

# A Global Strategy

for the conservation and use  
of Coconut Genetic Resources

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According to the CGRD during the past four decades, germplasm exchanges have generally decreased. Transfer between genebanks reached 99 accessions in 1980; it doubled (104 more accessions) from 1981 to 1990, and then it increased much more slowly: only 34 germplasm transfers from 1991 to 2000, and 34 more from 2001 to 2017. This decrease is mainly due to emerging diseases, to the growing complexity of regulations on germplasm exchanges, and to the technological constraints of *in vitro* embryo cultivation. From a global perspective, in recent years, access to crop genetic resources has been constrained by exclusive technological and legal restrictions (Halewood 2013).

To our knowledge, since 2004, the year when the Treaty was signed, no Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA) was used when moving coconut germplasm, despite the recommendations of the Treaty and the fact that many COGENT members are contracting parties of the Treaty. The SMTA<sup>57</sup> is a mandatory model for parties wishing to provide and receive material under the Multilateral System.

The first SMTA was recently signed in 2015 between CNRA and CIRAD while exchanging very specific material called “mapping population” which was used to prepare the sequence of the coconut genome.

COGENT countries agreed that the germplasm conserved in *ex situ* collections is a common good which is not for sale. Countries requesting germplasm from *ex situ* collections do not have to pay for the value of the germplasm itself. Nevertheless, managing this germplasm is costly, so requesting countries or dedicated projects should contribute. In 2011, the COGENT Secretariat launched a first initiative to standardize the cost of preparing germplasm for international exchange. Côte d’Ivoire and the Philippines, which are the main providers of coconut germplasm worldwide, agreed on the same germplasm preparation costs which are summarized in Annex 7.

## 2.7 Partnerships and networking

A wide range of partners are collaborating through COGENT, most of whom have contributed to developing this Global Strategy. These include national and international institutions directly involved in coconut research, international institutions dealing with all aspects of biodiversity management, local and international NGOs, private companies, international independent experts and some highly committed individuals.

These partners are too numerous to be cited in the main text of this document. Lists are given in annexes, as follows:

- Annex 1: the national institutions from the 39 member-countries officially involved in COGENT;
- Annex 2: the contributors to the Strategy and their parent institution(s);
- Annex 3: the individual contributors to the Strategy by chapters and sections.

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<sup>57</sup> <http://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/the-multilateral-system/the-smta/en/?q=content%2Fwhat-smta>

COGENT's nascent international thematic action groups (ITAGs- see Annex 4) also embrace a number of other individuals and institutions who have provided supporting expertise during the Strategy development. Full lists of proposed members are available on the COGENT website.

The "Coconut knowledge network for information exchange about *Cocos* ", known as the coconut Google group<sup>58</sup> and coordinated by Dr Hugh Harries is the main international forum in which important subjects have been usefully debated, contributing to the relevance and focusing of this Strategy.

All these partners, particularly those holding germplasm in the public domain, as well as any other organizations, institutions or networks involved in coconut genetic resources in recent years, are likely to participate in the implementation of this Strategy. The coconut genetic resources scientific community is currently collaborating through a number of networks, projects and international legal and technical frameworks. COGENT is linking all of the key partners in the coconut sector, worldwide.

COGENT aims to harness the benefits of its networked approach, particularly in the context of the Treaty and its global Plan of action. Since 1992, COGENT has developed an increasing number of connections with genebank curators, decision makers from the public and private sectors, scientists, private companies, farmers from the field until the highest levels. The COGENT Steering Committee, where official representatives from 39 coconut producing countries stand is a unique place to produce recommendations going directly to the Governments. These recommendations, being based on the inputs of hundreds of the most eminent scientists and hundreds of stakeholders working in the coconut sector for many years, are strong and highly reliable.

COGENT network is the only global entity able to generate a world vision of the status of the biodiversity and genetic resources of the coconut crop. Its existence should be recognized by FAO and UN as crucial to protect and ensure the food security of the future generations of coconut farmers and stakeholders. Without genetic resources preservation, the capacity of adaptation of this specific crop to challenges such as climate change, pest, disease or urbanization will be jeopardised. Thus, the monetary equilibrium of millions of people on the planet will be threatened.

## 2.8 Facing emergency situations: an overview

Despite the crucial role of COGENT in the coconut sector at the global level, this network is today threatened by the lack of interest of major international institutions. Thus, the key emergency situations to be addressed by the Strategy that can be concluded from the above are summarised below:

- There is a lack of commitment to conserving and using coconut genetic resources at local, national and international levels. This situation is mainly due to:
  - 1) insufficient communication between researchers and other stakeholders;

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<sup>58</sup> See URL: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/coconut>