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Managing Complex Multi-partner Projects: Report of a Peer-assist Process

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The ILAC Initiative fosters learning from experience and use of the lessons learned to improve the design and implementation of agricultural research and development programmes. The mission of the ILAC Initiative is to develop, field test and introduce methods and tools that promote organizational learning and institutional change in CGIAR centres and their partners, to expand the contributions of agricultural research to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

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Summary

This report documents a peer-assist process on the topic of managing complex multi-partner programmes[1]. The participants consisted of the ILAC team and representatives of eight multi-partner programmes hosted by Bioversity International. The aim of the peer-assist process, conducted in September and October 2007 at Bioversity's headquarters in Italy, was to draw out experiences and lessons in managing such programmes to assist the ILAC Initiative and other programmes.

The main lessons related to: identifying and selecting partners; developing agreements to collaborate; assessing the capacity of individuals and institutions implementing the projects and addressing capacity-building needs; developing an effective communication strategy within the programme and disseminating programme results; and taking account of the many management issues involved, such as management structure, planning, finance, monitoring and evaluation, trouble-shooting and managing impact expectations.

1. Introduction

The Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) Initiative is hosted by Bioversity International ('Bioversity'). It aims to strengthen the capacity of collaborative programmes to promote pro-poor agricultural innovation and to ensure that research and development activities are managed more effectively. Its specific focus is on programmes that target and engage resource-poor farmers and other poor people.

Central to ILAC's strategy is a Learning Laboratory in which professionals from collaborative programmes come together to share knowledge and experiences, experiment with new approaches for facilitating pro-poor innovation, and evaluate the results. The programmes are based on collaboration among various types of organizations, such as international and national research organizations, NGOs, local government agencies, farmers' groups, policy organizations and universities.

ILAC has existed as an informal grassroots interest group since 2003, but with the approval of a large grant in 2007, a more formal approach to collaborative programme management was needed.

2. The challenge

Managing the ILAC Initiative involves coordinating the activities of many organizations, back-stopping workshops and other activities, and using participatory communication methods to exchange knowledge, learn from experiences and enhance programme partners'

[1] Programme vs Project: The approach used here is to view a 'programme' as the overarching concept, comprising a number of projects.

capabilities. This is a complex task, and in order to learn from the experience of others, ILAC organized two meetings with coordinators of other multi-partner programmes hosted at or coordinated by Bioversity,

A peer-assist process was used, whereby a group of peers comes together to elicit feedback on a problem, project or activity, with the less experienced participants (in terms of the subject at hand) drawing on the knowledge and insight of the more experienced participants (for more on this approach, see http://www.kstoolkit.org/Peer+Assists).

The issues for discussion at the meetings included:

– What problems arose in terms of programme partners' willingness and ability to participate and how were these problems overcome?
– How is effective participation maintained over time? Does the degree of participation change over time and, if so, how?
– In developing working agreements with programme partners, what kinds of agreements work best and what kinds should be avoided?
– Is the establishment of a higher level steering committee or advisory board an effective mechanism for stimulating partners' commitment, motivation and participation?
– What major lessons in managing a multi-partner programme should those about to undertake this task bear in mind?

3. The participants

Two peer-assist meetings were organized, the first on 27 September 2007 and the second on 8 October 2007. The participants in these meetings consisted of the ILAC team and representatives of eight programmes that shared the following characteristics:

– multi-partner involvement
– multi-phased implementation
– multi-donor support
– shared responsibility for implementation and coordination
– guidance provided by a steering committee
– sustainabili ty, knowledge-sharing and capacity-development goals

The participant programmes were:

– System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP)
– Crop Wild Relatives Project
– Genetic Resources Policy Initiative (GRPI)
– Enhancing the contribution of neglected and underutilized species to food security and to the incomes of the rural poor (IFAD NUS I phase)
– Information and Communication Technology and Knowledge Management (ICT-KM) Program of the CGIAR
– Global Facilitation Unit for Under-Utilized Species
– European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN)

– Central Advisory Service for Intellectual Property (CAS-IP)

At both meetings the ILAC team sought advice from the programme representatives on how to develop and maintain commitment, motivation and participation in a multi-partner programme, and insight into effectively managing it.

Background information on the programmes is given in the Annex, together with a list of all participants.

