

Third meeting of the EUGIS Steering Group
Bioversity International, first-floor meeting room
2-3 February 2010

Participants:

Jason Hubert (Forest Research, United Kingdom)
Hojka Kraigher (Slovenian Forestry Institute, Slovenia)
François Lefevre (National Institute for Agricultural Research, France)
Roman Longauer (Forest Research Institute, Slovakia)
Ditte Christina Olrik (Danish Forest and Nature Agency, Denmark)
Silvio Schüller (Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape, Austria)

Jarkko Koskela (Bioversity International)
Michele Bozzano (Bioversity International)
Milko Skofic (Bioversity International)
Ewa Hermanowicz (Bioversity International)
Sonia Dias (Bioversity International)

Observers :

Judy Loo (Bioversity International)
Barbara Vinceti (Bioversity International)
Giorgia Beltrame (Bioversity International)

Opening of the meeting

J. Koskela, the project coordinator, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants to Maccaresse on behalf of Bioversity International. He also introduced the agenda of the meeting, which was adopted without changes. All participants then introduced themselves

J. Koskela continued by providing a brief update on the progress made by the project activities. Furthermore, he explained how the annual financial and technical reports are reviewed by the EC (European Commission) and its independent experts. He also summarized the feedback and questions received from the EC based on the second- year reports in 2009. He then reminded the deadlines of the third-year reports in 2010 and clarified issues related to reimbursements, audits and the eligibility of various expenses.

WP1: Creation of a network of national FGR inventories

J. Koskela provided an overview of the activities carried out as part of Work Package 1. He then presented the revised version of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which has been developed in collaboration with the Policy Unit of Bioversity. The new version now includes a reference to the EUFORGEN Steering Committee decision (June 2009) that, after the EUFGIS action has ended in September 2010, the information system will be maintained and further developed as part of the EUFORGEN activities (European Forest Genetic Resources Programme) during Phase IV (2010-2014). Furthermore, the revised MoU also takes into account the needs expressed by some countries to comply with national laws and/or regulations on making publicly available the exact geographical coordinates of privately owned gene conservation units. The text of the MoU has also been aligned with another data sharing agreement European countries have signed for the EURISCO Catalogue, which provides online information on *ex situ* collections of plant genetic resources in Europe. Similarly to the EUFGIS information system, Bioversity is also maintaining the EURISCO Catalogue on behalf of the European Cooperative Programme on Plant Genetic Resources (ECPGR).

The participants discussed the revised MoU and made some suggestions to further improve the text. It was agreed that J. Koskela will discuss these suggestions with Bioversity's Policy Unit and then circulate an updated version to the project partners for their final comments before it will be sent to the EUFORGEN National Coordinators.

It was also discussed that a disclaimer explaining the conditions for data use needs to be displayed on the EUFGIS Portal, and that users have to agree with them before they can download data. Milko Skofic explained that the portal will consist of two parts; public interface and an intranet with access limited to the National Focal Points. It was agreed that the two parts of the portal should be also mentioned in the revised MoU.

S. Schüeler then presented preparations made for the final project meeting, which will be held in Vienna, Austria on 14-16 September 2010. He reported that the local organizers have also contacted the Ministry of Agriculture in Austria to seek additional support and visibility for the meeting as 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. He pointed out that the meeting is also a good opportunity for raising awareness on the conservation of forest genetic resources among general public and professionals. The meeting venue will be the Federal Research and Training Centre in Mariabrunn, near Vienna. The conference room has capacity for 100 persons while the expected number of participants is around 50, including the National Focal Points, experts and the project partners. S. Schüeler also noted that it is possible to organize a field excursion to visit gene conservation units and to talk to landowners and managers.

S. Schüller informed that before the final meeting on 13 September 2010, the NordGen Forest will organize a one-day seminar in Mariabrunn to present the results of the Nordic project on access and rights to forest genetic resources. This one-year project is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. J. Koskela added that EUFORGEN might organize a working group meeting on 17 September 2010 to discuss the use of the EUFGIS Portal for development of pan-European gene conservation strategies and other relevant activities. B. Vinceti noted that the final meeting could be also listed on the website of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) together with other events organized as part of the International Year of Biodiversity. J. Koskela and S. Schüller agreed to develop a draft agenda of the final meeting.

