

# **GRAIN Evaluation 2003**

**Commissioned by SwedBio/Sida, Novib and the Dutch Fund for Sustainable Biodiversity Management (Hivos/Novib)**

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The views and interpretations within this evaluation report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of either GRAIN or Sida, Hivos and Novib.

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## Executive Summary

This evaluation (undertaken between June and August 2003) was jointly commissioned by three of GRAIN's main donors: Sida/SwedBio<sup>1</sup>, Novib (Oxfam-Netherlands), and the Dutch Fund for Sustainable Biodiversity Management (managed by Hivos/Novib). This current evaluation considers change and impact during the period between 1997 and 2003.

The objective of the evaluation was *"to assess the relevance, impact and sustainability of GRAIN's work, with a special focus on its work in Asia and Latin America"*. More specifically, to assess:

- GRAIN's sustainability and organisational development since the Sida-funded evaluation of 1997
- GRAIN's relevance and role for civil society groups and networks, especially in Asia and Latin America, and at the international level
- the effect and impact of GRAIN's analysis, information sharing, capacity building and networking

This evaluation provides an opportunity for GRAIN and its main donors to be proactive in taking some strategic decisions about GRAIN's direction, levels and forms of engagement in shaping policies and processes for poverty alleviation, rights and the management of biodiversity important for food and agriculture.

The review was conducted through a series of semi-structured interviews with GRAIN staff and Board members, peers and partners. There have been a series of open and frank discussions of the issues and findings with the GRAIN staff throughout the evaluation.

The main conclusion of this evaluation is that GRAIN is more robust and stable than it was at the time of the 1997 Sida evaluation. There has been a commendable organisational progress since 1997 as GRAIN has put in place structures and systems that have facilitated its decentralisation and regionalisation and, -at the same time-, helped maintain internal cohesion. In turn, the decentralisation process and appointment of new regional staff have enhanced the relevance of GRAIN's policy work and capacity building for partners and their networks.

The following major areas of achievement are particularly noteworthy:

- highly productive staff investing through their strong collaborative partnerships in the development of capacity, ownership of process and methods, working in non-extractive ways in the countries in which they focus, building intellectual and human assets
- development of a more robust organisational structure and systems, providing an institutional environment for professional and personal growth
- bringing to the policy debate issues and analysis which take the agenda forward, by questioning orthodoxy and underlying assumptions which have been taken as givens in the debate on biodiversity, rights, livelihoods and sustainable food and farming systems
- production of high quality, user friendly and complimentary information and communication materials, - with different levels of detail and scope, in three different languages, and using print and electronic media for widespread dissemination
- building understanding through long term programmes and influence through long-term partnerships and networks in Asia and Latin America.
- implementation of all major recommendations made by the sida 1997 evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> Sida is supporting GRAIN until end of 2003. The "programme office" function (contacts, dialogue etc) was taken over by SwedBio on January 2003. Any future financial support from Sweden would be managed by SwedBio.

A number of risks for GRAIN were identified by both insiders and outsiders interviewed by the evaluators:

- risks of donor disengagement from main areas of GRAIN work in a more difficult global funding environment
- risks of alienating some NGOs, international organisations and some historical partners as GRAIN more closely aligns with new social movements and farmer organisations
- managing enthusiasm and commitment of staff with risk of over-work and burnout

This report further expands on these major achievements and risks, and also highlights progress and challenges in a number of key areas.

Challenges encompass a mix of problems still to be resolved, new opportunities and options for action. It is recommended that GRAIN addresses all challenges listed at the end of the different sections that make up this report. Other major recommendations for GRAIN and its main donors are listed below in the same numerical order as they appear in the report.

## **Major recommendations for GRAIN**

### **A. Organisational development**

1. Further develop user friendly guidelines and induction procedures to help staff and Board members internalise GRAIN specific ways of working, clarifying expected roles and responsibilities.
2. Continue to develop effective internal decision making structures to ensure adequate participation from region based staff. In particular, further develop active communication and information flows between programme staff and the Coordination and Finance Teams.
3. Continue to develop monitoring and evaluation systems and incentives to ensure learning in GRAIN.
4. Develop opportunities for further staff diversity through exchanges with like minded organizations, secondments and location of programme.
5. Explore options for fair and flexible change or exit strategies for senior staff in order to make space for newer staff within GRAIN. In particular, pro-actively develop ways of retaining more experienced staff through the creation of new staff categories and train “a second line” of coordinators to ensure the long term sustainability of the organization.
6. Continue to build up financial reserves to further develop GRAIN’s financial sustainability.
7. Continue to diversify sources of funding, exploring the potential contributions of independent foundations in particular.
8. Investigate the opportunity for donors to work together and finance GRAIN through an agreed programme plan with a five year time horizon. This could include joint five-yearly reviews.
9. Further clarify the roles, rights and responsibilities of the Board members, including

the Chairperson, and ensure that these are understood by new Board members.

10. Continue to diversify the membership of the Board of GRAIN, ensuring gender balance and geographical spread.
11. Further develop leadership and synergies (between the Board, the Coordinator, the Coordination Team and the Finance Team, as well as with the staff in the regions) to ensure the organisation has the ongoing ability to generate pro-active analysis and effective information on newly emerging threats to biodiversity, rights, livelihoods and culture at a time of global change.

## **B. Analysis, information and networking**

12. Continue to develop the work of the communication and information programme areas, focussing more on targeting the media. Develop and implement a strategy to pro-actively engage the media in policy influence and civil debate.
13. Further diversify the content of GRAIN materials to meet growing demands in the regions (e.g. look at the option to launch a new list server on agricultural research and corporate power).
14. Give more equal emphasis to different strands of GRAIN's programme. More specifically, GRAIN's work on rights needs to be complemented with a comparable effort in the areas of agricultural research and growing diversity in order to meet regional expectations and ensure that the organisation remains relevant in the next decade.
15. Seek to deepen the rights agenda in the arena of biodiversity management, shifting the debate from narrow definitions of farmer rights to broader notions of human and environmental rights. Focus on reframing the knowledge-policy interface on rights by a) building more on the legacy of Indigenous Peoples struggles around rights to self-determination, b) working on the epistemology and deconstruction of the notion of ownership (private property, common property, ownership as responsibility...), and c) addressing the gendered nature of knowledge and rights over biodiversity.
16. Emphasise gender relations and community differences more in GRAIN's planning, analysis, information materials and collaborative work with all partners. As a first step in this direction, develop staff skills and experiential learning in the areas of gender analysis and the analysis of difference.
17. Consider forming alliances, -or platforms for joint learning and action-, with like minded organisations and/or individuals who can offer, or help secure, the range of skills and funds needed to strengthen alternative agricultural R&D and promote more diverse and democratically controlled food systems. With the right mix, this option could help GRAIN simultaneously deepen its work in key areas (Recommendation 15) and give more equal emphasis to all aspects of its programme (Recommendation 14).
18. Facilitate an open debate among Board and staff members on matters of political choice and strategy that are likely to deeply influence the role and relevance of GRAIN in the next decade. Key questions include: how and where should GRAIN position itself in relation to social movements, NGOs and in between the micro and macro levels? Is there a need to reassess relationships with historical partners? Is GRAIN's main focus on the South still relevant in a globalising world? Should other

regions such as Eastern Europe also receive more attention? Does GRAIN need to change its name and emphasis to one that more fully encompasses action research on biodiversity, rights and livelihoods in a globalising food system?

