

# Development Opportunity Crops and Species (DOCS): strategy, action plan, and integrated R4D programme

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**- DRAFT -**

*“In wildness is the preservation of the world” - Henry David Thoreau*

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# 1. BACKGROUND

Despite DOCS' importance for livelihoods, nutrition and health of poor rural communities, and the environment, they are not receiving adequate attention by policy makers, development workers, scientific research, and donors. Efforts around DOCS have been fragmented and, while effective, have been lacking large scale impact. Against this background, broad-based collective action among stakeholders is considered superior to competing small entities for attracting funding and for achieving impact.

The Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), with its Secretariat in Rome, has therefore initiated the process of bringing together initiatives and organizations with similar or overlapping mandates around a group of crops and products that were initially termed specialty crops and species. Beginning with originally three initiatives, i.e., Crops for the Future (CFF), Global Horticulture Initiative (GHI), and NTFP/INBAR, the movement now consists of a much wider constituency, including Agropolis Resource Centre for Crop Conservation, Adaptation and Diversity (ARCAD), World Vegetable Centre (AVRDC), Bioversity International, Cambia, CIRAD, Commission on Plant Genetic Resources, Global Crop Diversity Trust, ITPGRFA, Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research, Prolinnova, PROTA, and UNEP-GEF.

The present document aims to put this process in a strategic context and to point to next steps for an inclusive, global partnership around non-mainstream crops and species. The document should be treated as a living document as several aspects and particularly next steps depend on ideas being generated by stakeholders, opportunities arising and new partnerships being forged. The document refers to the earlier "specialty crops and species" group consisting of CFF, GHI, and NTFP, as well as to the more recent developments in a wider context of Development Opportunity Crops and Species. If deemed helpful by the GFAR secretariat, it should be circulated among the wider constituencies for comments and inputs. This would benefit particularly the development of a realistic and integrated R4D programme.

## 2. STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

### *2.1 Strategic niche, coherence and complementarity*

The original reason for GFAR's partnership programmes (GPPs) was to complement the international research system in areas that although considered important, have been neglected (e.g., neglected species). There is cross-cutting potential in these themes, i.e., for GPPs and other players with a relevant mandate. However, the GPPs active in these areas have not been well aligned with other GPPs as well as other international players and this situation is potentially wasteful in terms of duplication and untapped comparative advantages. This issue needs to be addressed at the meta-level so that GPPs become a coherent mechanism working in tandem with other global initiatives and players, particularly the Consortium Research Programmes (CRPs) of the new CGIAR.

DOCS have attracted attention from a wide range of players and projects, which have produced a considerable wealth of information. But scattered as it is it remains difficult to access and to use. This means that little exchange is happening and that players largely continue to act independently. Also within existing collaborative structures (GPPs and others), individual partners continue to maintain their territories, which is necessary and important with regard to ownership, a major motivating factor for researchers. Collaboration does occur when the opportunity is presented and it is deemed advantageous for the participants. There must be both complementarities and mutual benefits. Independent actions will continue to have their place in a collective action framework. Collective action will be most attractive and effective when there is a regional, inter-regional or global dimension and when specialty crops are linked to cross-cutting and/or global themes.

DOCS do not feature highly on the agendas of NARS, international agencies and donors. For reasons that are not disputed here, priorities are on major, established food crops. The under-representation, due to under-valuation, of specialty crops and species however is a persistent problem in the quest for funds. Medium- and long-term funding is probably the biggest difficulty that GPPs as well as other players in this area face. This can lead to a prolonged dependence on GFAR or other initial donors due to the lack of a more diverse donor base. Advocacy at the level of international players by a broad-based, inclusive community of stakeholders is urgently needed to change perceptions and to put DOCS on the agenda.

## ***2.2 The way forward***

Pooling of resources to achieve critical mass is key in the context of positioning the DOCS community for programme and project funding. This is more of a qualitative than a quantitative issue. Improved sharing of fragmented knowledge is a further argument as this remains pivotal in achieving strategic coherence and in avoiding duplication in a field that suffers from under-funding. Also, inclusiveness and strong links with national partners are critical, providing for an environment conducive to designing effective impact pathways. Clearly, the driver for collective action is to translate research into impact.

