

## **Multi-stakeholder platforms for generating genetic resources policies: The experience of the Genetic Resources Policy Initiative**

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## **Abstract**

The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are cross-cutting issues that affect a number of economic sectors, involve many different stakeholders and cover a wide range of scientific disciplines. For this reason, innovative methods of governance that facilitate communication and understanding among all the actors involved and between science and policy are required when developing and implementing policies and legal instruments for diversity conservation and use.

The Genetic Resources Policy Initiative (GRPI), a collaborative project with partners in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal, Peru, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia, and Bioversity International, proposed and tested a methodology for policy-making for the conservation and use of genetic resources which was built on three key elements: participation, research and capacity-building.

The project focused on creating multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral platforms, which could contribute to the development of comprehensive policies on genetic resources. The results of the GRPI project shows that these platforms can address the issues that arise concerning genetic resources conservation and use, and provides a number of lessons on how to make these platforms work efficiently and maximize their influence on generating policy.

**Keywords:** Biodiversity, genetic resources, policy, participation, platforms.

## **1. Introduction**

The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are cross-cutting issues that affect a number of economic sectors, involve many different stakeholders and cover a wide range of disciplines. This has a number of implications for policy-making processes: In the first place, the traditional compartmentalized structure of current governments may be an obstacle for fully implementing biodiversity policies since these policies may need to be recognized, supported and implemented by government departments other than those traditionally responsible for biodiversity management (i.e. ministries of agriculture and environment). Secondly, insufficient involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making processes may lead to establishing legal instruments that do not meet stakeholders' needs, or that may be in conflict with their interests. Finally, the scientific community and policy-makers must communicate to ensure that biodiversity policies are based on scientific evidence, that legal provisions are technically affordable and that the economic and social impacts of policies are considered at the developmental stage.

For these reasons, innovative methods of governance that facilitate communication and understanding among all the actors involved, and between science and policy, are required when developing and implementing policies and legal instruments for diversity conservation and use. The Genetic Resources Policy Initiative (GRPI) proposed and tested a methodology for policy-making for the conservation and use of genetic resources, which was built on three key elements: participation, research and capacity-building. GRPI was a 6-year project which took place in seven countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal, Peru, Uganda, Vietnam and Zambia) under the coordination of Bioversity International.

The GRPI methodology relied on the premise that developing effective genetic resources policies would require a process that involved as many stakeholders as possible, reflecting the complex nature of the trade-offs that the policies would have to address (Wale et al, 2008). In line with this premise, the project focused on creating and maintaining multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral national task forces which could enhance the dialogue between actors and help incorporate the result of social and scientific research in policy decision-making.

The GRPI project was a source of valuable experiences which can contribute to increasing knowledge on stakeholder participation in environmental and agricultural management and decision making. Although the literature about the benefits of stakeholder participation is vast (Martin and Sherington, 1997; Fischer, 2000; Beierle, 2002; Richards et al, 2004; Stringer et al, 2006; Greenwood et al, 1993; Okali et al, 1994; Clayton et al, 1995; Stringer and Reeds, 2007, among others), there are not so many works that actually assess to what extent participatory methodologies adopted in the context of concrete projects and initiatives have led to the expected benefits (Oels, 2006: 117; Reed, 2008: 2422).

This paper focuses on the multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral task forces of the GRPI project and assesses how successful they have been in contributing to the generation of more comprehensive and sound policy and legal instruments in the area of biodiversity conservation and use. The assessment was conducted using two common criteria for evaluation: process and outcome criteria

(Chess, 2000). Process criteria analyze how the task forces were established and how they functioned. Here, we have looked in particular at the internal and external elements that defined the ability of the task forces to provide inputs to the national policy debate on genetic resources. Outcome criteria assess the concrete products and long-term outcomes of the task forces. Ultimately this paper strives to document the lessons learned and link them to the existing literature on the value of stakeholder dialogues for decision-making in environmental management.