4. Lessons

The lessons emerging from the meetings could be grouped into four main subjects: partnership; capacity; communication; and management.

Partnership

The main partnership issues involved in multi-partner programmes relate to **identifying** potential partners, **selecting** the partners, and establishing the **working arrangements** of the partnership and the **roles** of the different partners.

Identifying potential partners for a large programme involves local knowledge, peer recommendation, experience and expediency. Factors that come into play include potential partners' **reputations** for achieving results, working as part of a team, and ability to lead where necessary. It was important that partners were located in politically **stable environments** and had strong local and national **support**, and they remarked that the use of Bioversity's regional offices often proved to be very useful at the partner identification stage.

Selecting partners from those identified is less straightforward. Given free choice and good background knowledge of the partner institutions and their staff, and the local political environment, one could select partners that were **positive, stable, responsive and responsible**. Too often, however, a programme is constrained for political reasons to work through a particular institute and has to accept an allocated partner, selected on the basis of seniority, nepotism or even 'it's their turn', which might affect future programme success.

A common mechanism used for selecting partners is a **review committee** that screens potential partners in terms of their merits as well as their compatibility with the programme objectives and other partners. Regional **networks** can also be used to select suitable partners, but it is probably better to use networks that are practice oriented, rather than political networks where the network participants are likely to put political interests before programme interests.

Selection also needs to focus on what different partners can bring to the programme in terms of **resources** and which partners will lead which activities. An important consideration here is **flexibility**. For example, from time to time it might be necessary to change the **leadership** set-up (e.g., in response to donor demands), and partners need to exhibit the capacity to handle such change constructively. Similarly, they need to show an ability to manage the possibility that during the programme some projects might be dropped (e.g., because of lack of progress) and new ones might be launched, with possible corresponding changes in partners and programme direction. Steering committees and advisory boards can be useful in helping to select new partners at this stage.

Balance is also important, not only in terms of partners' **contributions** to the programme, but also in terms of their representation on programme committees and networks. There is also the **ethical consideration** of deliberately creating a balance between weak and strong partners, using strong partners to provide a reasonable chance of successful outcomes and providing weak partners with the opportunity to build their capacity.

It is important to develop a partnership built on **trust**, and to then justify and maintain that trust. Partner selection therefore needs to involve carefully examining the **motivation** of potential partners. While most partners will, to some extent, be seeking individual benefit ('What's in it for me?' in terms reputation, finance, credibility, etc.), they also need to be motivated by wanting the programme to succeed in and of itself.

In selecting partners it is also important to be sure that they will accept and adhere to the Bioversity **Letter of Agreement** (LoA) that underpins programme operation.

A significant aspect of the Bioverisity LoA is that it gives all credit for work done to Bioversity. Descriptor lists, for example, are published with only Bioversity as author, whereas the work might have been the product of a team, all of whom should be clearly acknowledged. The LoA also gives **Intellectual Property Rights** (IPRs) to Bioversity. This is a contentious issue and can cause problems. At one of the meetings the example was presented of a small grant to a PhD student working on topic within Bioversity's area of interest, as part of a project in a multi-partner programme; if strictly applied, the LoA would mean that the results of the student's research would be the property of Bioversity, which technically might invalidate the PhD. Similarly, there is the issue of who owns the rights to commercial cultivars developed within the context of a Bioversity-supported research project.

The LoA has also run into difficulties with regard to some multi-partner programme supporters, with donors requiring a more rigorous implementation of certain elements of the LoA, particularly in terms of **financial** responsibility. This increases the burden on both the programme coordinator and the partners. Another aspect of LoAs is the consideration of **shared principles** and vision. At least one case was mentioned where a national partner arbitrarily dropped a collaborating partner, for no obvious technical reason; it was assumed that there were personality clashes. The LoA can discourage that such actions by articulating expectations for collaborating partners, and establishing procedures for collaboration.

Capacity

The capacity of partners to implement and manage the activities involved in a multi-partner programme is fundamental to programme success. Important issues here relate to **assessing capacity** at various levels, **flexibility** in using identified capacities, providing **training** and reinforcing skills, and **mixing capacity** levels.