Collective action for DOCS will have common challenges not just among the GPPs but also with CGIAR Centres, i.e., within the context of the emerging new CGIAR. The current change management process in the CGIAR intends to bring strategic coherence at the level of the CGIAR system as well as their external partners collaborating within the Strategy and Results Framework (SRF). Several of the proposed mega programmes or Consortium Research Programmes (CRPs) have expected outcomes that could involve research, development and utilization of pro-poor specialty crops and species. The opportunity for GPPs and others lies in a major reform of the way the CGIAR will work together with other research and development partners to contribute to agreed outcomes and impacts. It has been recognized that in order to achieve development impact, the work of the international research sector needs to be imbedded in the wider frame of

partnership and action. GCARD itself is an important step in the process of discussing the CGIAR Alliance's thinking within the wider GCARD community.

The *modus operandi* of collective action should be light, if possible without an additional admin superstructure. Within the collective action framework, independent activities by independent entities within well-defined domains would continue. A useful mechanism would be a virtual platform for knowledge management, capacity building, and proposal development. Preferably, existing tools should be adapted and used. At least partially this could be hosted at the eGFAR website, thereby benefiting from FAO IT-support. Such a platform would provide the important glue to hold the collective action together, particularly if the social aspect of stakeholders' interactions can be emphasized.

### ***2.3 The need for advocacy to maintain momentum and to create awareness***

The MDGs continue to guide development agendas. Climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, notwithstanding the recent controversy, are receiving huge investments. Biodiversity is highly relevant in this context. A strong message needs to be sent about the role that development opportunity crops and species can play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. NTFP management specifically has much potential in sustainable forest management and thus in the reduction of emissions due to forest degradation and deforestation.

GFAR's constituencies have prioritized the issue of agrobiodiversity as one of prime global importance, affecting as it does the lives and livelihoods of millions of small farmers and communities who are dependent upon local crop varieties and indigenous species and recognizing also the role of agrobiodiversity of all forms in agro-ecosystem function. Generally, it is crucial to link specialty crops and species to global themes to achieve adequate visibility.

A first step towards establishing DOCS and their stakeholders in agrobiodiversity agendas is advocacy, by the stakeholders, at international events. Building on the consensus achieved at the meeting of GFAR's constituencies in Rome in January 2011, individual stakeholder now can and should speak on behalf of the entire group.

Box: Vision, mission and goals – to be validated by stakeholders

#### Vision

Collaborative efforts and synergies for addressing strategic research and development issues, improved knowledge base, conducive policies, and increased capacity of service providers and communities in the field of Development Opportunity Crops and Species (DOCS) making a significant contribution to human well-being

#### Mission / Purpose

- To facilitate research synergies and efficiencies through community building, knowledge generation and access, and awareness creation
- Capacity building for community leaders/multipliers, intermediaries, and service providers
- To develop, test and disseminate intervention models in a participatory manner

#### Goals / Strategic objectives

1. Coherent research-for-development approaches by stakeholders
2. Improved access to knowledge, information flows, and capacities of stakeholders (service providers and communities)
3. Awareness of investment needs in DOCS targeted to policy makers and other stakeholders
4. Mainstreaming of DOCS in global agendas

## ***2.4 Main elements of the action plan and next steps***

### **2.4.1 Establishing justification and strategic coherence**

Initial action points have been addressed and several “unique selling points” for DOCS have been identified. These include their economic, nutritional, ecological, and social importance. A major significance is seen specifically in combating hidden hunger, in basic healthcare, and also in income generation and greater species diversity of agro-ecosystems - contributing to their sustainability. DOCS also enable survival in emergency situations and living healthier lives under conditions of hardship. However the importance small farmers attach to neglected crop and animal species is not reflected in research and development agencies’ priorities. There is evidence that farmers make use of a much wider range of plants and animals than is encompassed in standard lists of crops and livestock.

Many DOCS have unique attributes in terms of nutrient contents and functional properties that turn these species into valuable components of a diversified diet since they complement those nutritionally unbalanced diets overly relying on staples and refined carbohydrates. Along with the development of market opportunities, these crops can also significantly increase incomes for growers and collectors and create employment along the value chain. Climate change as well as land and water resources degradation are fueling interest in species adapted to difficult environments.

To develop a coherent and collective approach, CFF, GHI and NTFP/INBAR had earlier established the following common challenges: **knowledge management, capacity building, post-harvest / post collection handling / value-added, market access** and

**marketing**, and **advocacy / lobbying / fundraising**. Several core activities and projects pertaining to these common challenges are listed below under “integrated R4D programme”.

### **2.4.2 Mapping and scope**

The initial meeting of several of the key players in this field in Rome in January 2011 facilitated an overview and mapping of the various constituencies. This is an ongoing process as further national and regional entities are expected to join the effort. While the current focus is on plants, the future scope is likely to include animals, fisheries and microbial resources, too. Relevant papers and institutional scopes and connections can be found at

<http://www.egfar.org/egfar/website/new/eventpage?contentId=3120&languageId=0>.