## **2. Methodology**

Informal interviews were held with project partners, external collaborators and members of the GRPI global coordination office. GRPI project reports and publications resulting from the project activities also provided valuable insights on the work of the task forces and on those lessons learned. A review of related scientific literature enabled the authors of this study to compare the lessons learned during the GRPI project, with recommendations provided by experts based on theoretical analysis and empirical experiences. In addition, the authors conducted a survey among task force members, which focused on the outputs and outcomes of the project, and on the factors that had determined the task forces' success, or lack of. In this way, the survey followed the model proposed by Oels (2006) for a stakeholder-based evaluation, where stakeholders themselves assess whether the process has achieved its broader goals and specific objectives.

## **3. The task forces as multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral platforms for policy influence**

### 3.1 The nature, composition and function of the task forces

The GRPI task forces were set up after some preliminary work with partners in Nepal, Peru and Zambia and constituted the core of the GRPI project in all the countries. After a highly inclusive consultation process, the national task forces developed a three-year programme of work with a series of activities to be carried out with the support, and under the supervision, of the task forces. These activities varied from research to capacity-building and were oriented towards the development of concrete legal and policy proposals, rooted in consultative and participatory processes.

The task forces constituted multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue among actors from different sectors and disciplines related to the conservation and use of biodiversity and, in particular, genetic resources. The philosophy of multi-stakeholder platforms is not new and has been widely applied to natural resources management and decision-making. It has its roots in the culture of consensus seeking and conflict resolution. Multi-stakeholder platforms allow stakeholders to share their views regarding different aspects of a problem, and then collectively explore differences and search constructively for solutions, going beyond the capacities and limitations of any one person. Multi-stakeholder platforms are therefore based on sharing resources, enhancing each other's capacities for mutual benefit and achieving a common purpose by sharing risks, responsibilities and rewards (Gray, 1989; Roling and Jiggins, 1998).

In particular, the task forces created a space for what Oels (2006) called stakeholder dialogues for science and for policy-making. Stakeholder dialogues for science aim to improve the knowledge base for decision-making. Their objective is to break the monopoly of “expert science” by providing alternative viewpoints. They undermine the privileged position of “experts”, whose knowledge is no longer regarded as automatically superior to other ways of knowing (Fischer, 1993). Stakeholder dialogues for policy-making aim to ground decision-making in a deliberative process that forges the collective will of the stakeholders (Oels 2006).

GRPI task forces were primarily established as governing bodies in charge of overseeing the development and implementation of the project at the national level (GRPI 2004) but they soon took on the role of platforms for dialogue. As a result of this role, members of the task forces, particularly in Egypt, Nepal, Peru and Vietnam, became more enthusiastic about identifying policy actions to address genetic resources issues and became more involved in proposing concrete measures to national authorities.

The task forces functioned through regular meetings. Each task force had a coordinator, chosen by the national host institutions, and the GRPI global coordination office. Task force members were identified in a relatively informal manner, often based on existing professional relationships.

In some of the countries, the process of identifying potential task force members involved consultations with a limited number of stakeholders, while in others this process was more extensive. With the more extensive consultations, the range of disciplines and sectors represented in the resultant task forces was considerably larger and therefore those task forces were in a better position to act as platforms for dialogue and policy influence. On the other hand, the larger task forces had to deal with higher transaction costs and more management problems than the smaller-sized task forces.

Tables 1 and 2 below show the approximate number of people from each sector and discipline represented in the task forces.