- 19.** Continue to develop monitoring and evaluation systems and incentives to ensure learning in GRAIN. It is strongly recommended that preference should be given to alternatives to the logical framework analysis (LFA). Impact assessments and ongoing learning should ideally be based on criteria and indicators appropriate for tracking change within the flexible process approaches that characterize GRAIN's work.
- 20.** Continue investing in staff and organisational learning, - with a focus on feeding monitoring and evaluation back into planning as well as acquiring new skills that can strengthen GRAIN's capacity to engage in action research that links the local to international decision making arenas through participatory policy processes.
- 21.** Focus on convincing donors that joint learning, building local capacity and not being extractive all have relatively high human resource and financial implications. Continue to diversify funding sources to support long term financing of process oriented approaches.

### **Major recommendations for donors**

- 22.** Recognise and provide adequate future funding for the full cycle of GRAIN's integrated way of working: from needs identification, analysis and research, capacity building, implementation with partners and networks, information and dissemination, and reflection and learning.
- 23.** Investigate the opportunity for donors to work together and finance GRAIN through an agreed programme plan with a five year time horizon. This could include joint five-yearly reviews.
- 24.** Closer mutual engagement between Sida, Hivos and Novib on the one hand and GRAIN on the other to address the opportunities, weaknesses and challenges identified in this evaluation report.

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## Acronyms

<b>ALCA</b>	Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas (Free Trade Area of the Americas)
<b>ANAMURI</b>	Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales y Indígenas (Indigenous and Rural Women National Association, Chile)
<b>BASA-Asia</b>	Biodiversity in Action for Sustainable Agriculture - Asia
<b>BIOTHAI</b>	Thai Network on Community Rights and Biodiversity
<b>BRL</b>	Biodiversity Rights Legislation
<b>Bt</b>	<i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i>
<b>CECCAM</b>	Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano (Centre for Studies to Change the Mexican Rural Area)
<b>CETAP</b>	Centro de Tecnologías Alternativas Populares (Centre for Alternative Technologies, Brazil)
<b>CET Sur</b>	Centro Educación y Tecnología para el Desarrollo del Sur (Centre Education and Technology for the Development of the South, Chile)
<b>CONAMURI</b>	Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones de Mujeres Trabajadoras Rurales y Indígenas (National Coordinator of Rural Workers and Indigenous Women Organisations, Paraguay)
<b>CGIAR</b>	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
<b>EMBRAPA</b>	Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisas Agropecuárias (Brazilian Agriculture Research Enterprise)
<b>ETC Group</b>	Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (formerly RAFI)
<b>FAO</b>	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
<b>FTAA</b>	Free Trade Area of the Americas
<b>GD</b>	Growing Diversity (Project)
<b>GEDES</b>	Gestión y Desarrollo (Management and Development, Chile)
<b>GE</b>	genetically engineered
<b>GMO(s)</b>	genetically modified organism(s)
<b>GRAIN</b>	Genetic Resources Action International
<b>IAARD</b>	International Alliance on Agricultural Research and Development
<b>IARC</b>	International Agricultural Research Centre
<b>KMP</b>	Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Peasant Movement of the Philippines)
<b>MASIPAG</b>	Magsasaka at Siyentipiko para sa Pag-unlad ng Agrikultura (Farmer-Scientist partnership for development, The Philippines)
<b>MMTR</b>	Movimento de Mulheres Trabalhadoras Rurais (Rural Women Workers Movement Brazil)
<b>MST</b>	Movimento do Trabalhadores Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement)
<b>NGO</b>	non governmental organisation
<b>PAN AP</b>	Pesticides Action Network Asia Pacific
<b>PVP</b>	plant variety protection
<b>REDES</b>	Red de Ecología Social (Friends of the Earth Uruguay)
<b>SANFEC</b>	South Asia Network on Food, Ecology and Culture
<b>TRIPS</b>	Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
<b>TWN</b>	Third World Network
<b>UNORCA</b>	Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autonomas (National Union of Autonomous Small Farmers Regional Organisations, Mexico)
<b>UPOV</b>	Union Internationale pour la Protection des Obtentions Végétales (International Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties)
<b>VC</b>	Via Campesina
<b>WIPO</b>	World Intellectual Property Organisation
<b>WSSD</b>	World Summit on Sustainable Development
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organisation

# Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the evaluation

Sida/SwedBio, Novib and the Dutch Fund for Sustainable Biodiversity Management (managed by Hivos/Novib) have been important and valued GRAIN partners over many years. All three donors have helped develop the substantial intellectual assets represented within GRAIN and its networks.

After having funded GRAIN for six years, Sida held an external evaluation of GRAIN's programme and outreach in 1997. In 2003, Sida initiated a new evaluation and it was agreed to do the exercise together with Novib (Oxfam-Netherlands, Co-financing Dutch development organization), which has funded GRAIN since 1990, and the Dutch Fund for Sustainable Biodiversity Management (managed by Hivos/Novib), which has been supporting GRAIN since 2001. This current evaluation thus considers change and impact during the period between 1997 and 2003.

This evaluation of GRAIN's ways of working, - and its external effects -, means that the learning that emerges is not just restricted to the relationship between GRAIN and the above mentioned donors but should also be of wider interest to other donors working with GRAIN. It represents a forward looking dialogue between the evaluators and the staff of GRAIN as well as selected partners and external actors.

The evaluation comes at a critical moment for GRAIN at the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium as it faces the challenges of an increasingly complex and globalised world. It provides an opportunity for GRAIN and its main donors (Sida, Novib, Hivos) to be proactive in taking some strategic decisions about GRAIN's direction, levels and forms of engagement in shaping policies and processes for poverty alleviation and the management of biodiversity important for food and agriculture.

### Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation are to assess:

- GRAIN's sustainability and organisational development since the Sida-funded evaluation of 1997
- GRAIN's relevance and role for civil society groups and networks, especially in Asia and Latin America, and at the international level
- the effect and impact of GRAIN's analysis, information sharing, capacity building and networking

In addition to these specific evaluation objectives, the evaluators were asked to assess in which way the use of criteria and indicators can help GRAIN to further develop and improve its monitoring and evaluation, planning, and reporting.

The evaluation focused on GRAIN's core '*Harnessing Diversity*' programme. In the past years, GRAIN has been involved in a number of separately funded special projects (such as the 'Growing Diversity Project', and the 'Gaia-GRAIN project') but these fall outside the scope of this evaluation.

## **1.2 Report Structure**

The report is structured around three main sections and the annexes. Section 1 provides a brief description of the process of the review. Section 2 looks at progress within GRAIN in terms of organisational development and sustainability. Section 3 considers the relevance and impact of GRAIN's programme work in relation to partners, networks and policy processes. The last part of the report includes all the annexes with relevant supporting material.

Each section brings together the perspectives of both internal (staff and Board) and external (partners and others) actors on GRAIN, - with a particular focus on the organisation's relevance, roles, strengths, weaknesses and risks. Each of the main sub-sections ends with a summary set of progress highlights, challenges and recommendations. Challenges encompass a mix of problems still to be resolved, new opportunities and options for action.

## **1.3 Process of the evaluation**

The evaluation was undertaken between June and early August 2003 and was conducted through a series of face-to-face interviews with staff, board members, partners and other actors, and telephone and email interviews with a wide range of partners and peers (Annex 1 lists the names of people contacted).

Both evaluators, - Maria Jose Guazzelli (MJ) and Michel Pimbert (MP) -, analyzed the organisational and governance issues that provide coherence and structure to GRAIN, enabling it to carry out its work and plan for the future. Similarly the quality and validity of GRAIN's information activities were analysed by the two evaluators. Responsibility for geographical reviews was divided between the two consultants: with MJ assessing the external face of GRAIN and its work in Latin America and MP focusing on the same in Asia.

