

COMMISSION ON PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

Third Session

Rome, 17 - 21 April 1989, Green Room

FAO RELATIONSHIP WITH IBPGR

Introduction

1. On 24 February 1989 the IBPGR Board of Trustees adopted the following motion:

"The further development of IBPGR as a fully autonomous, independently administered, International Center in the CGIAR system would greatly enhance

- i) its capacity to carry out its scientific mandate and,
- ii) its ability to attract strong and continuing financial support.

Therefore, provided mutually acceptable arrangements can be put in place, the Board of Trustees accepts with pleasure the kind invitation of Denmark (ref. 73.C.27.1/6 from Dr. Klaus Winkel dated 3 February 1989 to Dr. W.J. Peacock) to locate the headquarters of IBPGR in or near scientific institutes in Copenhagen".

2. The Director-General received confirmation of the IBPGR decision by letter from the Chairman of the CGIAR. This letter and the Director-General's reply are attached. A letter was also sent to the Director-General by the newly appointed Chairman of IBPGR, expressing the wish to discuss with FAO the follow-up arrangements to the Board's decision and reaffirming the strong desire of the IBPGR to maintain its cooperation with the Organization. In view of its importance and of its implications, the Director-General decided to inform the CPGR and seek its guidance on the future FAO/IBPGR relationship.

Background

3. FAO, since 1947, has been much concerned about the consequences of loss of genetic variability of crops useful to mankind. In pursuant to decisions of its Governing Bodies, FAO established a Panel of Experts on Plant Exploration and Introduction in 1965 to advise the Director-General on new lines of action to deal with the problem, and to expand the exchange of information and plant material between the countries and scientific institutions. A similar Panel of Experts on Forest Gene Resources was established in 1968. In the same year FAO also established a Crop Ecology and Genetic Resources Unit to deal with activities related to collections, conservation and documentation of genetic resources.

4. The Technical Conferences on Genetic Resources and the FAO Panel of Experts recommended that a global network of crop genetic resources centres should be established. The United Nations Conference on Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 gave FAO responsibility to assist in the establishment of an international genetic resources programme.

5. FAO submitted a proposal to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) in October 1971 to establish a mechanism to encourage, coordinate and support action to conserve genetic resources and make them available for use. In March 1972 TAC established an ad hoc Working Group of leading scientists which met in Beltsville, Maryland, USA. This group proposed the creation, over a period, of a network of genetic resources centres comprising a Coordinating Committee with a central staff as its executing arm. The general action programme of the Beltsville report was substantially revised and endorsed by TAC. The CGIAR agreed to take action to establish the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR) to promote and assist in the worldwide effort to collect and conserve the plant germplasm needed for future research and production.

Creation of IBPGR at FAO

6. A number of members of CGIAR felt that the coordinating functions outlined in the Beltsville report were so closely related to FAO's basic responsibilities that FAO should be charged with providing the central coordinating staff out of its Regular Programme budget.

7. Further negotiations between the CGIAR sub-committee and the FAO Director-General and his representatives in Rome in October 1973 resulted in the following general agreement:

first, the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR) would be created as an independent entity, reporting to the CGIAR through TAC and receiving funds through the CGIAR system;

second, the headquarters of the IBPGR would be at FAO headquarters, and FAO should provide the Secretariat of the Board;

third, a central trust fund should be created to finance the expenses of the board, additional Secretariat assistance if needed, and such programme activities as the Board might decide could be better financed through such a fund rather than through bilateral or United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) financing. The central fund was to be administered by FAO as a trust fund without charge, at least for the first year, but disposition of the fund was to be put entirely under the control of the Board;

fourth, the Board would consist of 14 members (at least four from developing countries) one of whom would be a non-voting member appointed by FAO;

fifth, the Chairman of the Board, who might be from outside the Board's membership, would be selected by the Board in consultation with the Director-General of FAO.