The participants then discussed the dissemination efforts of the EUFGIS action. J. Koskela reminded the partners that they should include all dissemination efforts they have carried out related to EUFGIS (newsletter articles, presentations, etc.) in the third-year technical report. H. Kraigher mentioned that two meetings of interest will be held in Slovenia this year. One of these will be organized in the context of the Slovenia Forest Week in the end of May, entitled as “Forest and Wood” involving PhD students and invited speakers from wood industry. J. Koskela emphasized that all such events should also be reported on the EUFGIS website.

J. Hubert noted that the Forest Commission in the UK has been thinking of using the YouTube video portal for its dissemination efforts. He suggested that the partners could also consider developing video clips or animated PowerPoint presentations on EUFGIS for YouTube. R. Longauer mentioned that a meeting of the EU Standing Committee on Forest Reproductive Material will take place every year (usually in autumn) and that it could also be used as a dissemination channel. He noted that the Committee often invites experts to give presentations on relevant topics.

WP2: Development of minimum requirements and information standards for dynamic gene conservation units

The participants reviewed progress made in the Work Package 2 activities and then discussed in detail the development of the documentation manual and the case studies.

J. Koskela presented examples of various documentation manuals on plant genetic resources that have been published by Bioversity. He reminded the participants that the purpose of the documentation manual is to provide countries and national focal points with guidelines for further strengthening of the documentation work. He noted that a separate user manual is also under development and it will provide the national focal points with detailed instructions on how to use the EUFGIS intranet. Regarding the documentation manual, it was agreed that J. Koskela will continue drafting the content of the manual and that it will be finalized (as a PDF document) by September 2010 to be

presented during the final project meeting. Furthermore, it was agreed that M. Bozzano and M. Skofic will finalize the first draft of the user manual by the end of February.

F. Lefevre presented potential topics for the case studies that need to be prepared for the final project meeting. He also suggested ways to improve the database and what kind of data searches are needed for the development of the case studies. He then continued by presenting a list of scientific journals for which the case studies could be submitted for publication.

Before discussing the case studies in detail, the participants agreed that it would be also useful to develop a review paper based on the pan-European minimum requirements for dynamic gene conservation units of forest trees. It was agreed that the authors of the reviewer paper should include the project partners, the expert group members and the chairs of the EUFORGEN Networks. *Biological Conservation* and *Conservation Biology* were identified as potential journals for which this paper could be offered. It was concluded that J. Koskela will lead the development of the review paper and that the draft manuscript should be circulated to all authors for their comments as soon as possible.

Regarding the case studies, the following topics were identified for the case studies: 1) evaluation of the gene conservation efforts in Europe, 2) climate change and its implications for the gene conservation efforts in a specific sub-region or bioclimatic zone, and 3) a regional synthesis of the data available in the information system. It was discussed that the first case study should demonstrate the use of the information system for assessments of tree species' conservation status and for development of gene conservation strategies at pan-European level. It was agreed that this case study should focus on 8-10 tree species and include a gap analysis based on the number and location of the existing gene conservation units, range-wide distribution of genetic diversity (obtained from earlier studies) and other relevant information. The second case study could focus on the mountain regions in Central Europe.

It was agreed all project partners will be listed as authors of the cases studies, which will be presented at the final project meeting. It was further agreed that manuscripts will be developed based on the first and second case study and submitted to relevant journals for publication before or after the final project meeting. F. Lefevre agreed to lead the development of the first case study/manuscript, and S. Schüler and R. Longauer will lead the second one. F. Lefevre and S. Schüler will circulate further ideas for the content of the two case studies by the end of February.

WP3: Creation of the information infrastructure

M. Bozzano gave a short presentation on the website of the EUFGIS action. He also briefed the participants on the development of the user manual, which provides detailed instructions on how to use the EUFGIS intranet and how to upload and view data on the gene conservation units. The user manual will also incorporate the questions the national focal points have raised so far.