The first phase of the evaluation was based on an extensive review of documents and other materials (see Annex 1). Interviews with GRAIN staff and external actors were then conducted through a semi-structured process to ensure that similar areas of evidence were collected and inter-relations between GRAIN and its partners understood. Interviews were conducted in person wherever possible, otherwise by telephone. From the list of 87 contacts supplied by GRAIN about 44 people were contacted to provide the evaluators with an understanding of how GRAIN is perceived by different actors. Of these 42 have responded. The evaluators also contacted 22 other persons not listed by GRAIN and got responses from 18 of those (see Annex 2). In many cases the same issues were raised by respondents and no responses have been attributed to individuals in this report). One to one interviews were complemented with focus group discussions with staff in Barcelona (Spain), Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Los Baños (The Philippines). Last, evaluators were able to observe and assess the dynamics of two regional multi stakeholder workshops (South Asia and Mexico) and an international policy workshop (Switzerland) in which GRAIN acted as a resource person/organisation (see Annexes 2 and 3).

The effectiveness of GRAIN has only been assessed through discussion with partners, donors and peers and not through any systematic tracking of change. Given the limited time available and the nature of the questions posed, it was recognized by all parties that the evaluation would be a qualitative exercise, grounded in the data collected and analyzed by the evaluators, and informed by their prior relevant experience and expertise.

As part of the learning oriented dialogue with GRAIN, the consultants shared their findings and recommendations with staff. GRAIN staff read and reflected on the draft evaluation

report in August-early September and their subsequent views and clarifications have been taken into account in this report.

## **2. Progress of an organisation: change since the 1997 Sida evaluation**

Since the 1997 Sida evaluation there has been a structured and steady process of decentralisation and regionalisation within GRAIN. The organisation's programme and way of working have changed gradually from a Northern-based agenda, - raising awareness about genetic erosion and corporate control -, to a more holistic approach which also includes collaboration with, and support for, groups in the South working at local and national levels.

A more robust organisation has emerged during this process of organisational renewal, - with structures, systems and a degree of staff satisfaction that were previously lacking and highlighted by GRAIN's Board in 1997 as key areas of institutional weakness. This section looks at changes in several major areas of organisational health.

### **2.1 Shared vision and values**

Over the last five years GRAIN has gone through a systematic process of consolidation not only in management and systems but also in terms of development of its overall approach and ways of working (see box 1 below). This has included regular discussions among staff and the Board on clarifying GRAIN's values, shared vision as well as working methods and norms consistent with these values.

#### **Box 1. Overall approach and ways of working**

##### **GRAIN aims to:**

- Stimulate public awareness about the importance of genetic resources for society, and about developments and factors that threaten this diversity
- Increase knowledge and understanding about structural causes behind the destruction of biological diversity and the implications of this loss for the poor
- Foster activities and policies that lead to a better conservation of genetic diversity at the local, national and international level with a special focus on the interests of the poor in developing countries
- Support the activities and facilitate communication between individuals and public interest groups concerned about biodiversity, such as: third world, consumer, environment, farmer, religious, trade union, legal and research organisations.

##### **Ways of working:**

- participatory dialogues and action with regional actors
- joint agenda setting and collaborative research within regions
- critical analysis of relevant global trends
- joint information/communication work with and by network members
- institutional development/capacity building.

##### **GRAIN's cross cutting programme areas:**

- impacts of trade on biodiversity
- strengthening the rights of local communities
- agricultural research for whom?
- growing diversity
- information work and general networking

However, mainstreaming appropriate ways of working and cultural norms will require more efforts within and by GRAIN. New regional staff in particular may need help in internalising GRAIN-specific ways of working in their interactions with regional and other partners. Important steps in this direction have already been taken with the drawing up of a paper highlighting a common vision on criteria to assess GRAIN's work, and with the 'GRAIN Output Booklet' that describes common elements and criteria in GRAINs publications and research. The development of codes of conduct or user friendly guidelines may be a useful step in further clarifying and making more transparent *expected* relationships between GRAIN staff and partners (collaborative research) and between GRAIN and donors.

## **2.2 Management structures**

Since the 1997 Sida evaluation, - and following Board decisions since then, changes in the management of GRAIN have accelerated, in terms of structures, systems and staffing. GRAIN has improved its decision making structures and processes, internal financial procedures and controls and to a significant degree the conditions and management of staff.

Several internal structures have been developed to consolidate the shift away from a largely Barcelona based staff to a decentralised and regionalised organisation that has a strong sense of collective identity. These structures have led to improvements in internal communication, transparency and accountability.

### **2.2.1 Decision-making**

The management structure includes the Board, the Management Committee of the Board, and the Coordinators of the Barcelona and Los Baños offices. These formal roles are complemented by GRAIN staff meetings which identify priorities on an annual basis. Coordinated decision making has also been improved with the relatively recent addition of two key teams, the Coordination Team (CT) – focussing on overall coordination and management on a day to day basis - and the Finance and Administration Team (FT) – which supports and coordinates day to day finance and administrative work and fosters collaboration and planning amongst finance and admin staff.

On the programme front, GRAIN has a number of issue oriented teams that bring together staff responsible in specific areas, such as the 'Rights Team' and the 'Info Team'. Sometimes teams are established on an ad hoc basis for specific tasks or projects. These teams are essentially peer groups that provide mutual support and collaboration among people with similar responsibilities in GRAIN, and take decisions in their field of work.

Last, yearly staff appraisals/evaluations and their outcomes help inform decision making on individual work plans as well as for the organisation as a whole.

By clarifying the boundaries for decision-making and streamlining procedures, these different elements of GRAIN's governance have helped the organisation move away from the risk of over-consumption of staff time and resources on management tasks as well as learn to manage high expectations from a participatory decision-making process. However, there is a need for more active communication and information flows between programme staff and the Coordination and Finance Teams.

### **Progress**

- Good staff access to information and decision-making
- Internal confidence built to work together within an environment of mutual trust
- Effective participatory decision-making within an organisational culture emphasising both rights *and* responsibilities

- Good progress made in developing the internal systems and structures necessary to build GRAIN into an effective organisation

### **Challenges**

- Management of high expectations engendered through participatory decision-making structures and the decentralisation/regionalisation process

### **Recommendation(s)**

1. Further develop user friendly guidelines and introduction procedures to help staff and Board members internalise GRAIN specific ways of working, clarifying expected roles and responsibilities
2. Continue to develop effective internal decision making structures to ensure adequate participation from region based staff. In particular, further develop active communication and information flows between programme staff and the Coordination and Finance Teams.

## **2.2.2 Internal Communication**

Communication has been a focus to develop internal coherence and shared understanding. GRAIN has responded creatively to the communication needs induced by the decentralisation process and the hiring of staff in parts of Latin America, Asia, West Africa, Europe and Canada. Internal communication is now based on a judicious mix of web based systems, telephone and face to face meetings. These innovations have allowed the organisation to act in a coordinated and focused way in both its internal and external activities.

GRAIN has also taken initiatives to better use its communication potential to enhance organisational learning. Open communication on information derived from monitoring and evaluation processes is seen as a key for designing and catalysing learning and effectiveness throughout GRAIN.

### **Progress**

- a coherent website for the whole organisation providing a clear branding for GRAIN and its analysis
- significant developments in intranet communications ensuring excellent linkages between staff wherever they are located
- functional complementarity between intranet communication and e-mail, chat, and teleconferencing systems

### **Challenges**

- Building effective communication processes for internal learning based on appropriate criteria and indicators (see Annex 8)

## **2.3 Human Resources Management**

In this section we first analyse key Human Resource (HR) issues of GRAIN, particularly the attractiveness of GRAIN as a workplace, the diversity of the staff and the career opportunities the organisation can provide for its employees. Second, we consider some of the important operational issues for human resource management and reflect on the progress made since the 1997 Sida review.