8. The report of the Seventeenth Session of the FAO Conference in 1973 stated "Recognizing FAO's role in activities in the genetic resources field and the importance of coordination, the Conference endorsed the recommendation that FAO should provide headquarters facilities for the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources, established by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, as well as the location of the Secretariat of this Board, in the Genetic Resources Unit with financing by the Board through extra-budgetary funds, and requested that the Council be kept informed of the Board's activities".

9. Subsequently, in June 1974, a Letter of Agreement between the donors of the CGIAR (viz., Germany F.R., the Netherlands, Sweden and the U.K.) and FAO was signed. This agreement was drawn up for the purpose of creating a central fund to finance

the activities of the IBPGR. Even though this agreement was initially for one year, it was tacitly renewed and remained operational until a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 27 February 1987.

10. These developments brought forth an international organization, the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR), under the FAO umbrella and with minimum formality and bureaucracy. Thus the IBPGR became operational at FAO headquarters in Rome in June 1974. In order to assure consistency between IBPGR's programme and FAO's own genetic resources work, the Chief of FAO's Crop Ecology and Genetic Resources Unit was designated to serve concurrently as Secretary of the IBPGR (in 1978 designated as the Executive Secretary), and the programme of FAO's Unit was reoriented to enable it to undertake the coordinating functions proposed by the Beltsville report. The inter-relationship between FAO and IBPGR thus introduced a new dimension into international activities in the development of a global network of plant genetic resources centres.

11. During its formative years, the IBPGR needed support from FAO for most of its field work and this is true even to date. In addition to providing a central coordinating mechanism for the IBPGR - the Crop Ecology and Genetic Resources Unit (later this unit became Crop Genetic Resources Centre) - the FAO country programmes provide much needed administrative support for IBPGR field projects. This assistance cannot be estimated in monetary terms, and there is no doubt that IBPGR was able to develop an effective programme due to the strong support it received from FAO.

IBPGR Achievements

12. During the first decade of its operation the IBPGR accomplished a great deal in various spheres of its operation. A few examples of these achievements are as follows:

- generated interest in, and awareness of, genetic resources conservation in many countries around the world;
- furthered the cause of conservation at technical level by means of meetings and publications;
- supported numerous exploration and collecting missions in the centres of diversity for major crops including cereals, legumes, vegetables, industrial crops, fruit trees and forages;
- supported research on problems related to genetic resources and developed scientific and operational standards for conservation of germplasm;
- assisted several national programmes in the establishment of national conservation facilities and documentation systems; - established a network of base collections;
- encouraged and supported national programmes to initiate characterization and evaluation of germplasm and also the establishment of crop data bases;
- provided training fellowships and organized training courses to increase the manpower for genetic resources conservation.

Recent Developments

13. There were substantial benefits derived from the close association which has existed between FAO and IBPGR since 1974. In fact the programmes of IBPGR and FAO were co-terminous, but with the increase in the programme and activities of the IBPGR, the Board of IBPGR felt that it needed a different organizational and staffing structure. Following the External Programme and Management Review, carried out in 1984-85, the Board of IBPGR has been transformed into a Board of Trustees and a new staffing structure was adopted, in particular to strengthen IBPGR's research capabilities. At the same time the Executive Secretary of IBPGR was redesignated as Director. Since that period IBPGR was considering alternative arrangements to become a fully autonomous and independent CGIAR centre.

14. A series of discussions at various levels between IBPGR/CGIAR and FAO resulted in a negotiated memorandum of understanding (MOU) between IBPGR and FAO in February 1987. According to the MOU, the IBPGR has offered to take over the funding of professional staff, hitherto provided by FAO's Regular Programme, and thus all the IBPGR professional staff are engaged full time for activities defined by the IBPGR Board of Trustees, and FAO has agreed to apply to IBPGR-funded staff more flexible arrangements which govern the administration of field projects.