The topic of capacity needs crops up often in the course of a programme and its importance should never be underestimated. With regard to identifying capacity, the considerations here are both the partner's capacity and the capacity of people and organizations in the local environment in which the partner operates. One of the multi-programme coordinators noted that **local capacity** is often available, but it can be difficult to identify; also, having found it, it is important to respect local norms in the way this capacity is used for the benefit of the programme.

A worthwhile approach to identifying capacity is to assess partners' **track records** in order to see if the requisite skills are in place. Depending on the overall programme plan, there should be some room for **adjustment** in planned activities to match them more closely to the identified capacity.

Most of the multi-partner programmes participating in the peer-assist process had provided training in participatory decision-making and in leadership. It pays to do a **skills assessment** early on in project activities, and plan suitable training opportunities to build up any necessary skills. Limited understanding of **terminologies** can be a constraint, and should be addressed. Where programmes operate through national coordinators with support assistants, the relative inexperience of the national staff might also be a factor, and this has been addressed by arranging **meetings** to bring all partners together at least annually to exchange experiences.

Capacities might need reinforcement, and various stratagems are used to do this. **Mixing skill levels** in meetings can have a positive effect on learning, so long as care is taken to avoid any tendencies to intellectual arrogance. Similarly, the inclusion of specialized topics in otherwise general meetings can help reinforce weak areas. On a larger scale, building and reinforcing capacity by **'twinning' partners** of differing capacity is a good option, giving the stronger partner some experience in leadership and the weaker partner the benefit of the experience of the stronger one. Such twinning typically involves exchanges of scientists and field trips for farmers.

Communication

A good **communication strategy** is vital to the success of a multi-partner programme. Communication needs to be timely, relevant and comprehensive, using **channels** that are appropriate for all the partners and focused not only on ensuring the smooth operation of the programme, but also on building up a sense of **ownership** of among the partners. They all need access to information about plans, activities and results. The choice has to be made between a hub-and-spoke form of communication, with the programme coordinator responsible for receiving and disseminating information, and a net format, employing e-mail lists or an online forum to which all partners have access.

Electronic communication can revolve around a rather passive **website** that is kept current, or around more clearly target e-mail communication. If using **e-mail**, it is important to tailor the messages to suit the various categories of recipients. It is worth considering producing a general and inclusive **newsletter** that carries comprehensive news of progress and developments, linked to 'tickler' e- mails that provide links to particular items in the newsletter thought to be of interest to particular recipients.

It is important to bear in mind that **communication norms** vary from one culture to another. The use of the telephone is acceptable in Europe and North America, for example, but in central Asia it is not the norm to communicate by telephone until prior personal contact has been made via face-to-face meetings. Also, allowance needs to be made for variation in the ability to send and receive e-mails, and care should always be taken to re-read e-mails before sending them, to avoid misunderstanding; e-mails should be regarded as being on a par with formal written communication. Keeping e-mails short and to the point, and minimizing inbox overload, is advisable; where appropriate, the e-mail could carry links to additional information of interest to the recipient.

The most suitable communication channel when developing workplans is face-to-face **meetings** that allow the participants to argue their case and reach a compromise. The role of the programme coordinator at these meetings can be crucial, and it is very important to have clear expectations of the meetings and to ensure they are communicated to participants.

Regular communication provides encouragement for those implementing programme activities and also serves as a reminder to partners who might be lagging behind. One programme regularly sends out a monthly update electronically, and also has an Internet Share Point Site to encourage the exchange of information among the various country projects. In another programme the National Task Forces met on a regular basis to exchange information and experiences and to build up a shared purpose.

Reporting is a two-way process and keeping all partners in the picture helps minimize misunderstandings. Reporting requirements vary between programmes. Often, the reporting load is onerous, and the availability of people who can write well and who have the time to do so is a considerable benefit in facilitating the flow of information. One of the programmes has very heavy reporting requirements, a factor that was not fully taken on board at the planning stage caused some difficulties initially. Reporting often involves coaxing the required information from programme participants.

Using list servers is fine, but it is important to try to avoid **information overload** and to understand that **'non-response'** does not necessarily indicate disengagement or agreement. The subject of each communication should be clear, allowing recipients to decide quickly whether or not to read the message, but at the same time reassuring them that they have been included and given the opportunity to respond. When a response is needed, it is best to communicate individually with the relevant people and to structure the message in a way that stimulates reaction.

