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Implementing the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources: Harnessing the Knowledge and Capacity of the NGOs

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Introduction

The Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources [GPA] and the Interlaken Declaration was adopted in 2007 following the negotiations at the first International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources in Interlaken, September 2007 [Interlaken Conference]. The SAVE eNews 3/2007, published shortly before the Interlaken Conference, carried the main article "Interlaken – A Milestone, Interlaken – and the NGOs". This article challenged States to take the role of the NGOs seriously and challenged the NGOs to not wait to be asked to help implement the GPA but to carry on the work they are already doing to motivate the grassroots, to challenge bad policy and to actively seek involvement in their country's international obligations. Without the involvement of stakeholders on all levels – local, regional, national, international, global – the GPA cannot and will not be implemented. This paper will expand upon the eNews article in order to clearly show the strengths and weaknesses of both State structures and NGOs and, also, illustrate how these two sectors can complement each other, so that implementation of the GPA becomes a realistic goal.

Principle Actors

The conservation and promotion of rare livestock breeds occurs on more than one level. It is typically based on the three principle actors of State, Science and Non-Governmental/Civil Society (see *figure 1*). This paper will, however, concentrate on the actors: State and Non-Governmental/Civil Society [NGOs/CSOs]. As can be seen in *Figure 1*, each of these actors has a pressure which is external to the representative cycle of knowledge and information. These two pressures can be summarised as a) the pressure on nation-states to take part in, sign and conform to international treaties and conventions and b) the needs and ideologies of grassroots stakeholders, which influence the work of the NGOs/CSOs. In the long-term, conservation will only be successful if these top-down and bottom-up influences complement each other. Each of these actors develop their strategies at a different pace. The NGOs/CSOs have been active internationally for a long time (for example: Rare Breeds

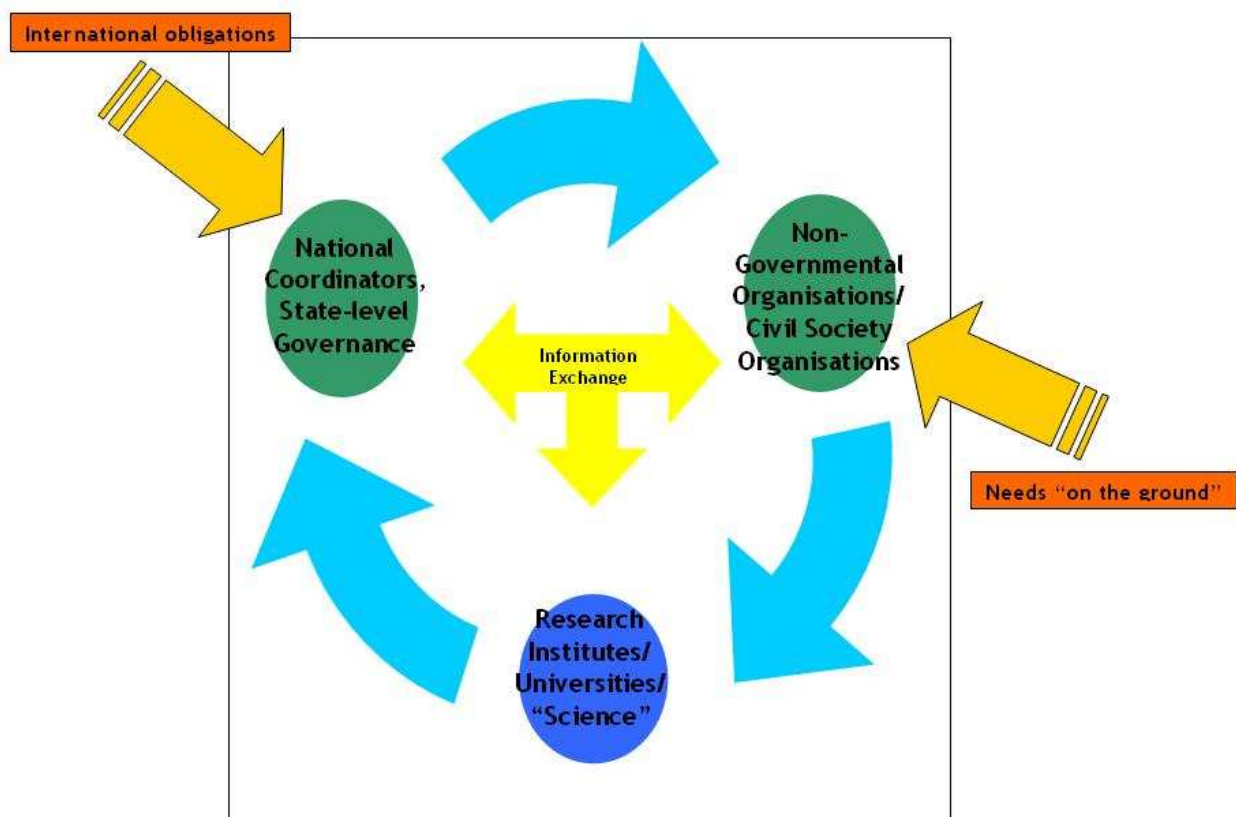
International globally, SAVE Network in Europe), now the State sector is catching up by negotiating the GPA and setting 23 Strategic Priorities to combat erosion of Animal Genetic Resources [AnGR] and to promote their sustainable use.

