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THE ROLE OF FAO IN THE CONSERVATION, INDUSTRIALIZATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF WILD PLANT RESOURCES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION

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MOTS-CLEES:

FAO, REGION MEDITERRANEEENNE, EUROPE, PLANTE SAUVAGE, DURABILITE, RESEAU

This paper summarizes the various programmes and activities undertaken by FAO, that are relevant to the conservation, industrialization and sustainable use of wild plant resources in the Mediterranean Region. In particular, the on-going activities of the ESCORENA European networks (coordinated by Dr. Boyazoglu of FAO) may serve as examples for the development of the MEDUSA network as, presently, there are over 1800 members from more than 300 institutions from almost all European countries involved in ESCORENA. It involves 13 sub-networks (including two in collaboration with CIHEAM) and a further 400 scientists and technicians participate from non-European countries. In the last biennium, ESCORENA played a significant role in the field of genetic biodiversity. In the plant sector PGR development continues in the Olives, Nuts, Rice, Sunflower, Pastures and Fodder, Cotton, Flax and Oat crops. A new working group for the management of pollination and pollinator diversity in natural and agricultural environments has been formed within the SREN (Sustainable Rural Environment and Energy sub-network).

The aims of MEDUSA are entirely relevant to the International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, held in Leipzig, Germany on 17-23 June 1996, where a 'Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture' (FAO 1996a) was adopted by Representatives from 150 countries. Also presented at this Conference was a major report on the state of the world's plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (FAO 1996b) that represented a major source of data for MEDUSA as do the regional synthesis reports for the West Asian, South and East Mediterranean Sub-Regions and the European Region that formed part of the preparatory process. The AGPS (The Seed and Plant Genetic Resources Service) of FAO should be involved in the Network planning and discussions.

The proposed MEDUSA Network is in line with FAO-HQ's normative mandate and the possibility of FAO Headquarters financing a start-up newsletter for MEDUSA in 1997, similar to FAO's 'Non-wood News' would be explored. [Subsequently the funding of the newsletter was approved by FAO].

It was important to be alert to the dangers of 're-inventing the wheel' for MEDUSA's proposed data-base and other, developed, data bases should be examined before embarking on a new one. For this purpose the Executive Secretary of MEDUSA was invited to visit FAO-HQ on July 15 1996 to discuss various FAO data bases.

The 'uses' categories for plants were an important consideration and assistance would be given in developing these. Subsequent to the meeting, the Steering Committee agreed to adopt and adapt the Taxonomic Databases Working Group for Plant Science (TDWG) *Economic Botany Data Collection Standard* (Cook 1995) published by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

It is important that MEDUSA should include all plant uses, and not just concentrate on medicinal and aromatic plants; economic and market data should be taken into consideration it should be borne in mind that the smallholder is the prime player.

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ANNEXE

The following is a summary of the discussions held at FAO headquarters, Rome with various officers during the subsequent visit of Melpo Skoula, Executive Secretary of MEDUSA, in June 1996.

- J. Boyazoglu** (Research and Technology / Regional Office for Europe) gave advice on networking, suggested to avoid overlaps and gave information on current networks organised by FAO, referring to ESCORENA, the World Cactus Network, the Nuts Network and MESFIN Network.
- M. Anishetty** (Plant Genetic Resources Group / Plant Production and Protection Division) gave information on the last Leipzig Conference and the Global Plan of Action, and the activities of Plant Genetic Resources Group. M. Beltramme demonstrated the Germplasm Databank which contain information on germplasm that is stored in the different germplasm banks of the world and agreed to provide M. Skoula with a full list of all wild plants, institutions and contact persons of all Mediterranean countries that are listed in the Databank.
- P. Vantomme** (Non-Wood Forest Products / Wood and Non-Wood Products Utilisation Branch / Forest Products Division / Forestry Department) presented the objectives and activities of the Forest Products Division explaining that they are very broad, including fauna and flora. He also referred to the document prepared before and after the International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, held in Leipzig, in June 1996. He provided copies of some publications of the Non-Wood Forest Products (listed below).
- P. Diemer** (Soil Resources / Soil Resources Management and Conservation Service / Land and Water Development Division) demonstrated and provided a copy of the ECOCROP1 database of

FAO, that includes information such as climatic and soil conditions, production characteristics etc. on 1700 cultivated plants of the world.

F. Petrassi (SDRN / FAO) demonstrated the Climatic database of FAO, which is also available on CD-Rom.

P. Griffie (Steering Committee member) reported on his participation at the Conference on Alternative Crops and on the presentation of SEPASAL database which appeared to be very close to MEDUSA's objectives. He also forwarded to M.Skoula a copy of the Economic Botany - Data Collection Standard - Prepared for the International Working Group on Taxonomic Databases for Plant Sciences (TDWG), ix + 146 edited by Cook, F.E.M. 1995, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK. This seemed to be an excellent guide for the scheme for the different categories of use that he had volunteered to prepare for MEDUSA Information System. P. Griffie proposed that FAO finance a visit of M.Skoula to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, UK, in order to discuss the possibilities of SEPASAL / MEDUSA Collaboration. This was later undertaken.

The following FAO documents were provided by P. Griffie for use by MEDUSA to assist in setting up the Network and newsletter:

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