The problem of **language** often arises in multi-partner, multi-country programmes. Bioversity operates primarily in English, with some translations into Spanish and French. Its Regional Offices operate in English and to a limited extent in the local language. The obvious way to overcome the language barrier between English and other languages is to provide translations, but usually budgets do not provide for systematic translation. For programmes that are large and dispersed, and therefore likely to involve a number of local languages, it is more difficult to find partners that not only have the required technical and management skills, but are also fluent in English. Language-related communication problems can also arise from not understanding technical terminology.

Technical issues are often common to many regions, and the experiences in one region should be available to regions, but this usually requires **translation**. This is an area where it is not possible to rely on back-stopping from Bioversity's Regional Offices, because they do not have the resources (financial nor temporal) to provide such support on a regular basis.

Management

Good project management can be seen as boring and often is not highly valued in research organizations but it is a vital element in the success of multi-partner programmes. The main management issues raised at the peer-assist related to management structure, planning, finance, monitoring and evaluation, trouble-shooting and managing impact expectations for impact.

Management structure

The management structure of the multi-partner programmes varied. For example, one of them has an International Steering Committee, from which a small Executive Committee is elected, as well as an Information Management Committee. The Executive Committee can make decisions on the basis of Steering Committee guidelines or in anticipation of Steering Committee approval. Each country also has a National Steering Committee.

It is important to be clear about the mandates of **steering committees and advisory boards**, as the terms are not synonymous. A steering committee steers (i.e., takes decisions), while an advisory board advises, and its advice is usually given to the steering committee. If the programme is large and all the partners want to be on the advisory board, meetings could become too big for effective action and will add considerably to the operating costs of the programme. If institutes pay their own costs, it could be difficult to avoid having to accept their choice of delegate, who might be a senior staff member only remotely involved, rather than a scientist actively involved in the programme. If the costs of board meetings are to be met from programme funding, then due allowance for this must be built into the budget. One solution is for the full board to elect a small (3–5 person) executive team.

One programme developed from a pre-existing platform, with European Union funding. The Steering Committee had one representative from each of the 34 countries, while the Steering Group had representatives from each participating partner. Meetings therefore involved many people, which required considerable organizational and preparatory effort to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

Another programme had initially organized activities on a sub-regional basis, but that soon became unworkable, with little cross-border cooperation, and its activities are now implemented on a national basis. It was pointed out, however, that even within countries there can be **inter-institutional rivalries** that can prevent cooperative action. Where there is a national policy supporting the devolution of activities, programmes have been reasonably successful.

The management structure needs to take into account **workload and timescale**. One programme had been set up to run for 1.5 work-years, but it soon became apparent that some national partners lacked the capacity to manage the programme effectively without additional support from Bioversity. Time had to be spent on building up this capacity first, with the result that the time allocated for programme implementation was now too short.

The multi-partner programme representatives also discussed the **role of Bioversity**, which they saw as one that combined research and support. They were not clear how the programme partners viewed Bioversity, but indicated that it was important that Bioversity made its role highly visible by visiting participants and providing support either directly through personal contact on a regular basis or otherwise helping to support effective programme implementation.

Planning

At the programme conception stage, **donors** vary considerably in their requirements. Some require detailed on information on workplans and collaborators from the outset, while others will accept a well-argued concept note, followed up later by a detailed workplan.

Whenever the workplan is developed, the process should involve all the potential partners. This requires funding for a **planning workshop,** so that the partners can express their views in face-to-face meetings and can approve any adjustments to the original concept that might be needed because of changed requirements or resources. Providing an introductory workshop that includes an inception planning meeting has proven very effective. This fosters a degree of commitment and coherence and encourages the development of personal networks.

Care should be taken not to allow **preconceptions** (e.g., about people, institutions, donors, beneficiaries) to distort a workplan. It is also important for workplans to have an inherent flexibility, allowing for review and adjustment as needed.

Implementation plans tend to evolve as activities progress, and so the original programme plan should not be inflexible. However, all partners should be involved in (or, at the very least, be clearly informed of) any changes proposed, and they must feel that they have some influence over what changes are to be made.