Interlaken – a milestone

With the Interlaken Conference, the FAO has achieved a very significant goal. In Interlaken the report “The State of the World’s Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture” [SoW AnGR] was presented. This SoW AnGR report synthesised information from 169 States, nine international organisations (of which SAVE was one) and thematic studies commissioned by the FAO. It has been a long journey from the data collection for the first edition of the “World Watch List” in 1993 to today’s “SoW” report. The discussion in Interlaken was not only be about the dangers facing agrobiodiversity and the current trends, it also concentrated on the discussion of conservation measures, promotion of old breeds, awareness raising about the use of diversity and the future “management” of the “genetic resources”.

A result of the Interlaken conference was the acceptance of the negotiated “Global Plan of Action”. However, it is only in the implementation of this action plan that it will become clear how important the theme really is for the member States. The members of the FAO are the governments of individual States. It is up to them to recognise and adopt the priorities. It is the member States who must develop policy, who must pass laws and regulations. Most importantly, it is within the member States that the financial means to implement the “Global Plan of Action” must be found. However, it is important that any financial support awarded by States does not create such dependencies on the recipients that independent initiative is restricted.

Figure 1: Influence and information between the three principle actors in AnGR conservation.



Sharing the Load

The following distribution of responsibilities can be assumed from consideration of *Figure 1*:

“State”

- Financial assistance – incentive measures as mentioned in Art. 11 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CoB)
- Cooperation with the private sector – Art. 10 CoB
- Reassessing the legal framework
- Positive regulation

“Science”

- Scientific documentation and verification
- Advice, recommendations and strategies
- Ex-situ conservation

“NGOs”

- Monitoring of breeds and their conservation status
- Livestock transfers
- Advice to breeders/keepers
- Management of herdbooks
- Promotion of cultural heritage and products
- Publicity and fund raising

The State Structure – Strengths and Weaknesses

The representatives of the developed countries in Interlaken were able to bask in the successful work of the grassroots. This work was undertaken - all too often - against the structural policies of the State. Many old breeds are only still in existence today due to “obstinate farmers” or insightful NGOs consciously mobilising for conservation and tradition. Many of the relicts of old breeds were only found because they were consciously looked for, despite State-level institutions and Universities claiming that all traces had already disappeared and that any action would be pointless.

But the State structures should not just be seen as an obstacle in the way of conservation of AnGR. It is important to understand the model within which States organise their activities, as these show both the strengths and the weaknesses of the structure and can be a key to finding the combined role of the State and NGOs/CSOs in implementing the GPA.

First and foremost, it is the State representatives that are invited to negotiate global strategies such as the GPA. It is the State actor which holds (varying degrees of) bargaining power on an international level and it is the State actor that has to create national policy to fulfil international obligations. A country that sends an informed and powerful negotiating partner to conferences such as Interlaken will be able to form an international agreement in a way that best benefits its most influential stakeholders.

International negotiations take place within formalised systems of accepted “norms” – there are ways of behaving and stating one's case which fit into the historically-based routines of international politics. These systems are created for State actors and are orientated towards *bargaining*. Within bargaining, actors can be seen as following a logic of

consequence, which leads to rather incremental decision-making often (understandably) motivated by self-interest. State actors that are generally less-powerful in such bargaining processes often, and this was the case in Interlaken, organise themselves into more powerful groupings such as the “G77/CHINA”. This increases their powerbase in negotiation and also serves the purpose of creating “interest groups” within the system of State actors. Whilst this “bargaining mode” of doing politics is successful in producing international plans of action and treaties, it is questionable if it is the way to produce optimal strategies for dealing with complex problems.