<b>GRPI Country</b>	<b>Government ministries and agencies</b>	<b>CSO/CBO/ farmers' organizations</b>	<b>Research/breeding institutes, genebanks, universities</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>Private industry</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	4		9	1	2
<b>Ethiopia</b>	3	2	6		
<b>Nepal</b>	4	4	6		2
<b>Peru</b>	3	3	3		
<b>Uganda</b>	5	1	5		
<b>Vietnam</b>	1	2	8		1
<b>Zambia</b>	4	4	4		1

Note: These numbers are estimates. Task force composition changed

Table 1: Number of people from each sector in the task forces						
GRPI Country	Government ministries and agencies	CSO/CBO/ farmers' organizations	Research/breeding institutes, genebanks, universities	Media	Private industry	
throughout the project.						

Table 2: Number of people from each discipline in the task forces							
	Agronomy (crops and livestock)	Biology	Business	Sociology	Economics	Law/policy	Journalism
<b>Egypt</b>	5	7		1	1	1	1
<b>Ethiopia</b>	4	3	1	1	1	1	
<b>Nepal</b>	6	6	2		1	1	
<b>Peru</b>	2	3		2		2	
<b>Uganda</b>	3	6				2	
<b>Vietnam</b>	6	2	1	2		1	
<b>Zambia</b>	7	3	1		1	1	

Note: These are approximate numbers. Task force composition changed throughout the project.

### 3.2 Benefits and challenges of establishing and maintaining the task forces as multi-stakeholder platforms

The participatory principles and processes of the GRPI project, and in particular the task forces, enabled a broad variety of stakeholders to:

- explore a wide range of ideas on genetic resources;
- identify issues of genetic resources conservation and management;
- create a sense of ownership over the outputs of the project and the policy or legal instruments arising from it;
- share knowledge and use broad and diverse expertise;
- link local needs with policy debates on genetic resources;
- create awareness about the value of genetic resources for food and agriculture and the importance of policy frameworks in various sectors (e.g. farmers' communities, researchers and policy-makers);
- build capacities within institutions of varying mandates and areas of work.

At the same time, working through task forces as platforms for dialogue was not easy. In the first place, there were obstacles to ensuring that all sectors and disciplines were represented in the task forces. Stakeholders in several GRPI countries had never been exposed to participatory processes and were unfamiliar with the principles and methodologies. Social and cultural issues constituted obstacles to dialogue in some GRPI countries: at the initial stages, farmers and NGOs found it difficult to make their voice be heard when outnumbered by

researchers and influential policy-makers on the task force. In addition, language barriers inhibited farmer participation, particularly in Nepal and Zambia. In Egypt and Uganda, sociologists were hired to provide technical backstopping and to assist task forces with consultation processes that would be accessible to all stakeholders.

The task forces consumed time and money and required much effort in terms of coordination. The performance of the task forces relied on the members' sense of ownership over the process and its outcomes. When their sense of ownership was weak, members tended to lose sight of their common vision and objectives, worked in a more isolated manner, and approached their activities from the perspective of their own interests and agendas, rather than focusing on common objectives.

Gunton and Day (2003, 13-14), after reviewing recent studies on multi-stakeholder platforms for resource and environmental management, identified five pre-conditions for success which can help determine when multi-stakeholder platforms are appropriate: 1) Commitment of decision-making agencies to the multi-stakeholder platforms; 2) commitment of all stakeholders; 3) urgency for resolution of an issue or issues; 4) absence of fundamental value differences; and 5) existence of feasible solutions. In their view, the challenge is not whether all pre-conditions are met perfectly, but whether they are met sufficiently enough to allow a multi-stakeholder platform process to be started. The GRPI experience confirms the conclusions of these authors except for one point: the lack of an initial commitment from decision-making agencies did not necessarily discourage the task forces from initiating activities and eventually developing proposals for policy-makers to consider.

#### **4. Factors affecting the performance of the task forces**

Internal and external factors defined the ability of the task forces to effectively provide inputs to the national policy debate on genetic resources. We consider internal factors those that refer to the strengths and weaknesses of the task forces, and the external factors, the opportunities and threats derived from the policy environment and the behaviour of actors outside the task forces.

