be examined in order to facilitate implementation of the GPA, in the framework of the CBD and other relevant international agreements, and be harmonized, as appropriate.

54. It was suggested that there should be a regional consultation concerning the exchange of genetic resources in order to (a) facilitate a regional position vis-a-vis the negotiations to revise the International Undertaking, and (b) facilitate exchange of materials within crop gene pools.

#### **CLOSING CEREMONY**

55. In their closing remarks, Messrs. David Cooper and Ken Riley thanked Secretary William Dar and the Department of Agriculture for hosting the meeting, and in particular the staff of the Bureau of Plant Industry for local organization, and Secretary William Padolina, Department of Science and Technology, and in particular the staff of PCARRD for their support to the meeting, as well as the international organizations particularly INIBAP. They congratulated all participants on the fruitful outcome of the meeting and they looked forward continued commitment of all in implementing the recommendations.

56. Ms Beatriz del Rosario, Officer -in-Charge of PCARRD and Chair of the National PGR Committee, in closing the meeting, thanked the co-sponsors and all participants. She looked forward to the implementation of the Global Plan of Action in the region based on the recommendations of the meeting.