### 2.3.1 Staffing in GRAIN

The Staff of GRAIN can be divided into three categories: overall coordination, done by the GRAIN Coordinator in cooperation with the Coordination Team; Programme Staff; Technical or Programme Support Staff. In some cases there is overlap between the different categories, with the Coordinator being involved in direct programme work, and some programme staffers being involved in coordination functions. Over the years the relative distribution of staff in the above categories is shown in Table 1.

As can be seen staffing levels at GRAIN have nearly doubled over the last 5 years, from a total of 7 (1997) to 13 (2003). The doubling in size of the Programme staff in particular is a direct consequence of GRAIN's decentralisation and regionalization process. The size of the organization is nevertheless within staff levels recommended by the 1997 Sida evaluation (Annex 4).

**Table 1 Distribution of categories of staff over the years**

Staff Category	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Coordination	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Programme	4	4	5	6	8	8	9
Technical/Support	2	3	3	5	3	3	3

### 2.3.2 Diversity

Staff diversity (gender, ethnicity, age) is an important strength within any organisation, particularly in an international organisation committed to ensuring that voices of different groups are heard. Looking at the diversity figures (Table 2), it can be seen that GRAIN has made progress in ensuring it achieves diversity across two major areas: gender and north/south representation.

Gender in GRAIN staff has been quite consistently balanced between 1997-2003, with male and female staff relatively evenly spread across professional categories. It is noteworthy that there has been a substantial increase in the diversity and representation of nationalities between 1997-2003. The number of nationalities among GRAIN staff increased from 5 (1997) to 10 (2003), with roughly equal representation from the North and the South. Moreover, there is a close correspondence between nationality and the country where GRAIN staff are located, with a majority of regional staff being nationally recruited staff (Table 2).

Table 2 GRAIN Staff in 2003							
#	Surname	Name	Nationality	Gender	Location	Category	Time
1	Bell	Janet	British	Female	USA	Programme	80%
2	Bhutani	Shalini	Indian	Female	India	Programme	100%
3	Gaddi	Noemi	Philippine	Female	Philippines	Techn/Support	100%
4	Gimeno	Daniela	Spanish	Female	Spain	Techn/Support	100%
5	Hobbelink	Henk	Dutch	Male	Spain	Coordination	100%
6	Kuyek	Devlin	Canadian	Male	Canada	Programme	80%
7	Montecinos	Camila	Chilean	Female	Chile	Programme	80%
8	Santos	Lene	Philippine	Female	Philippines	Programme	100%
9	Urkiola	Aitor	Spanish	Male	Spain	Techn/Support	100%
10	Vaughan	Alexis	British	Male	France	Programme	100%
11	Vellvé	Renée	USA	Female	Philippines	Programme	100%
12	Vicente	Carlos	Argentinian	Male	Argentina	Programme	50%
13	Zoundjihékon	Jeanne	Bénin	Female	Benin	Programme	70%

These organisational trends are laudable as they reflect a strong commitment to diversity and social inclusion. For many observers, GRAIN is an organisation attempting to break down conventional walls to become an 'open' institution. But apart from increasing diversity through long-term appointments GRAIN may also consider other ways of sustaining or/and encouraging greater representation, including secondments (in both directions) to donors and partner institutions, collaborative programmes and projects (already widely practised) and short-term fellowships.

### **Progress**

- Improving diversity has been a major focus area for GRAIN and much progress has been made, with key recommendations of the 1997 Sida evaluation implemented (Annex 4).
- Despite difficulties for a small organisation of encouraging greater southern representation, real progress can be seen in all parts of GRAIN

### **Challenges**

Given GRAIN's aim to keep the upper limit on staff size to no more than some 15 people, explore ways to further diversify and grow institutionally (e.g. staff employed part time by two organizations; grow internationally through a network of like minded partners. This may also help GRAIN better address newly emerging challenges on the program side of its work (see section 3.4).

### **2.3.3 Attractiveness**

The performance of GRAIN is mainly dependent on its attractiveness to committed and intelligent professionals and other staff. Historically, GRAIN has experienced certain difficulties in attracting high quality staff to its main Barcelona based office in Spain – but that became less of an issue in the decentralization process.

In many ways, regionalization and decentralization have made GRAIN much more attractive to would be Program and support staff. This, - combined with the use of modern communication systems -, has made it possible for new staff to work from their home country base or another location of their choice. Last, the attractiveness of GRAIN has further increased lately with the option of employing short or long term consultants to work in specific program areas e.g. analysis of WTO and WIPO negotiations on Intellectual Property Rights, genetic resources and peoples' knowledge.

It is noteworthy that all current staff view GRAIN as an attractive organization because of its internal open and participatory culture, non hierarchical relations, fair approach to setting and reviewing salaries (salary differentials within GRAIN are kept within a 1 to 3 ratio), competitive overall package & benefits, and a clear Staff charter as reference point. The attractiveness of GRAIN, - as a source of staff identity and pride-, is further emphasized by the overall perception insider and outsiders have of its organizational culture (Box 2).

#### **Box 2. GRAIN's culture seen from inside and outside the organisation in 2003**

- multicultural atmosphere and sensitive to cultural differences
- non bureaucratic
- gives space for initiative and is supportive
- joint planning culture yet emphasis on autonomy
- informal, non hierarchical
- interdisciplinary

- intellectual vitality
- serious professional, trustworthy partner with sensitive and well informed staff
- openness to ideas from the grassroots
- reliable
- independence, credibility
- sensitive in how it handles relationships and in how it works with partners
- non boastful, low profile and not out to make its name

### 2.3.4 Career opportunities

Career prospects or/and opportunities for growth are also an important part of the attractiveness of an organisation and workplace. GRAIN, even as a small organisation, needs to be able to offer equal career development pathways/opportunities for growth for both its Program and Technical/Support staff. It is also true that as staff grow in competence and aspirations they might leave GRAIN and take their next career step in another organization. Horizontal career development of this nature is positive and staff should have the opportunities to grow both through exposure to different work experiences (within and outside GRAIN) as well as through continued professional development.

GRAIN currently has a flexible approach to the Terms of Reference of its staff, which are updated and changed if needs arise or staff asks for new responsibilities. Internal career options for all staff are however essential. GRAIN may need to develop certain mechanisms for creating more opportunity and mobility among more senior Program Staff in particular. The introduction of a new category of GRAIN position (e.g. a Senior Fellow or Associate position) would for example make it possible for the most senior Programme staff and the Coordinator to remain within the organisation and, at the same time, leave the space for advancement of others into coordinating positions. A time limit for the Coordinator positions is also an option to create further possibilities for upward mobility and open up new opportunities for staff who move out of coordinating/managerial roles. Similar progress needs to be made to develop further career opportunities for technical staff while recognizing that opportunities are limited in an organization the size of GRAIN. These institutional arrangements may be important for the sustainability of the organization. They would potentially allow GRAIN to plan ahead of time and invest in training a “second line” of staff who could step in when senior staff either leave or decide to refocus their activities within the organization.

#### Progress

- Increased confidence amongst staff concerning staffing and other human resource management issues
- Decentralisation and flexible working arrangements make GRAIN an attractive organization that is able to retain the type of staff necessary for its continued development

#### Challenges

- Further development of internal career development/job enrichment opportunities for programme and administrative staff
- Finding creative and fair and flexible change strategies and/or ways of retaining senior staff to make space for new/younger staff. Having been “long with GRAIN” may become a potential problem as new staff come to dominate the organization, expecting leadership, novelty, proactive management and coordinators to “be on top of things”

- Ensuring that staff appraisals/evaluations are held regularly and in a consistent manner. This is critical given the larger size and geographical spread of GRAIN staff today.
- Use of staff appraisals to plan adequate support for staff who, at times, are concerned about not living up to expectations and performing well in a fast paced organization with a relatively high output.