##### 4.1. Internal factors

There was a consensus among the task forces that the most influential factors in achieving the results of the project were the composition of the task force, the skills of the task force members and the working environment within the task force. To a lesser extent, other internal factors influenced the ability of the task forces to get their proposals considered by the government.

###### *Composition of the task forces in terms of representation from various groups*

Much of the relevant literature stresses the importance of adopting a systematic approach towards identification and representation of stakeholders, in order to avoid the risk that some stakeholders are omitted and to ensure that the line between who is included and who is not is based on pre-determined and well-defined decision criteria (Reed et al, 2009).

Although all the GRPI task forces were quite diverse in terms of composition, and stakeholders with the potential to affect genetic resources policies were present in all

task forces, no task force was able to involve all of the actors engaged in genetic resources conservation and use. The most evident limitations were the lack of involvement of international organizations and, for some of the task forces, the private sector, the media and smallholder farmers.

#### *Skills of the task force members*

The capacity of the task forces to identify genetic resources issues, conduct policy analysis and formulate legal proposals relied on the skills, knowledge, expertise and contacts of the task force members. The presence of knowledgeable individuals from government ministries, civil society organizations and research institutes provided the task forces with a strong foundation to assess existing laws and policies, provide scientific and technical insights for policy decision-making and consider local needs and perspectives, in research and capacity-building activities and legislative proposals. However, the task forces were weak in certain disciplines of particular relevance to genetic resources conservation and management, like economy and sociology. These gaps affected the definition of GRPI activities (for example, agricultural subsidies on genetic resources and the possible impact of free-trade agreements were not identified as priority areas by any GRPI country) and some of the results of such activities, such as unrealistic legislative proposals in Peru, Egypt and Nepal that represent a good starting point, but might face insuperable obstacles at the implementation stage (Kameri-Mbote & Srinivasan, 2008).

#### *Open and democratic working environment*

The opportunity to collaborate on research activities, where contributions from stakeholders of different social and professional backgrounds were equally valuable, empowered task force members and shaped the task forces as open and democratic spaces. Most of the task forces managed to avoid discourses and decisions being dominated by particular members and maintained their openness for the duration of the project. In particular, they were successful in preventing representatives of government ministries from defining issues, deciding priorities and making decisions for the whole group (GRPI 2008).

In order to maintain this open and democratic spirit and encourage dialogue among its members, the task force in Uganda developed a capacity-building tool (in the form of questionnaires and open discussions) aimed at assessing the level of awareness of the task force members and increasing their interest in the relevant topics. This capacity-building methodology greatly facilitated the dialogue among participants and clarified objectives and roles.

#### *Coordination and governance of the task forces*

The commitment and performance of the individuals who played the role of task force coordinators was recognized by most of the people involved in the GRPI project. Their success was due in part to the fact that the other task force members perceived them as impartial, open to multiple perspectives and approachable. In addition, they were capable of maintaining positive group dynamics, capable of handling difficult situations and encouraging both the group and the individual members to keep working through the different phases of the project.

#### *Ability to communicate outcomes to third parties (in particular decision-makers)*

Although the fact that government agencies were represented on the task forces helped position the task forces in the policy-making processes, the mere participation of ministerial staff was not enough to ensure the development of legal and policy instruments. For example, even though the Zambian task force included a number of government representatives, it was not effective in proposing policy or legal instruments concerning genetic resources.

Similarly, the development of legitimate and well thought-out legislative proposals did not automatically lead to those proposals being approved by policy-making bodies. Task forces that adopted measures to expose decision-makers to project activities and results were more successful in getting their legislative proposals included in the parliamentary agenda than those that did not take sufficient measures to show their value as policy-making platforms. Efforts of the task forces in ‘marketing’ their products in the policy arena not only created space for genetic resources issues, but also provided scientifically based arguments for policy-makers to use in addressing such issues in a more technical and less political manner. Using an expression coined by Price (1965), the task forces ‘spoke truth to power’.