Presently, the movement around DOCS is organizing itself under three main themes: **livelihoods, nutrition and health**, and **environment**. Synergies need to be identified precisely and in such a way that mutual benefits are likely to accrue. Further, it will be necessary to assign responsibilities or at least spheres of competence among the constituencies.

### **2.4.3 Identity and governance**

The movement needs a name that conveys identity; “Development Opportunity Crops and Species” is certainly a positive and descriptive term though not exactly catchy and perhaps difficult to translate. The deliberations of the constituencies have not yet reached the stage of discussing detailed governance mechanisms. Certainly, no additional CRP or even an institution is envisaged. Presently, working groups or task forces based on the main themes (see above) are being discussed. It is certainly worthwhile to consider how to communicate the added value of this new alliance vis-à-vis a plethora of alliances that spring up around various issues. While a governance structure is not an essential ingredient at this point, internal and external communication mechanisms must be considered pivotal to maintain the momentum and to reach out to further potential partners and to targeted audiences.

### **2.4.4 Community and communication**

Communication will be crucial in building the community and in broadcasting the message using a range of media for different audiences. This should focus on the social aspect and not so much on structure, form and content. A community will be built around common goals and a passion for them. Content has to be interactive and not just one-way messages, thus engaging existing and new stakeholders. The enormous scope, with its breadth and depth of the work, which is going beyond the planned common platform for CFF, GHI and NTFP/INBAR, and the need to always be current point to the necessity for a dedicated position rather than a sideline. Staff with an already heavy workload is unlikely to be able to adequately take care of the task. Communication is of critical importance at this early stage of the initiative, but also throughout the later stages.

A detailed communication strategy is suggested below, under the “integrated R4D programme”.

#### **2.4.5 Overview studies and priority setting: linking crops and species with issues**

DOCS cover an extremely wide and complex field. A general consensus on their importance is in evidence, yet it remains crucial to be able to develop specific projects, i.e., actions around specific crops and species in defined locations and with and for target populations, with clearly defined common themes for cross-learning, and linked to the main themes and goals of the DOCS community.

To this end, an overview study and a priority setting exercise will be helpful. This could be organized along the lines of the main themes identified above. The effort should not get bogged down in methodological issues but develop a simple approach, easy to apply and to communicate. A set of agreed indicators including the potential for cross-learning, up-scaling, and likelihood of reaching and impacting on target population(s), etc., could be developed. A participatory ex-ante assessment by weighting the indicators, i.e., estimating their contribution towards the overarching goals/issues, would inform the community and donors on the ranking and hence relevance of potential projects. Impact pathway planning would have to be an integral component of such project proposals.

#### **2.4.6 Programme development: collaborative R4D and communication strategy**

Based on the above priority setting exercise, a coherent, justifiable, and accountable R4D programme can be developed. Below a skeleton programme is suggested, based on canvassing among CFF, GHI and NTFP/INBAR and identified common challenges. This will need to be further developed to accommodate the emerging wider DOCS community’s research and development issues.

Also, a communication strategy is suggested, which is considered a core mechanism to support R4D actions throughout all phases, both among programme participants and for external stakeholders. The strategy focuses on ownership by stakeholders but recognizes the need for a dedicated activity and appropriate inputs to ensure professional performance, visibility, and outreach to and interactions with very different target audiences.

#### **2.4.7 Advocacy and fundraising for projects and core activities**

##### ***Events and media***

Immediate advocacy actions should focus on participation by partners at international events for awareness creation. Where possible, policy dialogue should be sought. Policy and decision-makers’ attention can be facilitated by the media. Partnerships and contacts with journalists therefore should be established. A promising partner is the

Communication Initiative: [www.comminit.com](http://www.comminit.com). Partners may wish to examine their connections with various media and explore the options for briefing media representatives on the emerging DOCS community and its goals and activities. Obviously, it would be very helpful to produce briefing materials, i.e., a brochure.

### ***Social media***

Social media are an important PR instrument. For a lively exchange it will be crucial to be pro-active about pulling and pushing and to use interactive applications to ensure users can be involved. The reach of social media, especially Facebook, is enormous and the potential to utilize this for the DOCS initiative requires an integrated communication strategy with social media in a central position. Given the limited funds available at this point, social media are also a highly cost-effective fundraising mechanism in lieu of a dedicated fundraising position.

