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MEETING REPORTS

Regional Meeting for Central and Western Asia and North Africa to facilitate and promote implementation of the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Unsustainable Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Held in Aleppo, Syrian Arab Republic, from 22–25 June 1998

The meeting was hosted by the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), and organized with the assistance of the Regional Office for Central and Western Asia and North Africa (CWANA) of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and System-wide Genetic Resources Programme (SGRP) of the Consultative Group of International Agriculture Research (CGIAR). A total of 75 participants representing 26 countries and 8 international organizations attended the meeting. The International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, Leipzig, Germany 1996 adopted the Global Plan of Action (GPA) for the conservation and sustainable use of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. In line with the decisions of the International Technical Conference, the GPA will be implemented through a participatory process involving all stakeholders. A series of regional meetings are being held, building upon the country-driven participatory process for formulating the GPA.

The aims of this meeting were to

(1) Identify opportunities for implementation, including potential sources of funding; (2) Strengthen the involvement of stakeholders in national and international programmes; and (3) Promote implementation through the various organizations, and to provide for coordination and cooperation amongst them.

The provisional programme of work was adopted, based on three background presentations on GPA and review of the status of GPA implementation. Three thematic topics, namely National Programmes, Community PGRFA management and regional and international collaboration, were addressed in parallel working groups. For each plenary topic, a number of general presentations and regional activities were organized. Theme 1 was on 'Strengthening National Programmes, strategies and policies'.

Presentations were made on (a) national coordination mechanism involving all stakeholders and (b) integration of PGRFA planning in the wider contexts of agriculture and biodiversity. The experiences of Tunisia and Turkey were presented. Theme 2 was on 'Strengthening community PGRFA management'.

Presentations were made on identifying mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of farmers and communities to conserve, use, improve and manage PGRFA. The case histories and experiences from Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, Jordan and the FAO approach were presented.

Theme 3 was on 'Strengthening regional and international collaboration with particular emphasis on promoting the use of PGRFA'. Nine presentations were made on the roles of regional networks, crop networks, and international organizations, particularly promoting the use of PGRFA.

The different funding issues, sources and opportunities were identified. Briefing on international policy issues, identification of elements of weak programmes and project concepts were discussed. Several existing funding sources were identified as multinational donors (e.g. GEF, the World Bank, UNDP, Islamic Development Bank, and so on), bilateral donors and foundations, national funding sources and private sources. The non-donor organizations such as FAO, IPGRI, ICARA, GIAR and ACSAD can be partners in facilitating funding.

In order to facilitate the funding of a country's GPA implementation, it was proposed that efforts should be made to secure funding from environmental and conservation funds. Efforts will be made to: ensure that activities are recognized as a priority by national authorities; develop proposals that are competitive; and develop appropriate partnerships with the private sector.

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Regional Workshop on Preparation and Financing for National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification

Held in Cairo, Egypt, from 7–9 July 1998

The Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE), The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), The League of Arab States (Technical Secretariat-CAMRE) and the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) Office to combat Desertification and Drought (UNOS) organized the regional workshop. The meeting was hosted by CEDARE.

The aims of the workshop were:

(1) Training and preparation of national Action Programmes, including training in participating methods and creating partnership and synergy between existing organizations. This was in order to unify efforts in project and programme financing, to identify priorities and improve information management;
(2) To create opportunities for partnership between national institutions, regional institutions and the donor community; and
(3) The networking of institutions to support the efforts in combating desertification.

About 80 participants, representing 17 countries from West Asia and North Africa, 13 international and regional organizations, 6 non-governmental organizations, and some donor organizations, attended the workshop. Training was conducted by the UNDP-Office to Combat Desertification and Drought, on the methodology for preparation of national Action Programmes under the UN Conventions to combat desertification (UNCCD).