#### 4.2. External factors

It is not always easy to determine the actual impact of external factors on the final results. Unlike internal factors, we cannot draw clear cause-effect relations between the socio-political and institutional circumstances at the time the task forces were active and the outcomes of the project. However, the experience of the task forces shows that stakeholder platforms cannot work in isolation and that the socio-economic and political dynamics outside the group must be taken into consideration when defining priorities and strategies to meet those priorities.

##### *Political stability and social conditions*

Political and social stability are basic conditions for any process or project to move ahead smoothly. In Nepal, an outbreak of the conflict between Maoist insurgents and the government forces in 2006 made it difficult for members of the task force to implement many of the activities they had planned to carry out. The conflict also paralyzed any attempt to approve legislative measures over the course of several months.

In other GRPI countries, like Peru, a series of changes in the government and, consequently, in government priorities, affected not only the composition of the task force but also its ability to reach definitive decisions concerning the best way to develop and propose legislative actions on the conservation and use of genetic resources. All this caused a significant delay in the task forces’ work, leading to frustration amongst task force members.

##### *Current trends in the international arena*

International agreements and initiatives related to biodiversity and genetic resources had a considerable influence on task force activities. In their comparative analysis of how GRPI countries identified and prioritized genetic resources related issues, Munyi et al (2009) stressed the impact of international discourse on the mind-set of stakeholders, in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)

and the Convention of the International Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties (UPOV). The GRPI experience shows that international debates still dominate the shaping of knowledge, practices and institutions at the domestic level even if the governments concerned are not particularly active in those international debates. Several factors can explain this phenomenon; perhaps the most important ones are: Firstly, the conditions imposed by donors, which increasingly require the adoption of those international principles and rules as the framework for research and development projects funded by them (Keeley and Scoones, 2003); and secondly, the campaigns and actions of civil society organizations, which play a central role in shaping public opinion.

#### *Support, involvement and helpfulness of farmers and local communities*

Farmers are the main users of agricultural genetic resources and their involvement in the project was necessary for the task forces to understand their needs and insights concerning conservation and use of genetic resources. To a great extent, the farmers' ability to express themselves in the GRPI process was linked to the existence of strong and efficient civil society organizations (farmers' and indigenous organizations in particular) representing their interests. Task forces in Nepal, Peru and Zambia benefited from organizations and structures that provided farmers with a voice in the decision-making processes. Whereas farmers in Nepal, Peru and Zambia were quite familiar with participatory processes and confident to express their opinions, farmers in Ethiopia and Vietnam were not.

#### *Donor agency preferences*

Task force members noted that there has been an increasing trend among donor agencies and foundations to require participatory and consultative processes as the basis for development projects. In this way, donor preferences can determine not only the (international) principles inspiring development projects, but also the modus operandi of such projects.

#### *Ratification of international agreements*

Accession to international instruments concerned with the conservation and use of biodiversity and genetic resources, like the CBD and the ITPGRFA, involves certain obligations. However, many governments do not always have the capacity to develop and put in place the regulatory frameworks required to meet these obligations in a coherent manner. The governments in most GRPI countries made use of the task forces to fill such gaps in capacity: for examples, the Egyptian Ministry of Environment entrusted the task force with the development of a draft law on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing; and in Nepal, the government engaged the task force in the development of legislation on plant variety protection. This decentralization of policy-making, and the devolution of regulatory initiatives to non-governmental agencies, was particularly impressive in Nepal and Vietnam, both of which are characterized by highly centralized regimes.

#### *Policy-makers' confidence in the task force's recommendations*

It was crucial that the policy-makers believed in the task forces in order for their proposals to be considered. Policy-makers were provided with opportunities to interact with the task forces; these opportunities showed the potential value of engaging the task forces in decision-making processes. Some task forces were very

successful in gaining the trust of high level politicians by involving them in task force meetings and training programmes, and by inviting them to visit the sites where genetic resources conservation and use activities were taking place.