Finance

The allocation of programme funds to specific activities should be **transparent** and the rationale behind funding differences should be obvious. This will help to minimize fiscal problems and ensure a clear audit trail, which is important not only to build trust, but also to meet the demands of donors, who increasingly request more detailed accounting. Partners should also be encouraged to demonstrate a clear audit trail and to quantify their inputs in kind, with a reasonable assessment of the value of those inputs.

In one programme, care is taken to make all financial allocations transparent. Each country receives an indicative budget, which is then adjusted to compensate for **national differences** (e.g., some countries are so big that extra money is needed to cover the cost of travelling to meetings).

The issue of how to decide on **budget allocations** involved much discussion time at the peer-assist meetings. The overriding requirement is to provide enough funds to ensure that the various activities have the potential to succeed. A related issue is that of **institutional overheads**. When carried by different partner organizations, this can can significantly reduce the amount of operational funding available.

It is also important to ensure that the funds actually reach the **intended recipients** and that the amount sent corresponds with the amount promised. In some programmes, funds have languished in the banks responsible for the transfer or in the institutional administration system. The **timely disbursement** of money was a constantly recurring theme during the peer-assist meetings. Delays in donor funding transfer and restrictions on pre-funding can result in delays of several months between ratification and delivery of funds to Bioversity. Such delays translate into **delays** in implementing a programme, which could greatly affect the programme itself (e.g., if funds do not arrive until after the start of the growing season, a project could be delayed by a whole growing cycle, with only two growing seasons instead of the three anticipated in the project plan).

The contribution of Bioversity as the hosting/coordinating organization is often underestimated, and the institute's **contributions in kind** should be clearly recorded. This could help to increase the staffing levels for programme coordination. In addition, when assessing Bioversity's potential involvement in a programme, a needs assessment should be conducted. The technical expertise that is available within Bioversity should be used as much as possible.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) help ensure that projects operate as planned and that results are properly reported and disseminated. But M&E is also often **expensive and time-consuming**, and can affect trust between the programme coordinator and partners. M&E can be seen as **invasive**, and needs to be handled sensitively. If the coordinator maintains close contact with all the partners, visiting as many projects as possible and as often as possible problems in implementation can be identified early and resolved. In this digital age, virtual visiting might be possible in some contexts, but in some cultures people are not willing to discuss activities with someone they have not met face to face. Another cultural aspect that can affect M&E is the degree of willingness to admit faults or failure.

The tendency for donors to demand more detailed accounting means that projects must systematically record activities. In this context, the concept of contribution-in-kind by collaborating institutes must not be forgotten, and should be clearly acknowledged in all reporting.

Trouble-shooting

Several programmes noted that in some countries there is considerable inter-institutional **rivalry,** including inter-ministry rivalry, with some institutes hardly acknowledging each other's existence, let alone cooperating with them. This poses considerable problems for the coordinator when activities should be operating on a national basis.

The **trust** factor becomes important in situations where the programme coordinator has very little leverage – carrots but no sticks. It becomes necessary to rely on the **goodwill** of partners, but partnerships can turn sour, particularly if an undercurrent of "What's in it for me?" becomes a maelstrom of petty jealousies that threatens the whole programme.

An allied problem is **arrogance**. People brought into a programme because of their particular expertise sometimes start treating that area of work as their personal fiefdom. Attempts to reduce their power can lead to efforts to sabotage programme in some way. Obviously, it is better to try to prevent such situations arising in the first place. Revolving membership of committees, boards and advisory groups can help reduce the development of such fiefdoms. Often, however, there is a very limited choice of potential collaborators and it is necessary to accept what is offered in order for the programme to progress.

Managing impact expectations

Donors often expect a programme to have an **obvious impact** in a relatively short time (about 3 years). There is therefore considerable pressure to focus on projects that are likely to provide a positive result within this timeframe. This can weigh against programmes with a strong focus on **developing local capacity**, in favour of using experienced **expatriate staff**. This might ensure demonstrable project outcomes, but it will not necessarily promote sustainable in-country capability. A nominal 3-year project might require an extra 2 years to train locals to the point where they can implement programme activities successfully.

5. Conclusion

Managing the ILAC Initiative is a complex task, involving coordinating the activities of many organizations and, through various participatory communication methods, encouraging partners to exchange knowledge and learn from experiences. In 2007, when a large grant to the Initiative meant it needed to adopt a more formal approach to collaborative programme management, it organised two meetings, using the peer-assist process, in order to draw on the experiences of other, more established multi-partner, multi-donor programmes hosted at or coordinated by Bioversity. In particular, ILAC hoped to learn how these programmes developed and maintained partner commitment and motivation and how they overcame programme management problems.

