

**MEETING ON UNDER-UTILIZED AND ORPHAN COMMODITIES
FAO, ROME, 22 January 2001****SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS****1. BACKGROUND**

During the first GFAR Conference held in Dresden, Germany, in May 2000, the responsibility to explore ways and means to develop and strengthen research partnerships for “Under-utilized and Orphan Commodities” (UOC) was assigned to a specific Working Group. This Working Group strongly recommended an involvement of GFAR in this topic of UOC in order to: (a) increase the visibility and valorize the work already done on neglected commodities at all levels; and (b) stimulate activities at the regional level, as it is seen as the most appropriate level to deal with neglected commodities. However, while emphasizing the regional dimension, the Working Group also suggested that there should be a “facilitation mechanism” operating at the global level and recommended, as a first step in this direction, to set up a Task Force including FAO, ICUC and IPGRI.

To implement this recommendation, the GFAR Secretariat took the initiative to call an informal brainstorming session between a few representatives of FAO, ICUC and IPGRI who were joined by a representative from Germany and one from IFAD, considering their vested interest and commitment to support activities on this topic. The list of participants is attached as Annex 1.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Review progress made by the different institutions in the field of UOC since the Dresden Conference of May 2000.
- Further develop the concept of what could be a “global facilitation mechanism” for UOC.
- Explore how best to start operationalizing such a mechanism and decide on preliminary steps to be taken.

3. STRUCTURE AND DYNAMICS OF THE MEETING

The meeting was divided in two parts: (i) an information sharing session in the morning; and (ii) a brainstorming session in the afternoon. The second session was facilitated by Prof. Vernon Heywood whose participation was supported by FAO/AGP.

The GFAR “spirit” of trust, mutual respect and openness prevailed during the whole meeting and all contributions were made in a very positive and constructive manner, keeping in mind the ultimate beneficiaries of this inter-institutional effort, i.e. the small poor farmers who rely on these under-utilized and orphan commodities for their daily subsistence and/or for income generation.

4. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

4.1. All participants found the information exchange session very valuable and welcomed in particular the presentations and contributions made by the representatives of the crops, forestry and fisheries sub-sectors. They were encouraged and impressed by the wealth of initiatives in the field of UOC which strengthened their willingness to put in place a “global facilitating mechanism”.

4.2. A discussion took place on the terminology to use to define the target group of commodities involved. All institutions have struggled for years with this topic and it was therefore decided not to spend too much time on it and to continue to refer to “UOC”, at least for the time being. However, four broad major crop status groups were mentioned: wild species harvested as commodities; “semi-domesticated” species in local traditional production systems; “domesticated” but under-utilized; and “new” crops (although these form a continuum and this classification does not completely resolve questions of scope and definition).

4.3. The participants whose expertise was mainly in the crop sub-sector consider that the forestry sub-sector should definitely be part of any global initiative on UOC and saw advantages to keep the fisheries and livestock sub-sectors involved in the discussion and possible follow up actions. They identified some common interests and potential benefits for joint actions, in particular at the global level, e.g. policy issues, public awareness, fund raising, etc. As a consequence, the “C” of UOC will continue to mean “Commodities”¹, including the maintenance of the resource base that produces them.

4.4. Regarding the need to develop a “global plan of action” as suggested in Dresden, the participants agreed that not too much time should be spent in developing such a document. They, however, recognized the need to have a short (2-3 pages) paper defining a “global framework” for agricultural research for the development of UOC which would serve as a declaration of the importance of UOC and of the firm intention of the institutions to work together.

4.5. While endorsing the “commodity chain” principle and acknowledging the results achieved by the IPGRI/INIBAP – CIRAD facilitating unit based in Montpellier, France, for the main market/cash crops, the participants highlighted the complexity of tackling UOC and considered that the approach to be adopted for UOC may be different. According to them, more strategic thinking is definitely needed.