The GRPI experience showed that the more governments were aware of genetic resources issues and interested in agricultural and rural development, the more policy-makers were willing to consider the project results. In Egypt, Ethiopia and Nepal, national agrobiodiversity policies or strategies provided the basis and the legitimacy for the task forces to operate and explore legal issues required for their implementation.

## 5. Achievements of the task forces

In order to assess the success of the task forces as multi-stakeholder platforms for policy generation, we have analyzed the products and outcomes that resulted from the task forces' efforts.

### 5.1. Policy products of the task forces' work

The project generated a number of concrete products (e.g. research papers, capacity-building and awareness-raising materials and policy and legal proposals). Almost all of the task forces developed and submitted proposals for new laws, policies and administrative measures. This was in line with the focus of the project, which was on "processes as a means to an end, rather than processes as an end in, and of, themselves" (Wale et al, 2008). Table 3 below summarizes the law and policy proposals developed by each GRPI country and indicates the ones which have been approved by the national governments.

**Table 3: Summary of policy and legislative products of the GRPI project**

**Egypt**

Draft law on access to genetic resources and the equitable sharing of benefits arising from their use

**Nepal**

National agrobiodiversity policy, approved by Government Decision 2061, 2007

Draft bill on access and benefit-sharing of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture

**Peru**

Draft national law on establishing agrobiodiversity areas

National registry of traditional potato varieties (approved by Ministerial Decision on 1 July 2008)

**Uganda**

National policy on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture

The Plant Genetic Resources Bill 2008 (draft form)

**Vietnam**

Decision No.35/2008/QĐ -BNN on farmers' production of plant varieties

**West & Central Africa**

The Ouagadougou Declaration: Countries of West and Central Africa join forces for action on crop diversity

Processes condition results. The factors presented and analyzed in the previous section of this paper determined the number and the quality of the policy products of the various task forces. Below we have selected two examples of policy products that have made a difference in the existing legal frameworks. Although it is too soon to evaluate the impacts of these instruments on the conservation and use of genetic resources, they show that multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary

platforms can contribute to the development of more comprehensive, imaginative and innovative genetic resources policies whenever the necessary conditions are met.

#### *5.1.1 Providing real support to informal seed systems*

Over the last few decades, the Vietnamese government has made a considerable effort to develop agriculture by modernizing production systems and facilitating access to modern inputs, including seeds. However, the modern improved seed varieties distributed by the extension services do not reach most of the farmers, who often select crop varieties and distribute their seeds through informal farmer-to-farmer systems, which does not always guarantee the necessary quality standards.

Despite the importance of informal seed systems for the Vietnamese economy, the legal framework did not recognize or regulate the contribution of farmers to the seed supply. For this reason, the task force concentrated its efforts towards developing and obtaining approval for an official decision to fill this legal gap.

The proposal developed by the task force, and ultimately approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Decision 35/2008), includes the following main elements:

- recognition of the farmers' role as generators of genetic resources, and as seed producers;
- definition of informal seed systems;
- commitment by the government to support farmers' efforts to produce good quality and economic seeds;
- description of the process for farmers to obtain financial support (up to 100 percent) for gathering, saving, selecting, evaluating, registering and producing seeds of local varieties;
- identification of quality conditions required for seeds of species listed in the List of Main Plant Species, industrial plants and perennial fruit trees;
- identification of processes to be monitored to certify quality;
- responsibilities of the six ministries involved in genetic resources conservation and use.

So far, two farmers' varieties of rice have been registered in the official catalogues of plant varieties commercialized in Vietnam and the farmers have received financial support to produce and commercialize seeds of these varieties with the required quality.