### ***Fundraising***

Funding is a critical factor for several of the partners. Core funding is of course what researchers crave, to free time otherwise spent with proposal writing and to do what they do best, i.e., research. Donors to international agricultural research should be approached to this end to ensure critical functions such as pro-active communication.

The GCARD process and the reform process in the CGIAR are facilitating interaction by non-CGIAR entities with the emerging Consortium Research Programmes (CRP) presently under development. CRP4 (nutrition and health), CRP6 (forests & trees), and CRP7 (climate change, agriculture & food security) are certainly going to operate in areas relevant to the DOCS community. The biggest obstacle here is likely to be the perception of the DOCS initiative as a competitor for limited funds, while in fact it is complementary. This issue should be approached by showing how the DOCS community adds value to the CRPs and in particular how a partnership between the DOCS community and CRPs adds to the delivery capacity of CGIAR programmes.

For coordinated fundraising, partners will have to rely mainly on their own human resources to scout for opportunities, either for individual or for collective actions. Partners can and should talk on behalf of the emerging DOCS community when engaging potential donors. The strengths and complementarity of the community and the relevance of DOCS for the overarching themes should be central arguments in our pitches. To facilitate this, the fundraising strategy should be elaborated with all partners, outlining classic and new approaches, responsibilities, and funding targets for core and programme/project activities. Like with communication, this is of critical importance to the DOCS community and ideally the development and implementation of the fundraising strategy requires a dedicated position. Coordinated proposal development can be further supported by a common online platform, e.g., a simple Wiki-based application



### **3. INTEGRATED R4D PROGRAMME**

An integrated R4D programme should consist of priorities, a coherent and complementary set of projects, implementation arrangements and responsibilities, and secured and projected financing. Support mechanisms including communication, lobbying/fundraising, partnerships for delivery, i.e., research uptake are equally important. A set of guiding principles to ensure synergies, impact and learning should be applied. These include cross-sectoral linkages (there are unexploited links between livelihoods, nutrition and health, and the environment), impact pathway planning, and evaluation according to internationally established best practices.

At this point, we present core elements (responsibilities, communication strategy, and actions around common challenges), with several aspects of the programme still under development. While the concepts put forward here are pro-active and based on strategic considerations, programme and project ideas would be developed depending on priorities and opportunities for stakeholders and donors to translate ideas into actions.

#### **3.1 Responsibilities**

While an elaborate governance structure may not be needed or may even be counterproductive, clusters and leadership around the main themes (livelihoods, nutrition and health, environment) can be formed. There should be responsibilities regarding the sharing of information on cross-cutting and other themes, and on leadership for collaborative proposal development under these themes. With a growing constituency, the role of various entities needs to be defined, including the regional forums and inter-regional linkages, national systems, institutions, NGOs, private sector, and last but not least farmer innovators.

#### **3.2 Communication and knowledge management (KM) strategy**

Below several major elements of a communication strategy for DOCS are suggested. The strategy is subject to agreement by the partners as it has financial implications for a dedicated task and requires collaboration by a minimum number of partners.

##### **3.2.1 What do we want to make known – what's our message?**

- Why do we do it (why is this sector important, what are the problems and opportunities?)
- Who we are: presentation of the partners and their experience and strengths in the field of DOCS
- What we do and how (pooling of resources, light admin structure, advocacy, KM - generating and disseminating knowledge, capacity building; projects)
- Our resources
- Common challenges and links to overarching, global themes
- Funding opportunities

- Capacity building opportunities
- Business opportunities
- Employment opportunities
- Events

### **3.2.2 Objectives of the strategy**

- Achieve visibility
- Exchange information and knowledge among partners and external stakeholders
- Capacity building
- Develop community of practice
- Create sense of ownership

### **3.2.3 Target audiences**

- Beneficiaries: the poor and their spokespeople
- Partners: Crops for the Future (CFF), Global Horticulture Initiative (GHI), NTFP/INBAR, Agro-biodiversity Frameworks of Regional Forums, Agropolis Resource Centre for Crop Conservation, Adaptation and Diversity (ARCAD), World Vegetable Centre (AVRDC), Bioversity International, Cambia, CIRAD, Commission on Plant Genetic Resources, Global Crop Diversity Trust, ITPGRFA, Platform for Agrobiodiversity Research, Prolinnova, PROTA, and UNEP-GEF
- Potential partners and other external stakeholders: CGIAR CRPs, national systems and institutes, NGOs, private sector, and communities
- Technical agencies
- Media
- Donors