4.6. The participants agreed that most of the efforts and energies should be devoted to facilitate the emergence of the regional and sub-regional priorities, through a bottom-up approach. The key question remains on how to include UOC in the research priorities and get support for them from the policy and decision-makers at all levels: national, sub-regional, regional and global. All participants also recognized the urgent need to develop information systems (or strengthen existing ones) to serve the UOC community at large, including the consumers. As well as technical information, case studies, etc., such information systems could include databases on “who’s-doing-what” (players, countries, institutions, etc.) to facilitate research partnerships and networking.

¹ IPGRI prefers to use the term “species” for its neutrality and wide application beyond domesticated crop plants. For IPGRI, the word “commodities” may also introduce some ambiguity since for many readers it implies a certain level of research and attention, whereas the targets of the discussion are specifically disadvantaged by a lack of research and attention.

4.7. Finally, the participants decided not to go for a very ambitious programme from the start but to identify a few concrete activities which could be carried out with only marginal additional costs in order to concretely demonstrate the added value of joining forces in the field of UOC. Therefore they agreed to develop and implement the following plan of action and to meet around July 2001 to review the progress made and, if positive, to formally establish a “global facilitation mechanism” for UOC. This pragmatic approach should greatly facilitate the mobilization of funds to launch the proposed mechanism. Meanwhile, the GFAR Secretariat will continue to serve as the focal point for these different initiatives. Dr. de Haas offered to host the next meeting of this informal group on UOC in Germany.

5. THE PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION

5.1. “Global Framework”

FAO/AGP suggested that Prof. Vernon Heywood prepares in the coming two weeks a draft of such a document and that he could finalize it taking into account the comments and suggestions of the different participants. FAO/AGP offered to support this exercise within the GFAR umbrella.

ACTION: Prof. V. Heywood and FAO/AGP **DEADLINE:** End of February 2001

5.2. “Strategic Thinking”

All participants agreed on the need to develop a specific strategic approach to address the identification, conservation, development, sustainable use and marketing of under-utilized and orphan commodities for the benefit of local farmers in improving food security and alleviating poverty. Before deciding on commissioning a paper on this topic, the participants agreed to review a document which has been recently commissioned by IPGRI² through ICUC entitled: "Global Research on Underutilised Crops: An Assessment of Current Activities and Proposals for Enhanced Cooperation" authored by J.T. Williams and N. Haq

ACTION 1: IPGRI for immediate distribution & participants for comments and decision on the need or not to commission a paper on the subject.

DEADLINE: End of February 2001

ACTION 2: If necessary, GFAR Secretariat to identify funds to commission the paper and the most suitable author (after consultation with the other participants).

DEADLINE 2: Strategy Paper available for July 2001

5.3. Regional Priority Setting

Three initiatives have been identified in this field:

5.3.1. In the coming year, all regional/sub-regional fora will be revisiting their research priorities in order to provide, *inter alia*, inputs to the new regional approach of the CGIAR research planning and implementation process. The participants saw these activities as a good opportunity to start raising awareness on UOC and recommended to send messages to the regional/sub-regional fora as well as to the CGIAR Centres. On-going and planned activities in the Mediterranean region were briefly presented and it was suggested to consider this region to develop a pilot programme.

ACTION: GFAR Secretariat and IPGRI **DEADLINE:** End of February 2001

² This was agreed at a meeting on “Enlarging the basis of food security: role of underutilized species”, held at the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, India, 17 – 19 February 1999.

5.3.2. FAO/AGSI is actively preparing its International Conference to develop a “Global Initiative on Post-Harvest Technology (GIPHT)” by contracting the five regional fora to commission sub-regional status reports and to organize a regional workshop on the topic. The participants suggested that FAO/AGSI highlights in the terms of reference of the consultants the importance of the “under-utilized & orphan” dimension and, if possible, includes in the outline of the report a specific section on under-utilized and orphan crops that will greatly facilitate the gathering of information on UOC in the different regions.