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Papers were presented by the donor organizations/countries on their expectations, in terms of quality for proposals to be submitted. They also presented the rules for application for funding under the umbrella of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

Presentations made by international and regional organizations, as well as the non-governmental organizations, demonstrated their institution's capabilities which could be made available to assist other countries in the implementation of their UNCCD. Regarding the financial resources and funding mechanism to support the implementation of the Programmes, both donor and recipient organizations agreed that it is necessary to identify clearly the activities to be funded, ensure sustainable funding, to follow up and evaluate the programmes with representatives of all the partners, and to encourage the triangular cooperation or triangular arrangements at a sub-regional level. The term 'triangular' refers to a situation whereby projects and programmes initiated by two or more countries are financed by a third party, in the spirit of partnership. This kind of cooperation requires mutual understanding and trust amongst participants.

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Land-Boundary Demarcation and Management

A workshop of the International Boundaries Research Unit, University of Durham, Durham, UK, held during 13–14 July 1998

Most of the current 192 sovereign states share a national boundary, whether land or marine, with several other states. At one extreme, China shares with other sovereign states 15 land and 6 marine boundaries, only 10 of which have been bilaterally accepted. Although the number of China's neighbours is at the high end of that spectrum, its fraction of agreed borders is quite in line with the current worldwide situation. More than half of the world's land boundaries and more than two-thirds of its marine boundaries are ill-defined or contested.

A national border must first be *delimited* (through the negotiation and consummation of a bilateral treaty) then be *demarcated* (through surveying, the setting of permanent boundary markers, and mapping), and finally be *managed* (through a variety of unilateral and bilateral frontier arrangements). During its first day, this tightly packed two-day workshop examined land-boundary demarcation; and during its second day, one aspect of boundary management, namely the management of shared (trans-frontier) natural resources and other environmental concerns, was examined.

The 27 workshop participants , coming from 17 widely scattered countries, were mid- to high-level representatives of their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence or Interior. The six tutors to which the participants were exposed were all world-renowned specialists in their respective arcane fields.

Land-boundary demarcation was addressed from theoretical, technical, and practical perspectives. For readers of this journal, suffice it to say that the state-of-the-art, high technology equipment and procedures in use today in the demarcation of land boundaries has made this a highly specialized, time-consuming and expensive operation. Indeed, under difficult terrain and climatic conditions (not infrequent in frontier regions), such demarcations typically progress at a rate of perhaps nine kilometres per month and cost in the order of US$150 000 per kilometre.

Boundary management was addressed as a most important, inherently difficult, and largely neglected field of inquiry. The fundamental aims of good long-term boundary management were suggested to include the achievement of international peace, of borderland prosperity, of local and national security, and, ultimately, of borderland integration. The management issues associated with border-straddling natural resources were a particular emphasis of this workshop. It became quite evident, by way of example, that the management of border straddling oil-fields, surface waters, aquifers, fisheries, wildlife (mammalian, avian, and so on), and areas important for the protection of biodiversity are hampered by a combination of their technical complexity and political sensitivity.

As might well be expected, cooperative actions dealing with shared natural resources are hampered not only by deeply ingrained attachments by states to their national sovereignty and by a paucity of widely accepted relevant treaty law. Hampered additionally by the contested location of the boundary itself, resolution of these issues is thus all too often attempted by resort to armed conflict. The allocation of available freshwater resources between upstream and downstream states in a shared river system remains as intractable as ever, with equitable model treaty law (although available) virtually impossible to institute. The management issues surrounding cross-border movements of air and water pollutants, are complicated by the varying levels of acceptance, the differing interpretations and the haphazard enforcement of international environmental law. The emerging principle of international environmental law is that: the activities within the jurisdiction or control of a state do not cause damage to the environment of other states or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

The sundry difficulties just alluded to notwithstanding, a variety of innovative approaches to the peaceful and equitable resolution of trans-frontier natural-resource and other environmental issues were touched upon. These included cooperation in wild-fire suppression, in insect pest control, in countering illegal resource-based activities such as wildlife poaching, and in the development in the rapidly expanding field of eco-tourism. Additionally noted were the sharing of technical expertise and other relevant knowledge and of educational efforts. Elaborated upon in some detail were the need and the potential for establishing trans-frontier nature reserves.