15. The Trust Fund of IBPGR continued to be administered without any overheads. These arrangements were on a trial period of one year. The situation was reviewed in 1988 and due to the financial situation of FAO and increasing autonomy requested by IBPGR, FAO suggested the following modifications/amendments for the next phase starting on 1 January 1989: (i) FAO no longer to provide or finance IBPGR professional or general service staff; (ii) FAO to charge, and IBPGR to pay, for all services rendered by FAO at a reduced agency cost rate of 5 percent of total expenditure; and (iii) IBPGR to pay rent for allotted headquarters space. The amended agreement is expected to be in effect until the end of 1990.

Separation of IBPGR from FAO

16. During 1988-89 the Chairman of the Board of the IBPGR contacted a few donor countries, viz., Denmark, Switzerland and Italy as possible future hosts for IBPGR headquarters. According to the information available it appears that the Governments of Italy and Switzerland did not react or were in the process of considering the issue; however, the Government of Denmark sent a letter to the Chairman of IBPGR reacting favourably to the IBPGR request. In view of the Danish Government's invitation the IBPGR Board of Trustees on 24 February 1989 adopted the motion accepting this invitation as indicated in paragraph 1 above.

FAO's Position

17. The Director-General regrets that FAO as the host of the IBPGR Secretariat since 1974, and co-sponsor of the CGIAR, was not consulted in advance on this decision.

18. This decision, if implemented, will have a number of implications for the future programmes of IBPGR and FAO in this field, related to coordination and costs. In particular, the Director-General is concerned about the possible adverse effects which this decision may have on the developing countries and their full access to all necessary genetic material, information and data, publications and technical assistance.

1.9., The Director-General is also concerned about the financial and administrative implications of this decision as regards the IBPGR staff (who are FAO staff members). The cost of their separation or redeployment if, for one reason or another they are not transferred to the new IBPGR Headquarters in Denmark, could reach \$800,000. Other financial commitments which would be left with FAO on IBPGR's departure are connected with the rental agreement for IBPGR premises and amount to approximately \$350,000 per year or \$1.1 million for a three-year period. Moreover, the fate of the IBPGR files, data banks, and the FAO/IBPGR joint publications which were established during the many years of FAO/IBPGR cooperation, will have to be determined.

20. In view of the complexities of the matter, the Director-General has decided to establish an internal committee to examine all the possible implications and make proposals for ensuring that all the commitments which FAO has taken on behalf of IBPGR will be honoured by the IBPGR donors. As IBPGR has no legal status it is not clear whether the Board of IBPGR or the CGIAR Secretariat could provide the necessary formal assurances that the departure of the IBPGR from FAO will be at no cost to the Organization or whether FAO will have to approach donors including the World Bank. The Director-General would welcome the views and advice of the CPGR in this respect.

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

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March 8, 1989

Dr. Edouard Saouma
Director General
Food & Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations
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00100 Rome, ITALY

Dear Dr. Saouma,

I was surprised to learn last week from the new chairman of the IBPGR, Bill Tossell, that the board had decided, to recommend moving the center to Denmark. We all were aware that alternatives were being considered, but I certainly did not expect anything to happen this quickly. It is an instance, I suppose, of the ambiguity between the CGIAR principle of board autonomy and that other CGIAR principle of working through consensus.

While I might have preferred a different approach to the matter, and for that matter a different outcome, the board is undoubtedly within its authority to take the action it has. Nor would it be appropriate, given all of the history, for me to intervene strongly to attempt to persuade the Group to act one way or another on the board's recommendation.

It is critical, however, that whatever administrative arrangements are made, the technical collaboration between FAO and IBPGR continue to be open, extensive and effective. I am writing, therefore, to propose that we work together to ensure that the technical collaboration continues, and also that there is a minimum amount of damaging controversy as the issue is formally resolved over the coming months. Bill Tossell assures me that the IBPGR itself has the same desires.

In closing, let me say to you directly what I am sure is a sentiment generally shared in the CGIAR: how indebted we are to the FAO for its support to the conservation and utilization of plant germplasm through organizational and financial resources provided over the years to the IBPGR. We appreciate particularly the efforts made in recent years to deal with some of the problems that emerged as the role of the IBPGR changed. I am

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Dr. Edouard Saouma
Director General, Food & Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy

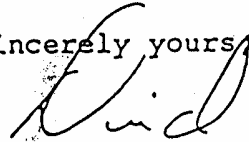
March 8, 1989

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confident that support will be no less important in the future, though perhaps in different forms, than in the past, whatever may be the ultimate ending of the path on which the IBPGR has now engaged.