Once returned home from international conferences, States have a large resource pool to draw on when it comes to forming and implementing policy. This is not just a financial resource, it is also a structural and manpower resource that cannot be competed with in the public sector. Alongside this, States also have the resource of *legitimacy*. States, at least “democratic” States, are legitimised by the electorate to represent their interests in international negotiations. They are also legitimised, by their sovereignty, to take part in such negotiations on an international level – this position is not available to non-State actors. These domestic resources on hand in many States, not only in so-called “developed countries”, are what lead to the expectation that States channel resources towards the implementation of international agreements.

NGOs – Strengths and Weaknesses

Many Stakeholders were not present in Interlaken. This is a shame, at least the organised bodies - the NGOs - could have been involved in the proceedings to a greater extent. However, NGO involvement would lead to a completely different process taking place, one that may not be welcomed by all at the negotiating table. There is a long history of NGO involvement in international governance (see *Figure 2*), many ground-breaking international agreements have been based on NGO activity.

Unlike States, NGOs do not enjoy vast power in negotiations – and, thus, NGO negotiating strategies are significantly different to that of States. The negotiating mode favoured by NGOs can be described as an “*arguing mode*”, as opposed to the “*bargaining mode*” of the State actor. This arguing mode is based on a desire to achieve agreed goals, which are based on factual evidence. The goal to be achieved is not “an international agreement” but, rather, a workable plan of action or binding global agreement.

This way of negotiating is not based on a power-relationship, as NGOs generally have very little bargaining power, rather it has to be based on mutual trust between actors and a readiness to hear arguments from different perspectives. This leads to agreements that are based on the probability of success of the different options proposed, the resources available for implementation and are clearly based on agreed goals. In the case of the GPA, the implementation of which is being discussed here, it is especially interesting to note that agreement about the resources for implementing the GPA led to the most difficult discussions in Interlaken and that this part of the GPA is the weakest and least satisfactory.

NGOs generally gain their legitimacy from the people they represent – the membership of the organisation, usually from the “grassroots”. This sector of society is very often distrusting of what they see as “State-level interference” – NGOs can bridge a gap. As with State legitimacy, the true extent of NGO legitimacy can be relative. Some NGOs are more representative than others. NGOs hold an advantage over State structures in that an NGO

Figure 2: NGOs in History: two centuries of participation

	2000	
	1990	
Empowerment	1980	Rio 1992 - involvement of 650 NGOs. NGOs taken into consultative role in UN Structure. The internet becomes the ideal tool of the NGOs.
	1970	Stockholm 1972, CITES 1973, World Food Conference 1974, Montreal Protocol 1987, Antarctica, Whaling, Human Rights.....
Intensification	1960	
Underachievement	1950	IUCN is formed.
Activities limited by Cold War and institutional weakness in UN Economic and Social Council	1940	NGOs assisted in drafting UNESCO World Heritage Conservation. Environmental NGOs pushed for treaty on Marine Pollution.
	1930	Formation of UN, Article 71 of Charter formalised NGO involvement.
Formalisation	1920	
Disengagement	1910	Significant NGO engagement in the various committees of the League of Nations.
Engagement	1900	World Congress of International Associations, Brussels.
	1875	Nature Protection
	1850	Free Trade Association
	1825	Trade Unions
Emergence	1800	Promoting inter-governmental cooperation
	1775	Free Trade Peace Movement Anti-Slavery

Source: Charnovitz, S., *Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs and International Governance*, *Michigan Journal of International Law* Vol 18:183

is generally small, fast moving, innovative and unbureaucratic. An NGO often has wide-ranging interests, which tackle many aspects of an issue and leads to NGOs being very well informed on a range of subjects within an issue. However, NGOs are weakened by poor financial resources to address issues. The wide interest can also serve to make simple issues very complex so that goals become unworkable.

The NGOs will not wait until the States think up a task for them within the GPA. As the historical evidence shows, NGOs both act to improve situations and constantly and consistently challenge behavioural and cultural norms. NGOs inhabit a special place in conservation work, with roots that go back over 100 years, from this point of view NGOs carry a body of experience with them that States both do not and cannot hold. NGOs do the work that States cannot usually do: they acknowledge, listen to and move the grassroots. In the context of AnGR, they motivate and persuade others that live conservation, when possible *in situ*, is right and must be supported. The NGOs undertake tangible fieldwork, with visible results.

The Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources

The GPA is split into “Strategic Priority Areas” and, in most of these areas there is expertise and knowledge in the NGO sector which can be harnessed. NGOs can negotiate dialogue between government agencies and the grassroots and vice versa. NGOs work easily cross-border and, thus, are ideal for work on cross-border occurring breeds as well as work on harmonising characterisation, inventory and monitoring standards. NGOs can promote, through project-based activity, sustainable use of AnGR – they can also help governments develop national policies to promote sustainable use. NGOs such as SAVE motivate interest groups to form breeders’ organisations and to keep herd records. SAVE also provides information to national NGOs which can be passed on to farmers and keepers. SAVE is especially active in networking stakeholders from all sectors in order to enhance interaction between them. Thus, it can be seen that one can go through the GPA point for point and find areas in every strategic priority, where NGOs can be involved – not only involved, but enhances the process and brings skills, knowledge and experience that are not found in State-level institutions.

Through the Wilderswil Declaration on Livestock Diversity (signed 6th September 2007), NGOs have issued a challenge to the negotiators of Interlaken. Wilderswil declares that:

“The social organizations of pastoralists, herders and farmers have no interest in participating in a plan which does not address the central causes behind the destruction of livestock diversity but rather provides crutches / weak support / for a collapsing global livestock production system. Because the Global Plan of Action does not challenge industrial livestock production, we reinforce our commitment to organise ourselves, to save livestock diversity and to counter the negative forces bearing on us. However, we remain open and willing to participate in any useful follow up that might be facilitated through FAO. “

Not involving NGOs in the implementation of the GPA will only serve to strengthen the argument that States are not committed to implementing the GPA. The discussions of Part III “Implementation and financing of the GPA” in Interlaken showed a worrying trend. The State negotiators present were clearly negotiating in, as described above, the “*bargaining*

mode". This bargaining has led to the total disappearance of, for example, what was point 18 of the draft Part III which stated

"Countries should promote the implementation of the Global Plan of Action, in particular through national actions. These should be complemented, as appropriate, by international cooperation in order to provide a coherent framework [and financial assistance] for exchange of informations [, access to and transfer of technology] and capacity building."

The bargained removal of such statements weakens the final GPA. The SAVE Foundation acts as an umbrella organisation for NGOs in Europe, inviting SAVE and other such representative bodies into the process of implementing the GPA will strengthen the process, will give it legitimacy and a chance of success. NGOs have played a major part in the history of international negotiations and have proved to be reliable partners. Governments have adopted the Interlaken Declaration in 2007 to show their commitment to the conservation of animal genetic resources. NGOs have been showing their commitment a good deal longer and have been an active part of the process: placing issues on the political agenda, lobbying, awareness raising, representing minority groups, negotiating, finding solutions to the increasing problems of genetic erosion in one of the most important systems for human life.

The Global Plan of Action must succeed. It is a most significant intergovernmental agreement, which will harmonise the political activity of the various countries in order to set strategic goals and adhere to specific policy. The GPA is seen as an important component in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Without a planned structure to future conservation work, loss of genetic diversity cannot be halted. It is important that clear goals are set to achieve conservation and that the means to achieving these goals is facilitated.

The non-governmental organisations will do their best to help achieve these goals. However, NGOs will not just sit back and follow orders from State institutes, they have the knowledge and capability to be actively engaged in policy formation and implementation as well as monitoring and verifying implementation and results. States should make sure that there is a place, inherent within the regulations, for NGO involvement. In countries without an NGO presence, the grassroots must be given the chance to organise and to develop.

Success will only be found in the cooperation of all stakeholders. This requires stakeholders to bury any past disputes about the way different actors work and to look at the structures available for constructive collaboration. In situ/on farm conservation cannot be achieved in an office or laboratory. Fieldwork and mobilisation of people (breeders, sponsors, consumers...) is essential. NGOs are serious and experienced partners for this type of work. The actors of State and NGO may well appear diametrically opposed, however, ways of working together must be found. Governments need to harness the capabilities of competent NGOs and support them with a political environment that promotes effectiveness. In this way, the implementation of the GPA could become a reality.

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