The pressing need to establish new protected natural areas in most countries and habitat types was presented as a cornerstone of biodiversity protection, with frontier regions being as yet under-utilized in this regard. Time was thus devoted to analysing the value and means of establishing trans-frontier nature reserves. It was stressed that such reserves would not only serve to protect nature, but would in the very process of their establishment and subsequent maintenance, also serve as bilateral confidence- and security-building measures. An important consideration associated with trans-frontier nature reserves was their formal demilitarization. These trans-frontier nature reserves may be able to serve between one and three political functions:

a) to reinforce existing amicable relations between neighbouring states;

b) to render moot conflict over contested border areas (including contested islands);

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c) to facilitate the federation or unification of neighbouring states working toward such a goal.

Although not suitable for all borders, it was gratifying to learn that at least two such trans-frontier 'peace parks' are currently under active consideration by governments that were represented at the workshop, and that further 'peace parks' may soon be considered. A favourable note was also made of the very recent formal linking, under a single cross-border authority, of Botswana's and South Africa's respective abutting Gemsbok National Parks. Now known as Kgalagadi Peace Park, this being the first of six such peace parks currently in the process of being established between South Africa and each of its six neighbouring states.

This workshop, the seventh of an annual series on diverse border-related issues, was sponsored by the International Boundaries Research Unit of the University of Durham, apparently the only research institute of its kind in the world (responses are welcomed). In addition to occasional monographs and papers, the Unit publishes the quarterly *Boundary and Security Bulletin*, which is to include some of the reports presented at the workshop.

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International Coastal Symposium

Held at The Breakers, Royal Palm Beach, Florida, during 19–23 May 1998

First held at Hilton Head Island (South Carolina) in 1991, this series moved to Bahia Blanca, Argentina, then Reykjavik, Iceland, to return to the US East Coast. Some 200 participants from about 25 countries did not, remarkably, duplicate presentations of Coastal zone Canada 96, Coastal zone 97, BORDOMER 97, all reported in *Environmental Conservation*. The absence of German and French researchers was somewhat surprising.

The symposium touched only briefly on economic, social and other human problems, and centred instead on the themes related to coastal protection, sea-level fluctuations and environmental impacts. It addressed the opposing philosophies of modified hard structures and soft methods on one side, and 'let Nature have its way' on the other. The hazards such as *El Niño*, cliff failures, hurricanes and storm surges were also considered. Two papers reviewed the numerous 'alternative' methods of coastal defence. Two fieldtrips took participants to Port Everglades, the Fort Lauderdale beach redevelopment, route A1A overdevelopment along Galt Ocean Mile, the bypassing operation at Hillsboro Inlet, and the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee.

One may regret that too many papers were scheduled for the last day, and the multiple parallel sessions which deprived some participants of the opportunity to attend more presentations.

The major topics covered were morphology, coastal: -sediments, -ecology, -hazards, -engineering, -surveys, and problems of inlets and estuaries, sea-level and climate changes and environmental impact. Environmental considerations permeated virtually all presentations. The level of papers was uniformly high, a welcome change from some recent conferences, and the meeting provided a unique opportunity to meet such leading researchers as Bruun, Pilkey, Fairbridge and several others. Though several case studies were included, particularly numerous for Brazil, India and Wales for instance, valuable information could be gathered on coastal erosion, beach nourishment, protective submerged hard structures, bypassing and sediment transport. The session on sea-level rise was perhaps the least informative and absorbed some 'orphans' dealing with environmental and socio-economic impacts.

The *Proceedings* have been assembled in two volumes making up a special issue of the *Journal of Coastal Research*. Several valuable papers, received too late for inclusion, will appear in regular issues of the *Journal of Coastal Research*.

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Sixth International Congress on the History of Oceanography, (ICHO)

Held at the Huanghai Hotel, Qingdao (Tsindao), P.R. China, 15–20 August 1998

The largest group of attendees was by far Chinese. Forty other nationals had manifested their intention to attend but only 30 showed up. Nineteen nations were thus represented within the 100 participants. Registration fees were very reasonable but travel costs were at the basis for the last minute 'defections'.Though the preliminary programme announcements mentioned them, there were no separate sessions running concurrently, and all sessions were plenaries.