ACTION: FAO/AGSI and GFAR Secretariat with inputs from IPGRI

DEADLINE: Mid-February 2001

5.3.3. ICUC is currently planning to support regional workshops to define or refine under-utilized crop priorities. FAO/AGP would favorably envisage to provide complementary support to this type of activity, if needed. The participants suggested to wait for the results of the FAO/AGSI regional workshops before embarking on these activities. Meanwhile, the dialogue between FAO/AGSI, FAO/AGP and ICUC should be pursued. Other agricultural sub-sectors should explore ways and means to identify their regional/sub-regional UOC priorities.

ACTION: FAO/AGSI & AGP, ICUC and all other participants **DEADLINE:** July 2001

5.4 *Information Systems*

5.4.1. EGFAR, the Electronic Global Forum, will develop a specific section on UOC to serve as the communication platform for the participants to this informal group (restricted access) and to start facilitating access to information and knowledge on UOC, including on planned international events.

ACTION: GFAR Secretariat

DEADLINE: Mid-February 2001

5.4.2. Since very large numbers of species/commodities (several thousand) are involved and there is a great amount of literature and activities, all institutions involved in the meeting will initiate discussions and explore ways and means to organize and facilitate access to their information on UOC. FAO/AGP offered to take immediately action in making available, through EcoPort, information on under-utilized and orphan crops. AGP put the mechanism in place the following day and is entering the UOC of ICUC and the IPGRI orphan crop species and commodity group priorities in a keyword search profile. This, if desired, can be extended to other commodities and is complementary to other GFAR/WAICENT initiatives. The possibility of eventually establishing a Clearing House mechanism was raised and should be explored further for consideration at the next meeting of the group.

ACTION: FAO/AGP, FAO/WAICENT and other FAO departments, IPGRI and ICUC

DEADLINE: Progress Report for July 2001

5.4.3. When assisting the regional and sub-regional fora to develop or strengthen their Regional Agricultural Information Systems (RAIS), FAO/WAICENT Outreach and the GFAR Secretariat will explore the possibility to establish specialized databases on UOC.

ACTION: FAO/WAICENT Outreach & GFAR Secretariat.

DEADLINE: Progress Report for July 2001

5.5 *Added Value of a global initiative on UOC*

In order to document the added value of “working together” in the field of UOC and to strengthen the case of establishing a global facilitation mechanism, the participants agree to join forces and to gather and analyze all research results obtained by individual institutions for one, if possible two, under-utilized or orphan crops or commodities. Sesame, Bambara Groundnut, oregano and jackfruit were mentioned as good potential candidates.

ACTION: IPGRI as lead institution; **DEADLINE:** One case documented for July 2001

5.6. Possible support to a “Global Facilitation Mechanism”

While postponing the decision to establish a “Global Facilitation Mechanism” to their next meeting in July 2001, the participants agree on the need to explore possible support for such a mechanism, considering the concept of the “Montpellier Facilitating Unit” for market/cash crops as a very interesting possibility.

ACTION 1: IFAD and IPGRI as part of their current discussions on the launching of a global initiative for “enhancing the contribution of neglected and underutilized species to food security and to incomes of the rural poor”

ACTION 2: Germany (BMZ) to explore possibilities to contribute (in kind or in cash) to the establishment of such a mechanism

ACTION 3: GFAR Secretariat to approach other institutions such as CBD and GEF to explore their interest in getting involved or supporting this UOC global initiative

DEADLINE: Progress Report for July 2001

Finally, in addition to the rather short-term plan of action mentioned above, the participants also recognized the need to develop a “flagship” programme on UOC. Three potential candidates were even mentioned: “aromatic & medicinal plants”; “home gardens” and “rattan”. The decision was taken to continue discussing informally the pros and cons of such a flagship programme and to review the situation during the next meeting.



GFAR

GLOBAL FORUM ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
FORUM MONDIAL DE LA RECHERCHE AGRICOLE
FORO GLOBAL DE INVESTIGACION AGROPECUARIA

Annex 1

**MEETING ON UNDER-UTILIZED AND ORPHAN COMMODITIES
FAO, ROME, 22 January 2001, 9:00 – 18:00, Espace Gabon Room, A-024**

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