The decision is innovative in agricultural and environmental law, both for Vietnam and worldwide. It provides farmers with direct support for genetic resources conservation and seed management. In addition, this legal measure is the result of a highly participatory process in a country where policy decisions are usually made in a very centralized manner. A thorough and objective analysis of the needs of farmers, seed producers and seed consumers provided the basis for the task force to present their needs connected to the national development interests, making the proposal attractive for the government.

#### *5.1.2 A national register of native potato varieties: Much more than a list*

The idea of creating a national register of native crop varieties was already recognized in existing Peruvian legislation, but the way to establish it was not clear. Nor, at the time the GRPI project began, did it appear to be included in the government's agenda. The task force decided to focus most of its efforts on exploring ways to effectively implement this instrument in a coherent and comprehensive manner.

With the aim of offering a flexible tool, able to provide information to a variety of users, the task force engaged breeders, collectors and farmers to define the objectives of the register and the descriptors for the two species initially included, potato and maize. Consequently, in addition to the descriptors widely accepted by the international scientific community, the Peruvian register includes a series of descriptors which are rarely included by scientists and which are particularly useful for farmers to appreciate the value of varieties.

The register is a dynamic tool, which describes a large number of traditional varieties of maize and potato. All the information, including molecular characterization, is being uploaded onto a webpage that will be made publicly available. Taking advantage of the International Year of the Potato (2008), the task force introduced policy-makers to the register and it was officially recognized, through Ministerial Resolution N. 0533-2008-AG, which creates the *Registro Nacional de la Papa Nativa Peruana*.

The objectives of the register are very much in line with the current discourse on recognizing the value of Peruvian genetic resources and the importance of traditional farmers, and protecting Peruvian agricultural heritage from misappropriation. The register is, first and foremost, a technical publication about native Peruvian agrobiodiversity, its location and status. However, it is also intended for use in preventing Peruvian traditional plant genetic resources from being subjected to illicit patents and other intellectual property rights. In a world where protecting intellectual property is becoming more and more important in research, development and marketing activities, the government of Peru, instigated by civil society organizations and academia, feels the need to ensure the boundaries of its public domain. The recent completion of free trade agreements with the US and the EU made this a political priority.

Expected users of the registry are collectors, breeders, universities and farmers searching for new valuable traits, as well as the Peruvian and national intellectual property offices in general. It is expected that the register will help Peru meet its obligations to the CBD and the ITPGRFA, with regards to cataloguing biodiversity.

## 6.2 Task forces' outcomes

Task force members considered the task forces themselves outcomes, and not only instruments, of the project. They stressed, in particular, that the project led to a better understanding of the current situation regarding genetic resources conservation and management in the countries involved, provided valuable insights into local needs, and generated stronger linkages between those needs and national policies.

In most GRPI countries there were clear signs of appreciation for the work of the task forces from both the national and regional governments, while in a number of countries, decision-makers relied on the task forces for information, advice and technical proposals. Some specific examples include:

- Providing advice and developing proposals on access to genetic resources for the Ministry of Environment (Egypt);
- Providing information supporting the ratification of the ITPGRFA, and the development of an agrobiodiversity policy (Nepal);
- Providing advice on traditional knowledge, genetic resources and folklore to the Ministry of Science (Zambia), and
- Providing advice on national intellectual property policy to the Ministry of Commerce (Zambia).

The task force in Nepal cultivated such a strong relationship with the National Agro-Biodiversity Committee that the Committee has come to rely on the task force for technical inputs in some key areas such as the national agro-biodiversity policy.

The task forces established similar relationships with local government authorities and technical agencies, for example, the task force in Egypt developed long-term collaboration with the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, the Desert Genebank and the National Genebank. In Peru and Vietnam, the task forces worked with local governments to develop and implement policy frameworks.

In general, the participatory approach of the project has already made an impact on genetic resources decision-making processes in nearly all GRPI countries, by encouraging decision-makers to consult with, and involve, more stakeholders than before. It is clear that the task forces played an important role as catalysts for this change. In addition, GRPI task forces made an impact on the nature of the discourse on biodiversity conservation and use, making genetic resources a national public issue and policy-making more responsive to public interest (GRPI 2008, 54).