Official foreign representation was very limited: actually only one ICHO group representative attended; a retired UNESCO civil servant represented the Intergovernmental Committee on Oceanography. The opening ceremony was characterized by the pathos typical of Asian hosts: it was colourful, lively, in good taste, and brief. The speeches by local officials were to the point, mercifully devoid of the lengthy 'electoral' discourses too common at Western venues. China became on 15 August 1998 a member of the 'Conference'.

The kindness, helpfulness and good organizational *savoir-faire* were remarkable, but, unfortunately communications were hampered by the language barriers. Valiant efforts by Chinese presenters to get their papers across, did not often suffice to avoid frustration in auditors and authors alike. One may only hope that a well-edited volume of the *Proceedings* may supplement, within a reasonable time-span, the book of *Abstracts* that was doled out. Time limits are essential since five years after the Fifth ICHO, the American editors have not yet managed to get a single word in print. That incredible delay generated a letter of protest to the Conference.

The Congress itself generated mixed reactions, some voiced by the ICHO representative:

1) Papers were far more environmentally and ecologically significant than expected at a 'history meeting' (e.g. sustainability, biodiversity, pollution, fish-kills);

2) They were too frequently dealing with *recent* research and were lacking historical perspective or input;

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3) Occasionally they betrayed hasty last minute preparation;
4) Several presentations missed historical breadth.
In brief, too much basic research, and too little history.

The session on national and regional contributions to marine science centred, appropriately, on the Indian and Pacific Oceans and Asia. Biographical sketches and institutions' achievements covered Otto Petterson, chemical oceanographers (*viz.* Gay-Lussac and Boyle). The work of the German oceanographers was poorly analysed and poorly cited (were the reasons language barriers or political bias?). On the other hand, the work of the stations at Vladivostock, Porto Novo and the Black Sea was amply illustrated.

Several papers focused on biological oceanography dealing with algae, biodiversity, sustainability and microbiology. Also noticeable were the papers on global change, conservation (in Taiwan), fish-kills, impacts of fishing methods and fish population stress. International cooperation highlighted Sino-Korean relations, and since Qingdao was once a German 'concession' (Tsindao), German–Chinese cooperation in marine science and technology got its turn.

The marine economics session included, strangely, the pointedly environmental paper on the history of coastal protection, the second communication to question some 'incrusted' myths. Sea-farming and husbandry received summary attention, and 'Marine minerals in China' was weighted heavily on hydrocarbon aspects. A review of tide-mills and the prospects of their re-use in isolated areas was placed in the physical oceanography session.

Culture and Education, lumped together, threw some light on recent Chinese ocean maritime civilizations, the influence of the Yellow River Culture on traditional marine culture. A rather synoptic view of marine education in China stressed a more philosophical approach rather than factual development. However the spread of topics was too diverse to touch upon each of them here. Several papers were withdrawn leaving some participants disappointed. Input from the young generation of marine scientists may be hoped for, even though, understandably, the history of science and oceanography is not a discipline that will 'feed its man', yet may contribute substantially in our efforts to solve problems of biodiversity, sustainability and adaptation to global change. It may also be usefully used to teach lessons in harbour development, pollution abatement and related topics.

Mid- and post-congress excursions were culturally very rewarding though not topic related, except for visits to the First Institute of Oceanography, and an impressive, pedagogically oriented, aquarium, founded in 1936 and being currently expanded.

While there were papers on ecosystems models and fisheries management, none handled coastal zone management, conflict uses and occupational changes, nor was there a discussion on 'blooms' or eutrophication even though some specialists attended the meeting.

The absence of the chairpersons of the First Conference in Monaco, (founded in 1966 under the aegis of Prince Rainier) was regrettable. It fell to a hastily drafted group of 'volunteer' old-timers to meet and recommend selected cities, the leading contenders of which were Naples, Lisbon and Halifax Nova Scotia, as possible venues for ICHO VII.

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