### Recommendation(s)

3. Continue to develop monitoring and evaluation systems and incentives to ensure learning in GRAIN
4. Develop opportunities for further staff diversity through exchanges with like minded organisations, secondments and location of programme
5. Explore options for fair and flexible change or exit strategies for senior staff in order to make space for newer staff within GRAIN. In particular, pro-actively develop ways of retaining more experienced staff through the creation of new staff categories and train “a second line” of coordinators to ensure the long term sustainability of the organization.

## 2.4 Funding and Financial Management

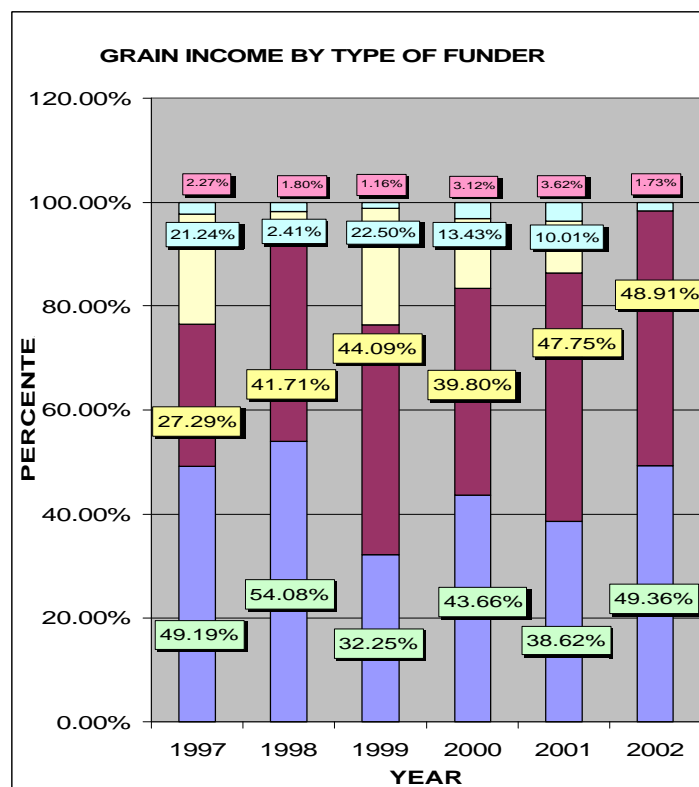
### 2.4.1 Growth trends and sources of funds

The overall annual income of GRAIN has risen from 370 686 Euros in 1997 to 717 065 Euros in 2002. The sources of GRAIN’s income are shown in table 3. The most significant increase during this 5 year period has occurred between 1997/98 when the share of Government Aid Agency (GAA) funds significantly increased in GRAIN's overall income,- from 27.29% (1997) to 41.71% (1998) of the total. Today, GRAIN receives roughly equal funding from the GAAs and NGO sources (Figure 1). Sida and the Dutch government are the two GAAs that have consistently supported GRAIN over the period considered in this evaluation.

		Type	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
CAFOD	UK	NGO	12'000	12'000	6'000	26'000	20'800	22'820
Tròcaire	IR	NGO	9'404	15'815	15'814	24'725	24'710	24'760
Brot f/d Welt	D	NGO	29'976	30'000	15'000	30'000	30'000	15'000
GORTA	CH	NGO	1'258	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
NOVIB	NL	NGO	29'014	33'695	38'559	68'042	68'061	68'067
SwissAid	CH	NGO	16'726	16'816	9'387	-----	-----	30'000
Gaia	UK	NGO	21'667	32'779	-----	65'722	54'476	122'734
CBDC		IGO	25'636	8'987	21'100	-----	-----	-----
Misereor	D	NGO	48'227	45'181	46'016	30'558	110'558	70'558
Dutch Govt. (DGIS)	NL	GO	50'000	91'395	133'962	143'000	-----	-----
Swedish Govt. (Sida)	SE	GO	51'173	64'328	64'118	68'881	172'920	175'691
EC		IGO	53'091	-----	80'000	80'000	80'000	-----
DanchurchAid	DK	NGO	7'076	7'914	6'717	6'704	-----	-----
Christian Aid	UK	NGO	7'006	7'683	7'394	8'342	-----	-----
Finnish Govt. (Finida)	FI	GO	-----	-----	-----	25'203	33'604	
Dutch Biodiversity Fund	NL	GO	-----	-----	-----	-----	174'997	175'006

Other Funding		Other	8'432	6'733	5'213	18'576	28'921	12'429
			<b>370'686</b>	<b>373'326</b>	<b>449'280</b>	<b>595'754</b>	<b>799'048</b>	<b>717'065</b>

Figure 1



	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<b>NGO</b>	49.19%	54.08%	32.25%	43.66%	38.62%	49.36%
<b>GO</b>	27.29%	41.71%	44.09%	39.80%	47.75%	48.91%
<b>IGO</b>	21.24%	2.41%	22.50%	13.43%	10.01%	0.00%
<b>Other</b>	2.27%	1.80%	1.16%	3.12%	3.62%	1.73%
	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 2.4.2 Reserve trends

Reserves are an important indicator of an organisation's resilience and ability to deal with unexpected financial crisis. As can be seen from table 4, GRAIN's reserves have grown at a steady and commendable pace over the last 5 years.

However, if compared to the size of GRAIN's overall budget, the share of the reserves fund have relatively decreased. In 1997, the reserves amounted to 32% of GRAIN annual income – a figure that was down to 20% in 2002. GRAIN's Board hold the policy that GRAIN should aim to have a reserve of one third of its annual budget (enough to sustain its operations for 4 months), This would indicate that there is need for further increase in GRAIN's reserves.

Table 4. GRAIN'S RESERVE FUND (in Euros)

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003*
<b>Reserves</b>	119'913	131'462	129'187	132'146	150'568	143'655	178'853

\*Projections after 2002 results

### Progress

The above analysis of data points to sound development of the organisation:

- diversified sources of income from different sectors – government, non-government and intergovernmental sector
- balanced development of growth and income
- a reasonable distribution of funding among donors, without a pronounced dominance by one individual donor
- increase in the unrestricted reserves

### Challenges

- although there have been continued improvements in growth with a diversity of funding sources, there is a clear need to further diversify to ensure no over-dependence on donors that may change their priorities or reduce their contributions in a more difficult global environment