I am copying this letter to the Cosponsors of the CGIAR and to the Chairman and Director of the IBPGR.

Sincerely yours



W. David Hopper
Chairman

copies Messrs. C. H. Bonte-Friedheim, Michel J. Petit,
 Timothy Rothermel, Cosponsors
 Dr. William E. Tossell, Chairman, IBPGR
 Dr. J. Trevor Williams, Director, IBPGR

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The Director-General

AGD-DG/89/400

Rome 12. IV. 89

Dear Mr. Hopper,

Thank you for your letter of 8 March 1989 regarding the recent decision of the IBPGR to move to Copenhagen.

The possibility of the Board leaving Rome and the framework of FAO has been under discussion for several years. For my part, I recognize that there are difficulties in running a CGIAR-sponsored International Agricultural Research Centre within the relatively inflexible administrative framework of a UN specialized agency - although I should add that the UN framework does offer a number of compensating advantages. With the increasing scale of the IBPGR's activities, the difficulties have become more obvious to both sides. The Memorandum of Understanding between FAO and the IBPGR signed on 27 February 1987 represented a serious effort by all concerned to meet the problems which were emerging, but we recognized at the time that it was only an interim solution. The Memorandum explicitly left open the longer-term issue of "whether it is the mutual desire of the two parties to maintain the present relationship between FAO and the IBPGR ... or to seek an alternative solution".

The establishment of the IBPGR as a separate institution outside the FAO framework thus appears to me as a natural and perhaps inevitable phase in its evolution.

On the other hand, I am seriously concerned over the manner in which the Board reached a specific decision on 24 February 1989 to move to Copenhagen. There was no prior consultation with FAO, and indeed the decision was taken in the absence of the ex-officio FAO Board member. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, was there any study of the implications for FAO, for the Board itself, and for the staff (who are all FAO staff members).

At this stage, I have two main concerns.

.../.

Mr. David Hopper
Chairman
CGIAR
1818 H Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20433

Of over-riding importance, it seems to me, is the need to ensure that cooperation on substantive matters between the IBPGR and FAO goes ahead without dislocation, and in particular that there is no damage to the interests of developing countries.

In second place, I am concerned to ensure that the winding-up of the IBPGR's activities in Rome take place in an orderly manner, and that FAO is fully reimbursed for any costs it may incur including indemnities for the cancellation of contracts for services or contracts of staff. We have financial problems of our own, and I certainly cannot afford to be generous.

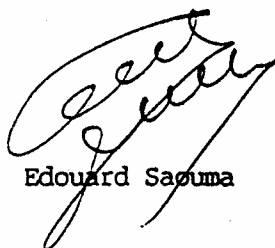
I shall be very glad to work with you, as you suggest, to ensure that technical collaboration continues, and also to minimize controversy. In my view, formal measures should be taken to establish a transitional period of one year (or as long as necessary) in which the transfer of the Board would be planned jointly by the several parties directly concerned, including FAO.

On the FAO side, the decision to accept the IBPGR as a part of the Organization was made by our Conference in 1973. Consequently, any major change in the relationship must, of course, be reported back to our Governing Bodies. I shall in the first instance be informing the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources, which will be meeting in the next few days, and plan to make available to it the relevant documentation including your letter and this reply.

I would like to add that I have also received a letter from the new Chairman of the IBPGR indicating his strong desire for full consultation and close cooperation with FAO, and I hope to have a chance of discussing the matter with him next week.

In addition, I have noted that the May meeting of the CGIAR will discuss the proposed IBPGR move, and I shall be very much interested to learn the views of the CGIAR and the donors to the Board.

Yours sincerely,



Edouard Saouma

cc: Dr. William E. Tossell
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