



Editor's note:

This paper represents an assessment conducted for IPGRI's External Programme and Management Review in 2002. It has not been published previously.

The full version of this Impact Assessment and Evaluation Discussion Paper can be found at www.ipgri.cgiar.org

Nature and effectiveness of partnerships:

a study of several projects coordinated by IPGRI

J. Watts and J. Robinson

Background

The *modus operandi* of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) is not typical of centres belonging to the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) because IPGRI is a scientific research institute without laboratories or experimental fields. Instead, IPGRI forms partnerships with a wide range of collaborators, including public and private institutes, international and national organizations and individuals ranging from policy-makers to subsistence farmers. The institute mobilizes its partners to achieve goals related to sustainable management and use of plant genetic resources with the aim of improving peoples' lives mainly in developing countries. IPGRI is an effective coordinator because it has a multidisciplinary professional staff and a decentralized structure. By working together, IPGRI and its partners are able to achieve goals that would be beyond the scope of a single institute.

This paper presents an analysis of the nature and effectiveness of three partnerships coordinated by IPGRI: 1) the International Coconut Genetic Resources Network (COGENT), 2) *in situ* conservation of agricultural biodiversity in Nepal and 3) traditional leafy vegetables in sub-Saharan Africa (ALV). COGENT is a global network coordinated by IPGRI. It links partners in 38 countries through their common interest in conserving coconut genetic resources. In the *in situ* conservation project in Nepal, IPGRI works with the Nepalese agricultural research service and a national nongovernment organization (NGO). The ALV project links national partners in five geographically distant sub-Saharan African countries and contributes to a global project on neglected and under-used species.

Results

All partners make useful contributions to and receive benefits from their partnerships. Contributions include financial support, technical assistance and in-kind materials and resources. Partners also bring in their own informal networks and contacts. For example, in the Nepal *in situ* project, the NGO Local Initiatives in Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) had well-established connections with farmers and farming communities and was able to connect the project's research with farmers' fields. Financial support comes from a range of donors and sometimes from national partners. All partners contribute substantial amounts of their time.

The partnership approach has yielded a number of outputs, benefits and impacts. Outputs include improved germplasm and genebank facilities, better communication and management practices, enhanced conservation of genetic resources, training of personnel and increased public awareness of agricultural issues. Rural income generation and employment opportunities have also been improved. The projects have also encouraged links between countries, between technical sectors and between research organizations and farmers. Capacity development in research institutes has stimulated introduction of innovative approaches to plant genetic resources conservation and use.

Contributions of the partnership approach

A partnership approach provides several unique contributions towards achieving more complex project objectives:

- cost sharing and shared commitment
- synergy and complementarity
- responsibility
- security
- credibility and prestige
- links
- capacity development.

Conclusions

It is unlikely that independent efforts could have created the quality and quantity of outputs and the benefits of mutual added value and synergy that were seen in all three cases. In addition, IPGRI played a unique role in coordinating the efforts of the partners. Some reasons for IPGRI's success as a coordinator are given below:

- IPGRI is an established international research organization with a global mandate for plant genetic resources conservation and use
- IPGRI has regional offices through which it can create links with field-level activities
- IPGRI has established administrative systems and manages financial resources at an international level, offering donors a high level of accountability
- a broad range of expertise exists among IPGRI's technical staff who can provide research inputs and technical backstopping
- through the CGIAR and other networks, IPGRI has access to an even greater stock of expertise and political support
- IPGRI's senior management has solid links with international funding and research agencies and with high-level decision-makers in national governments. The senior management also operates on a level with ministers and directors of national, regional and international organizations.

All three projects have finite financial support and IPGRI has no contractual commitment to its partners beyond the time-span of the current activities. However, all three projects do have scope for continuation if they can secure adequate leadership. None of them have so far developed a strategy for phasing out IPGRI as a coordinator. The sustainability of these projects is therefore under threat if IPGRI can no longer play its leadership role. The projects all have complex objectives and are well suited to a partnership approach. Projects that aim to achieve simpler goals, such as training or conservation of germplasm using traditional approaches, may find the costs of maintaining partnerships are less desirable.

Although the partnership approach has many benefits, there are also some drawbacks. The transaction costs of priority setting and action planning are high, while negotiated decision-making is time-consuming and often results in compromise solutions. International coordination of projects is expensive and the sustainability of funding support is never guaranteed. IPGRI has learned the following lessons from its involvement in the three projects:

- very strong coordination on the part of IPGRI may not be sustainable or desirable in the long term
- partners must be carefully selected to ensure maximum benefits to all
- costs must be carefully weighed against the benefits and partnerships should be developed only in cases where it is the most cost-effective approach to achieve the desired outcome
- introducing new development ideas and methods into national programmes requires a multi-level approach that includes research institutes, politicians and farming communities.

Related IPGRI Impact Assessment Briefs

- 2 The International *Musa* Testing Programme
- 9 An assessment of IPGRI's Letters of Agreement 1996–2001

**FUTURE
HARVEST**
<www.futureharvest.org>

IPGRI is
a Future Harvest Centre
supported by the
Consultative Group on
International Agricultural
Research (CGIAR)

**International Plant
Genetic Resources
Institute**

Via dei Tre Denari 472/a
00057 Maccarese
Rome, Italy
Phone: (+39) 0661181
Fax: (+39) 066197661
Email: ipgri@cgiar.org
www.ipgri.cgiar.org

IPGRI's Impact Assessment and Evaluation Discussion Paper series and Impact Assessment Briefs present the results of evaluations and impact assessments carried out by or for IPGRI. The papers present work in progress with the purpose of stimulating discussion and critical comment. They have been subjected to internal review but not a full peer review in all cases. The findings, interpretations and conclusions are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IPGRI. Many of the Discussion Papers will eventually be peer reviewed and published, at which time their content may also be revised.

Readers should send their comments and feedback on the papers to:
Jamie Watts (j.watts@cgiar.org), IPGRI, Office of the Director General.