### Recommendation(s)

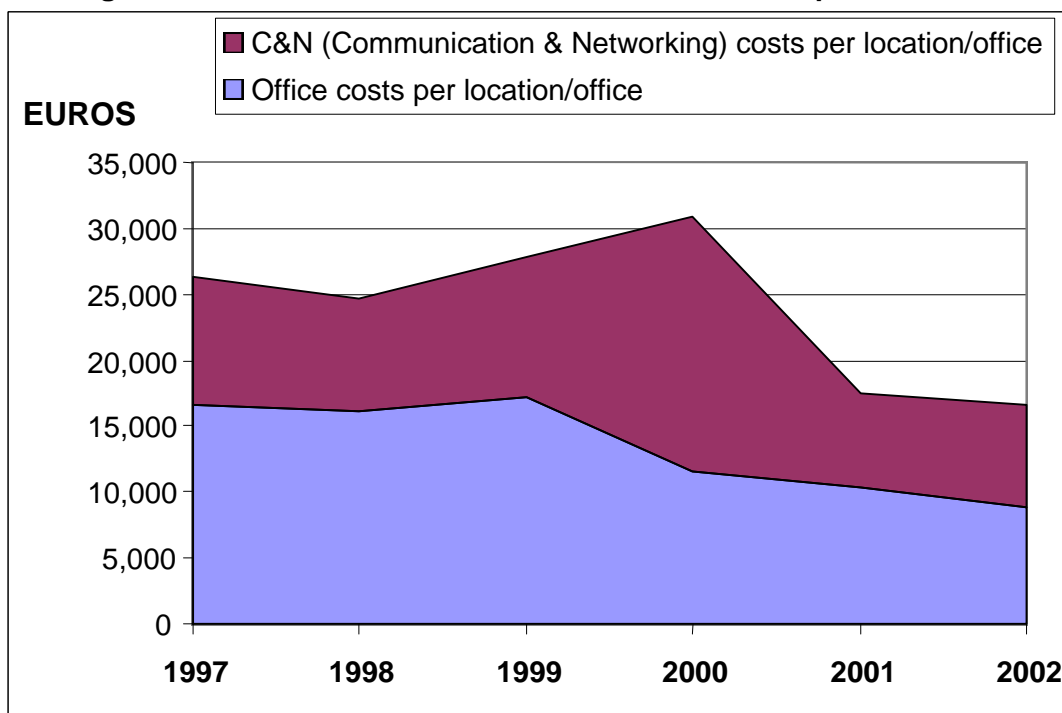
6. Continue to build up financial reserves to further develop GRAIN's financial sustainability.
7. Continue to diversify sources of funding, exploring the potential contributions of independent foundations in particular

### 2.4.3 Financial management

The internal financial management systems of GRAIN contribute to the robustness of the organisation. GRAIN's decision to plan its activities on a 3 year budget cycle reflects a commendable level of foresight, competence and financial discipline. Moreover, donor support for each 3 year Harnessing Diversity program is process oriented and not for specific projects, ensuring that donors fund the organisation as a whole rather than on a piecemeal (project) basis. This gives GRAIN a relative but important degree of stability and flexibility,- enabling improvements in administration, staff skills, communication and so on.

Overall, average office, communication and networking cost have decreased over the years with decentralisation and the posting of staff in the regions. Having two offices in 1997, GRAIN has now people working in 8 different locations. Between 1999 and 2001 a substantial investment was made to create office and communication infrastructure, but the net result of the decentralisation is a lower average expenditure per location in this area. (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Office and communication & network costs per location/office**



	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<b>Number of locations/offices</b>	2	2	3	4	7	8
<b>Average office costs per location/office</b>	16,532	16,061	17,216	11,632	10,390	8,892
<b>Average C&amp;N (Comm. &amp; Networking) costs per location/office</b>	9,745	8,602	10,618	19,217	7,184	7,664

The recent creation of the Finance and Admin Team (FT) is apparently proving useful in ensuring day to day cooperation on administration and financial developments throughout GRAIN's decentralised and multi-country set up. The FT currently includes two Barcelona and one Los Baños based staff with financial competence, and may ultimately need to include an additional person for finance coordination and oversight for the Americas.

### Progress

- clarifying responsibilities on financial matters
- good financial tracking systems set up
- establishment of Finance and Admin Team to develop a systematic approach to financial administration across GRAIN

### Challenges

- given GRAIN's staff numbers and geographical spread of operations it may be necessary to develop longer term budget plans to ensure the whole organisation and its process oriented approach are funded and secure (e.g. shift from a 3 year to 5 year Harnessing Diversity program?)
- ensuring that the financial management culture of GRAIN is sensitive and responsive to the specific needs and situations of partners in the regions. Sensitive facilitation and the capacity for creative responses by technical staff are of equal importance as good book keeping and auditing skills in an international organisation that seeks to empower groups working in a variety of cultural settings.

## Recommendation(s)

- Investigate the opportunity for donors to work together and finance GRAIN through an agreed programme plan with a five year time horizon. This could include joint five-yearly reviews.

## 2.5 Governance

GRAIN is governed by an international Board made up of seven members. Changes in the Board since 1997 reflect a genuine attempt to internationalise GRAIN. There are now seven countries represented on the Board, with members from Latin America, SE Asia, Europe and North America. However, the Board of GRAIN has become less gender balanced over the same period, with only one out of seven members being a woman in 2003 (Table 5). The gender situation should improve after November 2003 as new members join the Board of GRAIN (Table 5).

Year	Number	BY GENDER		BY REGION				
		Female	Male	Africa	Asia	Europe	Latin America	N. America
1997	6	2	4	0	2	3	1	0
2003	7	1	6	1	2	1	2	1
2003*	8	3	5	2	2	1	2	1

\*post November 2003

A Board with 7 or 8 members for an organisation of the size of GRAIN is considered to be a large board. If its members are scattered around the world it means substantial logistical problems and costs in bringing together Board members for decision making. To reduce costs (funds, time) GRAIN's Board now meets once a year instead of twice, as was the case until 1999

In response to the difficulties of bringing the whole Board together regularly and ensuring good engagement and oversight of GRAIN

- the Board has constituted an Management Committee consisting of the Chairperson, the Treasurer and one ordinary member. This Committee deals with financial and management issues, and meets twice per year.
- Board members in any given region are in regular contact with GRAIN staff posted in the same region, at times actively collaborating in GRAIN programme activities

GRAIN staff are a major factor in the governance of an organisation that has a participatory decision making culture. GRAIN's governance has therefore to be understood as the outcome of the interplay between them and the Board, with the Coordinator playing a key linking role between the Board and the organisation.

The Board is also a major asset for GRAIN and a body capable of effective peer review, visioning and strategising, active collaboration in programme activities and advocacy. It is important to find ways and means to further involve Board members in GRAIN's regional and international activities.

### Progress

- Major improvements in governance through changes to the Board and its style of operation, shifting to a strategic oversight body that reflects more the regional realities GRAIN now deals with

- Board members chosen for their good understanding of biodiversity, rights and livelihood issues in relation to the dynamics of globalising food systems and world trade
- Board members are from/located in the regions where GRAIN works, ensuring that the organisation's work is relevant to regional partners and processes

### Challenges

- For staff- designing and carrying out programme activities in the regions in ways that enlist and build on the assets of Board members (intellectual, networks etc)
- For the Board - communicating GRAIN messages to key actors and decision makers at local, regional and international levels as appropriate

### Recommendation(s)

9. Further clarify the roles, rights and responsibilities of the Board members, including the Chairperson, and ensure that these are understood by new Board members
10. Continue to diversify the membership of the Board of GRAIN, ensuring gender balance and geographical spread.
11. Further develop leadership and synergies (between the Board, the Coordinator, the Coordination Team and the Finance Team, as well as with the staff in the regions) to ensure the organisation has the ongoing ability to generate pro-active analysis and effective information on newly emerging threats to biodiversity, rights, livelihoods and culture at a time of global change

## 3. GRAIN's Programme: relevance, effects and impact

GRAIN's ongoing multi-year programme plan, - *Harnessing Diversity* -, is divided into five distinct but interconnected areas (Box 3 and Annex 5).

### Box 3. GRAIN Programme Areas

- **Trade and Biodiversity.** Focuses on the impact of international trade on the local management of biodiversity and food security. It analyses trade agreements in relation to this and also looks at how communities are reacting to and coping with the increased pressures created by trade liberalisation.
- **Strengthening the rights of local communities.** Focuses on the struggle to articulate, strengthen and implement rights of local communities in relation to biodiversity management and traditional knowledge.
- **Agricultural research for whom?** Focuses on the promotion of relevant research for farming communities to help the further development of locally adapted sustainable farming and livelihood systems. Critical analysis of further privatisation of research and the top-down, internationally imposed models of industrialisation and uniformisation of agriculture, and against new technologies such as genetic engineering, which serve to undermine local agricultural systems.
- **Growing Diversity Revisited.** Agricultural biodiversity has become a central concern in many development co-operation projects and national development policies. GRAIN works with the groups active in this field, in the area of capacity building, documentation, and articulation of needed policy environments and measures
- **Cross-cutting information work and General Networking.** This programme area brings together all of GRAIN's general information activities and outreach and networking functions to promote cooperation amongst the NGOs and other actors involved.