The exercise proved to be very useful, highlighting many common problems in relation to establishing partnerships, dealing with differing levels of partner capacity, developing partnership communication strategies, and managing partnerships. The feedback on how the programmes overcame these problems, however, was more limited, which might have been due to the limited amount of time available for the meetings or, more probably, because in many cases the solutions had not been found, indicating the need for more research on how to manage complex multi-partner programmes effectively.

Annex: Participants in the Peer-Assist Process

The participants in the peer-assist process included the ILAC team members – Jamie Watts (Project Coordinator),Cristina Sette (Programme Specialist) and Oonagh Darby (Programme Assistant) – and representatives from eight programmes.

Crop Wild Relatives Project, *represented by Annie Lane (Global Project Coordinator)*

Funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), this 5-year programme covering five countries (Bolivia, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Armenia, and Uzbekistan) was set up in 2004 to promote effective *in situ* conservation of crop wild relatives to ensure their continued availability for improving global food security. It is led by Bioversity and implemented by UNEP, and the international agencies actively involved in it include FAO, BGCI, UNEP-WCMC, IUCN and the German Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food. Its major tasks are to develop international and national information systems on crop wild relatives, build the capacity of national partners to gather and use information on crop wild relatives, and raise awareness among policy-makers, conservation managers, plant breeders and local users of the potential of crop wild relatives for improving agricultural sustainability. The programme works closely with relevant government ministries to ensure that conservation measures are supported by laws and policies, and that each country develops a management plan for at least one protected area that contains priority crop wild relatives. More information at http://www.bioversityinternational.org/scientific_information/themes/crop_wild_relatives/overview.html

European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN), *represented by Jarkko Koskela (Coordinator)*

EUFORGEN is a collaborative mechanism among European countries to promote the conservation and sustainable use of forest genetic resources. Established in 1994 and financed by EU member countries, it is coordinated by a Secretariat at Bioversity in collaboration with FAO and is overseen by a Steering Committee composed of National Coordinators nominated by the member countries. The role of the National Coordinators is to: promote the programme at national level; liaise between the Secretariat and relevant ministries and the national institutions involved in EUFORGEN activities; ensure that necessary resources are channelled to the Programme; and nominate country representatives to the EUFORGEN Networks and maintain regular contact with them. The programme has helped strengthen national efforts on forest genetic resources, has contributed to the development of new EU programmes and policies, and has provided a useful platform for developing bilateral cooperation and implementing large research projects on forest genetic resources in Europe. More information at http://www.euforgen.org/

Genetic Resources Policy Initiative (GRPI), *represented by Michael Halewood (Supervisor)*

The GRPI was set up in 2002 to strengthen the capacity of developing countries to develop policy frameworks for multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral (‘3M’) cooperation in relation to genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA). Work is currently taking place in seven countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal, Peru, Uganda, Vietnam and Zambia) and in two sub-regions (East Africa, and West and Central Africa). Among the reasons for the initiative was the need to building national capacity to implement international legal agreements on GRFA (e.g., the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and the Convention on Biological Diversity). The initiative is being implemented by Bioversity and IDRC in two phases: Phase 1 – the creation of 3M task forces in each country and sub-region to conduct surveys on GRFA issues; Phase 2 – putting in place mechanisms to ensure delivery of project outputs. The GRPI's activities are overseen by a Steering Committee comprised of people drawn from government agencies, research centres, donor organizations, civil society organizations, industry and regional networks. More information at http://www.grpi.org/

Global Facilitation Unit (GFU) for Under-Utilized Species, *represented by Irmgard Hoeschle-Zeledon (Coordinator)*

A multi-partner initiative of GFAR, FAO, IFAD, Bioversity and ICUC, the GFU for Underutilized Species was created in 2002 to foster information exchange in underutilized species and to encourage the wider deployment of these species globally. It is funded by BMZ and hosted by Bioversity. The unit is guided by a Steering Committee composed of representatives of Bioversity, BMZ, FAO, GFAR, ICUC and IFAD. It supports networks, organizations and others working on underutilized plant species by providing access to up-to-date information; formulating recommendations to policy makers for the amendment of national and international policies to create an enabling environment for these species; and increasing public awareness of the role of underutilized species in improving the livelihoods of poor. More information at http://www.underutilized-species.org/default.asp