## **7. Conclusions and recommendations**

The experience of the GRPI project in Egypt, Ethiopia, Nepal, Peru, Uganda, Vietnam and Zambia shows that multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder platforms can address the issues that arise from the complex and cross-cutting nature of genetic resources conservation and use. The previous sections of this paper presented a number of lessons on how to make these platforms work efficiently. These have been summarized in the following recommendations:

1. The platforms should be established as systematically as possible, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders, sectors and disciplines are represented and that there is balance between the different stakeholders.
2. Overly inclusive criteria may lead to having large and extremely diverse groups. Despite their advantages, large platforms can mean higher transaction costs and a weaker sense of ownership over the process and its outcomes. Creating opportunities for members to have more direct contact with the process is likely to minimize costs and enhance the sense of ownership.

3. In order for the platforms to maintain an open and democratic spirit, all stakeholders must have a good understanding of the participatory approach (which implies being open to other people's views), a sense of power to influence the dialogue (Chase et al 2004) and a feeling of ownership over its results.
4. The technical capabilities of members of the platforms are crucial for developing valuable policy inputs (Richards et al 2004). Gaps in knowledge and skills within the platform should not be underestimated. Some disciplines, like economics and social sciences, are often dismissed when dealing with issues related to the conservation and use of genetic resources, but they have been shown to be crucial to understanding the trade-offs that genetic resources policies must address. Similarly, a good knowledge of genetic resources issues does not automatically imply the capacity to propose sound policy or legal solutions. The group should be able to identify its weak points in policy analysis and drafting laws and take the necessary measures to overcome them.
5. It is advisable that the group adopts a capacity-building tool to help the group adopt a common language, achieve a common understanding and become more open to other people's opinions.
6. Multi-stakeholder platforms should ensure the involvement of small-scale farmers and indigenous communities, who play a key role in the conservation of genetic resources. Identifying reliable spokesmen for such actors can help significantly in this task.
7. Even if the ultimate objective of the multi-stakeholder platforms is to develop or amend policies, they should first consider alternatives and assess their capacities before embarking on complex, lengthy policy-making processes.
8. The impact of the platforms is likely to be greater in situations where the national government is aware of biodiversity issues and has already taken some measures that show a commitment towards conservation (e.g. the ratification of international legal instruments). Regular exposure of policy-makers to the platforms' activities is crucial for the multi-stakeholder group to build trust among policy-makers, exert influence on the national policy agenda and produce concrete change in the existing legal framework. The participation of government representatives in the platforms can help the groups consolidate their space in the constellations of entities dealing with genetic resources policies, but it is not enough to ensure that personnel in higher spheres of the decision-making processes will adopt the platforms' recommendations. At the same time, any initiative aimed at enhancing dialogue between policy and science must take into consideration that while certain policy questions are seen as issues for scientific deliberation, others are firmly kept within the area of politics, even if they are initially perceived by politicians as complex issues which require technical consideration by specialized bodies. Access to genetic resources is an example of this.

9. Some authors have pointed out that the long-term success of participatory processes may depend on institutionally embedding stakeholder participation (Reed 2008). The GRPI experience has confirmed that, in an ideal situation, the location and role of the multi-stakeholder platforms should be determined through a formal, long-term agreement with the government. Such an agreement should not compromise the participatory, non-hierarchical nature of the platform.

The GRPI project confirmed that multi-stakeholder platforms can reach some of the benefits expected from introducing participatory processes in decision-making processes. When the necessary conditions are met, the multi-stakeholder, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral platforms have shown to be a powerful tool in creating more comprehensive and inclusive ways of developing policies in the area of biodiversity and genetic resources. However, the project also revealed the challenges involved in the process and the need to take them into consideration before putting a platform for dialogue and decision-making in place.

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