In this section we first examine the relevance and impacts of GRAIN's information and

networking activities. These are the areas of GRAIN's work that are most visible to the outside world, - shaping external perspectives and opinions on GRAIN. We then move upstream and critically assess the quality, effects and impact of the more analytical and research oriented aspects of GRAIN's programme (Box 3). However, it should be born in mind that this presentation is somewhat artificial in that GRAIN's programme activities are tightly interlinked. Indeed, GRAIN's work may be thought of as a continuum of overlapping activities and an iterative cycle that includes:

1. dialogues with partners to identify emerging issues and needs
2. idea initiation and development
3. building capacity and relationships to carry out the research and analysis
4. actually carrying out the research/analysis
5. adequately supporting the communication and targeting of the outcomes of the research/analysis using appropriate media and mechanisms
6. reflection and learning to ensure continued improvement with partners and within GRAIN

What follows must be seen and read in the context of this integrated cycle of reflection and action.

### 3.1 Information and communication

Most outsiders know GRAIN through its information and communication work. Effective communication has been key in developing a more coherent and targeted external understanding amongst donors, peers, partners and others not familiar with GRAIN.

Feedback on the quality, usefulness and relevance of GRAIN's information and outreach is generally very positive. It is particularly noteworthy that GRAIN materials are perceived as useful by many different actors: policy makers and government representatives, scientists, academics, journalists, farmer groups, civil society organisations and grassroot activists.

#### 3.1.1 Complementary information outputs

One reason for this positive assessment lies in GRAIN's efforts to produce several complementary information outputs, - with different levels of detail and scope, in three different languages and by making information widely available through print and electronic media. A summary of GRAIN's main information and communication outlets is shown in Box 4 and more details are provided in Annex 6.

#### Box 4. A diversity of information materials

**GRAIN web sites.** GRAIN set up the [www.grain.org](http://www.grain.org) website in 1995. The format of the website changed in 2001, when it was re-launched with a new structure and format. The GRAIN website is split into three languages, which each have information about the work and publications of the organisation. All three languages contain a "magazine": *Seedling* in English, *Biodiversidad* in Spanish and *Semences de la Biodiversité* in French. For an organisation the size of GRAIN, there is a huge amount of information on the website, most of which is available in HTML and PDF format. The website gets roughly 1,500 visits a day. Perhaps more relevant to note is the enormous amount of files that are being downloaded. For example, between early September and early December 2002, the website received 130,000 visitors who downloaded nearly 17 gigabytes of documents. This means that people come to GRAIN's website not just to browse, but to take information for their own use. The Latin American website ([www.biodiversidadla.org](http://www.biodiversidadla.org)) on agricultural biodiversity issues is supported by GRAIN, the ETC Group and Misereor.

**BIO-IPR.** BIO-IPR is a specialised information service that GRAIN has produced since September

1998. It relies on an electronic mailing list through which GRAIN circulates timely news and analysis about developments in the field of intellectual property rights related to biodiversity and associated knowledge, especially as they affect developing countries.

There are currently over 1,000 subscribers in 83 countries. In 2000, after four years of operation, GRAIN conducted a participatory evaluation of BIO-IPR, engaging the full subscribership. The level of participation was high (30%) and the results were positive.

**Magazines.** *Seedling* was redesigned in July 2002 on its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. *Seedling* was originally a newsletter meant to serve an initially tiny network of NGOs in the North working on issues related to agricultural biodiversity. Over the years, *Seedling's* audience widened and diversified, and the breadth of the issues it covered increased too. The *Seedling* (whether on the web or on paper) continues to be the main contact channel with GRAIN's audience, and it is particularly important tool for getting information out to people with poor or no internet access. The new *Seedling* has been very well received both inside and outside GRAIN, and there is a marked increase in the participation of GRAIN staff in producing the magazine, which means that it now more effectively reflects and enhances the profile of the organisation (print run was over 2100 copies).

*Biodiversidad* is a quarterly magazine produced in Latin America on agricultural biodiversity issues in partnership with the NGO Redes in Uruguay. It is the most important source of information in Latin America on agricultural biodiversity issues. The print run is 2000, 1500 or which are sent to individuals and the rest to various organisations in Latin America for local distribution.

*Semences de la Biodiversité* is GRAIN's first regular French publication and has been published monthly since January 2002. It is aimed at a Francophone audience in North, West and Central Africa. Since the level of understanding of these issues is low in the region, *Semences* is written in a simple style and kept brief (2 pages). *Semences* is sent to about 700 subscribers, mainly by post but also by email.

**Briefings and Reports.** GRAIN's briefings and reports vary in length, language, style, format and authorship. The audience also varies from NGOs to policy makers to a wider audience. Many publications are translated into other languages, usually from English to Spanish or French. Around two thirds of GRAIN's reports are written in collaboration with other organisations or individuals (a deliberate strategy). Since 1999, GRAIN has produced 32 briefings and reports in English. The average is six per year, except in 2000 when 12 were produced. They have tended to be 20-40 pages long, providing in-depth analysis of a specific issue. GRAIN has recently started producing shorter briefings, around 4-5 pages long, with less background and analysis, and more 'punch' (such as 'TRIPs-plus through the back door'). These tend to be more topical and newsworthy, and are generally accompanied by a news release. The various briefings produced are outlined in GRAIN's Activity Reports.

Direct feedback from the range of people interviewed for this evaluation as well as responses from readers of *Seedling* (Annex 6) and citations in the media (Box 5) confirm that GRAIN's information is offering a valuable service to many different actors. But the more invisible use of GRAIN material is perhaps one of the most telling indicators of how effective it is in getting its message out. Often, groups in developing countries translate GRAIN materials into local languages and use them in their own publications. But also official institutions tend to use GRAIN materials. For example the UK governmental commission on IPR ([www.iprcommission.org](http://www.iprcommission.org)) used a lot of GRAIN's work. The Journal of World Intellectual Property often references GRAIN material, and individual researchers draw on GRAIN publications as well (The most recent example is an article by Nwauche in January 2003 titled "An evaluation of the African Regional IPR systems" which drew heavily from GRAIN publications and press releases). This demonstrates that GRAIN has been on the cutting edge of IPR issues, in particular TRIPs-plus and WIPO's patent harmonisation drive.

#### **Box 5. GRAIN making news**

Since 1997, GRAIN (or GRAIN's work) has been featured by the BBC, allAfrica.com, Reuters, The Independent (UK), SUNS, Yahoo News (via oneworld.net), New Internationalist, The Guardian (UK), IPS, and many smaller magazine and email lists. GRAIN has featured prominently in national and local media, particularly in Benin and the Philippines, and also in India.

The press releases sent out about "*ISAAA in Asia: Promoting corporate profits in the name of the poor*" were picked up by major dailies in the West, including Le Monde, which used the publication in writing a lengthy article on ISAAA and the push to bring GMOs to the South. In Thailand and the Philippines, conferences were organised by local partners around some of the collaborative reports produced in 2000 and 2001 generated excellent press coverage. This included participation by a GRAIN staff/consultant in one of Thailand's most popular TV talk shows, where he debated BB rice with the Director of the Ministry of Agriculture and Witoon of Biothai. The BB rice paper and the press coverage surrounding it played a big role in getting the Thai NARS to back down from a project to develop BB rice in Thailand.

