

# Working Groups for Collaborative Sorghum Research in Asia

---

**A Ramakrishna and C L L Gowda<sup>1</sup>**

## Introduction

Agricultural research is facing a severe funding crunch globally, but especially in developing countries. Research administrators and scientists are being asked to cut costs and maximize the efficiency of research output. Therefore, there is a need for collaborative research for effective utilization of scarce financial and human resources, to find solutions to important production constraints. A working group (WG) consists of scientists who share a common interest, and are committed to collectively addressing a high-priority regional problem, and sharing their research results with others. WGs coordinate and stimulate cooperative research by pooling expertise from both developing and developed countries, international research centers, and specialized research laboratories and institutions, to work together on a common platform as equal partners. WGs use existing staff and facilities, and avoid duplication of effort.

The membership of a WG may include scientists from national programs, international and regional institutions, and advanced research institutions. Each WG nominates a Technical Coordinator (TC), normally an expert on the subject, to liaise, coordinate, and harmonize research. The TC is usually supported by a network or institution that provides the necessary administrative and logistic support. The WG members plan the research agenda, share research responsibilities and results, and meet once in 2-3 years to review progress and plan future research activities. Currently, six Working Groups operate under the Cereals and Legumes Asia Network (CLAN). They focus on: groundnut viruses in the Asia-Pacific region; bacterial wilt of groundnut; botrytis gray mold of chickpea; nitrogen fixation in legumes; aflatoxin management in groundnut; and drought tolerance in legumes.

## Status of Working Groups for Sorghum Collaborative Research in Asia

Sorghum is an important cereal worldwide but its production has not kept pace with demand. A Consultative Group Meeting of Asian Sorghum Scientists was held during 16-19 Sep 1991 at ICRISAT-Patancheru to assess the need for regional collaboration and to discuss common production constraints, research priorities, and dissemination of technologies to farmers. The group resolved to establish a Sorghum Research and Development Network for Asia to enable rapid progress in technology generation, and

---

1. ICRISAT, Patancheru 502 324, Andhra Pradesh, India

its adaptation and adoption by farmers. The group also recommended that ICRISAT should initiate and coordinate the activities of this network. The overall goal of the network was to elevate the status of sorghum from that of a subsistence crop to a high-value crop. Subsequent developments and the formation of a unified Cereals and Legumes Asia Network (CLAN) resulted in changes in the organizational set up.

To carry forward the recommendations of the 1991 meeting, the Asian Sorghum Researchers' Consultative Meeting was organized during 27-29 Sep 1993, at ICRISAT-Patancheru. The meeting recommended that future collaborative research on sorghum be integrated into CLAN to strengthen collaborative research and technology and information exchange both within and outside the network. Considering the success of the Working Group approach in other CLAN priority crops, the participants agreed to form working groups to address specific problem areas as an appropriate way to conduct sorghum research and development in Asia. As a first step in the development of working groups, the production constraints in individual countries were reviewed. There were no major changes in regional priority between 1991 and 1993. As a result of this analysis, four working groups — on drought, shoot pests, grain mold, and forage sorghums — were identified. Plans were made for collaborative research activities in each group, and responsibilities and target areas were identified for each country. However, progress has been very slow compared to other WGs and only a few activities were initiated.

- Sorghum shoot pests — nurseries containing resistant germplasm and breeding lines were sent to Myanmar, Pakistan, and Thailand for evaluation.
- Drought tolerance — a questionnaire was sent to interested sorghum scientists. Responses were summarized and circulated to respondents for comments. A nursery of drought-tolerant lines was sent to interested scientists for evaluation.
- Sorghum grain mold — a sorghum grain mold nursery was distributed to interested scientists.
- Forage sorghums — a forage sorghum (single and multicut) nursery was distributed to interested scientists.

## Conclusions

Compared to other CLAN Working Groups, the four sorghum WGs have not shown the progress expected. We need to introspect, to understand the reasons for the slow progress, and suggest ways to improve and strengthen collaboration. We need to rethink the whole issue, and suggest better ways to improve linkages among scientists, and to further the cause of sorghum research and development in Asia.