Information and Communication Technology and Knowledge Management (ICT-KM Program of the CGIAR), *represented by Enrica Porcari (Chief Information Officer)*

Created by the CGIAR and hosted by Bioversity, the ICT-KM Program promotes the use of ICTs and KM to improve the effectiveness of the CGIAR system's work to improve livelihoods in developing countries. It supports efforts to achieve cost-effective multi-directional communication, to improve the ability to collaborate, and to develop and apply tools to support multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural teams. Initially guided by an ICT-KM strategy developed through consultations with representatives of most CGIAR Centers and functional levels, the programme is managed by the CGIAR Chief Information Officer. This involves overseeing a series of projects, as well as a range of other activities (e.g., nurturing communities and connections, negotiating economies of scale across Centers, and ongoing evaluation and learning). More information at http://ictkm.cgiar.org/index.php

Enhancing the contribution of neglected and underutilized species to food security, and to the incomes of the rural poor (IFAD NUS I phase), *represented by Stefano Padulosi (Senior Scientist)*

This is a 5-year project (2001-2005). Global food security has become increasingly dependent on just a few crops. More than 50% of the global requirement for proteins and calories are met by maize, wheat and rice, and only 150 crops are traded on a significant global scale. Yet surveys indicate there are over 7,000 plant species in the world that are cultivated or harvested from the wild for food. These neglected and underutilized species (NUS) play a crucial role in the food security, income generation and food culture of the rural poor. Lack of attention has meant that their potential value is under-estimated and under-exploited. It also places them in danger of continued genetic erosion and disappearance. More information at http://www.bioversityinternational.org/scientific_information/themes/neglected_and_underutilized_species/overview.html

System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP), *represented by Jane Toll (Coordinator)*

In response to the need for an integrated, system-wide strategy on genetic resources, the SGRP was established in 1994 to implement collaborative activities that complemented individual genetic resources programmes at CGIAR Centers (e.g., research on the economic valuation of genetic resources, policies for handling genetic resources, conservation technology, genebank collection management and duplication, and information management). The SGRP is coordinated through a Secretariat at Bioversity, which is responsible for day-to-day coordination and provides support in the areas of policy, representation, public awareness, information management and fundraising; an elected Executive Committee comprising the Chair and two other members works with the Secretariat to implement collective decisions. The programme is guided by the ICWG-GR, comprising representatives from each Center and from FAO; it sets SGRP strategy and priorities, and meets annually to agree a programme of activities. Individual Centres take the lead on collaborative activities, depending on their expertise. More information at http://sgrp.cgiar.org/

Central Advisory Service for Intellectual Property (CAS-IP), *represented by Victoria Henson-Apollonio (Project Coordinator)*

The CAS-IP mission is to assist the Alliance Centers of the CGIAR, their partners and the CGIAR system as a whole in a comprehensive approach to the management of Centers' intellectual assets as public goods. It collects and documents IP lessons learned throughout the CGIAR system, making this information available to subsistence farmers in developing countries and building a collective knowledge base on IP lessons learned within the CGIAR. Its overall goal is to facilitate access to and use of CGIAR products for the benefit of the poor through effective IP and technology transfer management. More information at http://www.cas-ip.org/

Acronyms and abbreviations

BGCI	Botanic Gardens Conservation International
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CAS-IP	Central Advisory Service for Intellectual Property
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
EU	European Union
EUFORGEN	European Forest Genetic Resources Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFAR	Global Forum on Agricultural Research
GFU	Global Facilitation Unit
GRFA	genetic resources for food and agriculture
GRPI	Genetic Resources Policy Initiative
ICT	information and communication technology
ICUC	International Centre for Underutilised Crops
ICWG-GR	Inter-Centre Working Group on Genetic Resources
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILAC	Institutional Learning and Change
IUCN	World Conservation Union
KM	knowledge management
LoA	Letter of Agreement
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
NUS	neglected and underutilized species
SGRP	System-wide Genetic Resources Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Centre