M. Skofic presented the features of the database and the intranet. He noted that the functionality of the intranet is continuously being improved and that the structure of the database can be still modified based on needs for making queries and for downloading data. He concluded that this fine-tuning will be done simultaneously with the development of the EUFGIS Portal.

The participants then discussed the EUFGIS Portal and what features and functions it should offer for users. M. Skofic demonstrated the functionality of the existing portals, such as EURISCO and SINGER. J. Koskela also mentioned the new European Forest Data Centre (EFDAC), which is a metadata catalogue with multiple search options. EFDAC was developed by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (Ispra, Italy). It was agreed that the EUFGIS Portal should allow the users to view data both as maps and tables, and that the downloading mechanism should be user-friendly. It was also agreed that the users will be required to register before they can download data from the EUFGIS Portal. Furthermore, the participants noted that the portal should incorporate the distribution maps of tree species compiled by EUFORGEN. It was concluded that Bioversity will develop a draft portal for other partners to comments by May 2010.

WP4: Building the information system

The second day of the meeting was started with a presentation on the EURISCO Catalogue. S. Dias presented a brief overview of the development of EURISCO, its technical improvements over the years, and future plans. Currently EURISCO contains information on more than 1 million accessions of crop genetic resources held in gene banks in 40 European countries. EURISCO is also a data provider of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). She concluded by highlighting lessons learnt that are also useful for further development of EUFGIS. In particular, she underlined the importance of frequent updating of data and training provided to the national focal points.

The participants then discussed progress made in compiling data for the EUFGIS database. M. Bozzano reported that the database contains information on 1024 gene conservation units and 74 tree species. However, he noted that the species-level data is

still missing for many gene conservation units. It was noted that the national focal points should finalize their data compilation work as soon as possible so that enough data will be available for the case studies. M. Bozzano agreed to remind the national focal points and ask them to finalize their data compilation and upload by the end of March.

WP5: Coordination

J. Koskela reminded the project partners that the third-year technical report is due by the end of May. He further informed the partners that the final technical report covering the whole project period (April 2007-Sep 2010) should be submitted to the EC by the end of November. The EC had informed him that the technical work carried out during last six months (April-Sep 2010) can be included in the final technical report, i.e. no separate technical report is needed for this period. The EC will soon circulate the template for the final technical report with further instructions.

E. Hermanowicz then made a presentation on the preparation of the financial reports. She highlighted the lessons learnt from the two previous reporting cycles and clarified issues related to reimbursements, audits and the eligibility of various expenses based on the feedback received from the EC. She also compared the expenditures of each partner against the approved budget for Year 1 and 2, and noted that many partners have claimed less than what was budgeted. Finally, she reminded the partners that two financial reports are due in 2010; the third-year report by the end of May and the fourth-year one at the end of December. She stressed that all project-related expenditures, including the final audit costs, should be occurred before 30 September 2010.

G. Beltrame also underlined the importance of claiming the amounts agreed at the beginning of the project and asked all partners to send their estimated third-year expenditures (April 2009-March 2010) to her and E. Hermanowicz by 12 February.

J. Koskela noted that the Steering Group should briefly discuss again the final technical and financial reports during the final project meeting in Vienna in September 2010.

Maintenance and further development of EUFGIS

The participants briefly discussed the maintenance of the EUFGIS Portal after the project in September 2010. J. Koskela informed the partners that the EUFORGEN Steering Committee had agreed at its meeting in June 2009 that the EUFGIS Portal will be maintained and further developed as part of EUFORGEN Phase IV. For the maintenance of the information system, the Steering Committee also allocated some financial resources for 2011-2014. J. Koskela noted that the EC might open suitable calls in 2010 or

2011 and new project proposals could then be prepared for further development of the information system or for using it for research purposes.

It was noted that monitoring of the data and its quality is a crucial maintenance activity in the future. It was also pointed out that the documentation work done by the TREEBREEDEX project on ex situ collections could be linked to the EUFGIS information system. However, this issue needs to be discussed with the coordinator of the TREEBREEDEX project, which will also end in 2010. Furthermore, in those cases when the gene conservation units are located within protected areas, similar links could be developed with existing databases of the protected areas.

Any other business

With no other matters, J. Koskela thanked the partners for their inputs and closed the meeting.