### **3.2.4 Tools and channels**

- 1<sup>st</sup> layer common platform / portal and 2<sup>nd</sup> layer consisting of individual partners' websites
- Blog(s)
- Facebook organization page: events, training, funding, jobs, business opportunities, videos, images, news, discussions, showcases, stories, interactive (all partners can be administrators and hence contribute), fundraising through FB
- Twitter
- Education, to reach young minds: school and university curricula
- Traditional media: rural radio
- Engage champions to promote diversified healthy diets based on non-mainstream crops and species: Jamie Oliver, etc. (a cookbook dedicated to DOCS would go a long way to this end)

### **3.2.5 Time-frame and financial resources**

A common platform/portal will need up to six months to be developed. A Facebook organization page can be set up immediately, but needs a catchy name. Financial resources are available to some extent in the NTFP grant but the widening scope and hence higher input for the DOCS initiative may require that this be revisited.

### **3.2.6 Database / information resource center**

Distributed databanks or publications on subsets of DOCS are available with partners. However, it may be worthwhile considering a one-stop shop for DOCS, which would have to provide value-added to be useful. Attributes of potential interest include

- Nutrition/medicinal properties/food value
- Poverty alleviation/economic potential (markets, value-added)
- Sources of information (experts, institutes, online resources)
- Actual and potential geographical distribution
- Scientific and common name searches
- Different applications

How to put the strategy into practice depends on resources and perceived advantages from engaging in communication activities. If it is agreed that communication is of crucial importance during early and later stages of the initiative, the necessary resources must be made available. While NTFP/INBAR will implement some collective action related communication activities (second layer platform for CFF, GHI, and NTFP/INBAR), the current configuration of the initiative goes beyond the initial smaller group; a growing constituency is envisaged that includes regional and national bodies and this development should be budgeted with regard to form (infrastructure) and content of the communication strategy.

## ***3.3 Actions (core and projects) pertaining to common challenges***

The following list of potential activities/projects is not prioritized but a collection of ideas from a sub-set of the DOCS community, i.e., CFF, GHI and NTFP/INBAR. Therefore they would have to be validated and amended by the wider community. Pointers as to the development of a prioritized and relevant programme have been given above (see priority setting).

The suggested actions require very different funding levels; some actions can be carried out to some extent within the parameters of existing resources. Mostly, they will require coordinated fundraising. It is understood that, while a pro-active strategy is needed, opportunities may arise in unplanned and unexpected ways and should have a place, too.

There are known problems with the way research has been carried out to date and particularly with the way research results have missed their targets. These include NARS' capacity (or the lack thereof) to absorb research results and technology (adaptive research, technology assessment and transfer, new partnerships), innovation systems and the need for different skill sets of researchers (soft skills, communication), focus on and

role of high-potential smallholders in innovation, regional research coordination esp. in Africa, cross-sectoral links: livelihoods, nutrition and health, and environment, as well as the widespread failure of extension systems to deliver. These are true for mainstream and non-mainstream crops and species. Lessons learnt should inform and guide the design of actions around DOCS.

### **3.3.1 Knowledge management**

Extensive innovative information clearing house (authoritative, honest broker): Common online platform, linked to individual sites for information exchange, training and funding opportunities, events, blogs, technologies and best practices (e.g., FAO-TECA: <http://www.fao.org/teca/>), social networking (see “communication strategy” above). Some aspects can be hosted at the eGFAR website, e.g., discussion groups.

### **3.3.2 Priority setting**

Peer-reviewed research paper(s) on key topics of DOCS: R&D priority setting (potential for up-scaling, research synergies / development of collaborative research programmes, identification and protection of plants / species with high potential for improving health, nutrition and reducing poverty)

### **3.3.3 Capacity-building**

- Grant writing capacity building for stakeholders
- Targeted training courses for service providers and community leaders, manuals in local languages, illustrations, video, TV and radio programmes (sustainable management, value addition, marketing, etc.)

### **3.3.4 Thematic actions**

#### **Post-harvest, value-added, and market access (example)**

- Assessing and exploiting the potential of geographic indications (GIs) for value creation and poverty alleviation
- IPR protection of farmers’/forest products
- Value chain (domestic and international) analyses, and development and testing/piloting of intervention models
- Linking DOCS producers and collectors to domestic and international markets (e.g., marketing and market intelligence, value-added, food safety awareness and enabling legislation)

*There are obvious thematic additions to make to this list such as climate change and challenges for agricultural productions systems and the role of agrobiodiversity, under-nourishment and links between food diversity, food security and health, the gender dimension of DOCS, and the urbanization trend and its implications for food production. Readers are therefore invited to contribute to this document and to fill in gaps.*