### 3.1.2 Ways of working

The way in which GRAIN information materials are designed and produced also help explain why they are well perceived and widely used. The following principles and tools guiding GRAIN's information strategy are particularly commendable:

- **Working collaboratively.** GRAIN usually tries to write reports in collaboration with other organisations or individuals. There are many reasons for this, the most important being to ensure that local groups are brought into the process of researching, analysing and writing the report. Not only does this build capabilities and empower these groups, it also ensures that the information is disseminated more effectively. Working in this collaborative way takes more time and effort and can create 'political' tensions, but the benefits far outweigh the inconveniences. GRAIN also encourages others to write for *Seedling*, and this has been successful in bringing in different aspects and issues that GRAIN is not working on directly (for example, the 'livestock' focus of the January 2003 *Seedling*).
- **Emphasis on translations.** Translating GRAIN materials is an important focus to ensure widespread dissemination of its work. *Seedling* and *Biodiversidad* editors work closely together to ensure that relevant articles are available in both English and Spanish. Recently there has been a particular emphasis on translating GRAIN materials into French for francophone Africa, because there is such a strong need for information on the subject in French. The materials translated includes a compilation of the best *Seedling* articles (1999-2001). Translation of material into national and even local languages is encouraged. A summary of the collaborative research papers GRAIN did with groups and individuals in SE Asia in 2000 was translated into Thai by Biothai. PAN-Indonesia translated at least two of the papers (Hybrid Rice and BB Rice) into Bahasa-Indonesia. Many of GRAIN's publications are translated without staff being aware of it.
- **Media work.** GRAIN works with the press at the international and national levels, but does not have the capacity to make this a major focus of its work. Nor does GRAIN wish to spend time promoting itself as an organisation in the media – staff and Board members would rather see local groups names being associated with an issue rather than GRAIN's. More often than not GRAIN works on collaborative press releases with other organisations, where it plays more of a supporting role.

- **Using website portals.** Website portals are an important avenue for disseminating GRAIN materials more widely. [www.oneworld.net](http://www.oneworld.net) is particularly effective in doing this, and it publishes all the material GRAIN sends out on email lists. Other portals include biotech-info net ([www.biotech-info.net](http://www.biotech-info.net)) which publishes much of BIO-IPR, Eldis ([www.eldis.org](http://www.eldis.org)) – and in particular the ELDIS IPR Resources Centre ([www.eldis.org/ipr/](http://www.eldis.org/ipr/)), CID at Harvard University ([www.cid.harvard.edu/cidtrade/issues/iprpaper.html](http://www.cid.harvard.edu/cidtrade/issues/iprpaper.html)), SCIDEVnet ([www.scidev.org](http://www.scidev.org)) and the Environmental News Service (ENS – [www.ens-news.com](http://www.ens-news.com)).
- **Answering queries.** Most GRAIN staff spend time providing information on GRAIN issues to academics, journalists, NGOs, policy makers and others. In the South, where internet access is restricted, this can take up a lot of time. Answering these enquiries is an important part of the work and can sometimes bring important publicity to an issue. However, it is not easy for GRAIN to provide all the support it would like to, and GRAIN prioritises helping those who can most directly help the people it tries to support.
- **Improving the quality of outputs.** To ensure that the material produced is of high quality, a *GRAIN output booklet* has been produced to provide guidelines for GRAIN staff on producing and writing English publications. As well as advice on how to write clear and concise English, it encourages writers to think about their audience and how to focus their message.

External perceptions of the quality, relevance and usefulness of GRAIN's information materials were very positive overall. However, there were also strongly held views that GRAIN gives inadequate attention to working with the media, resulting in sub optimal outreach and effectiveness in policy advocacy work. The issue here is not so much putting out press releases alone or with partners. It is much more about developing a strategy to enlist media early on in GRAIN's work, - to proactively and systematically link GRAIN analysis/ideas with media work that can help foster civil debate and shifts in policy.

### Progress

- Production of high quality information materials for different user groups
- Synergies and impact achieved by disseminating information through print (magazines, policy briefs and reports) and electronic means (web sites, list server, e-mail, CDs)
- Multilingual information materials (English, French, Spanish) tailored to regional needs
- Complex issues presented in clear and accessible language, allowing various actors to better grasp policy discussions and their implications as well as use materials in their own capacity building programmes
- Inclusive and process oriented approach to designing, writing and reviewing information materials with partners, with strong shared ownership and capacity building elements built in
- Information work often used as a catalyst or means to bring different and new actors together, strengthening human and social assets (skills, knowledge, networks) within regions
- Overall, substantial progress made in implementing recommendations of the 1997 Sida evaluation

### Challenges

- Maintaining high standards of critical information and communication work in the face of possible shifts in donor priorities and declining budget allocations for independent research, analysis and reporting

- Diversifying content of GRAIN materials to strengthen areas of programme work not directly related to the “rights” agenda e.g. new list server on agricultural research and corporate power
- Further strengthening of collaborative publication ventures with relevant organisations and groups in the North and the South
- Develop and implement a strategy to pro-actively and centrally engage the media in policy influence and civil debate

### Recommendation(s)

12. Continue to develop the work of the communication and information programme areas, focussing more on targeting the media. Develop and implement a strategy to pro-actively engage the media in policy influence and civil debate.
13. Further diversify the content of GRAIN materials to meet growing demands in the regions (e.g. look at the option to launch a new list server on agricultural research and corporate power)

## 3.2 GRAIN’s research and analysis

From the perspective of most outsiders interviewed, GRAIN’s analysis of issues around biodiversity, rights, livelihoods and sustainable agriculture remains as relevant today as it was prior to the 1997 Sida evaluation. Relevance in this context is strongly linked with a recognition that GRAIN’s analysis, position taking and perspectives are seen to be more principled and different from mainstream thinking, including the views of many NGOs. GRAIN is perceived as one of the few international organisations that has retained an approach in which local communities, -their rights and notions of well being-, are centre stage. Independent, critical analysis is thus a defining aspect of GRAIN’s relevance for most partners and peers.

### 3.2 Research and analysis: relevance and impact on partners

Further dimensions of GRAIN’s relevance are best highlighted by listing the many different roles GRAIN is seen to play in research on policies and processes for the sustainable management of agricultural biodiversity (Box 6).

#### Box 6. GRAIN’s diverse roles

- **Independent thinker.** Established centre of thinking on policies to sustain biodiversity, rights and livelihoods
- **Networker.** Building capacity of southern networks and institutions/individuals, bringing in new actors
- **Democratic facilitator.** Supports democratic ways of working, emphasising participatory planning, analysis and action
- **Intellectual asset builder.** Building intellectual assets in South,-not extracting
- **Synthesiser.** Synthesiser of available evidence that otherwise does not emerge (grey lit.) to inform best practice,- and usually good at articulating both technical and socio-political issues as coherent wholes
- **Credible and trustworthy analyst.** Provides credible and user friendly analysis for other organisations, -trusted analysis that can be fed into the activities of local groups and acted on
- **Bridge.** Bridging of northern and southern perspectives, linking local with international policy trends
- **Advocate.** Pro-south global policy and south-south collaborative advocacy in international and regional fora
- **Broker-** particularly for funds
- **Empowerment role.** Support and backstopping groups,-offering policy options so that

groups can learn, decide for themselves and act independently

In terms of capacity building, GRAIN's participatory forms of analysis and research appear to be well suited to the needs and expectations of regional partners. Some illustrative examples of GRAIN partnerships and collaborative analysis are highlighted in box 7. In these and other examples of joint analysis and action, the following GRAIN skills and ways of working have helped build local assets and capabilities:

- Ability to engage players from local NGOs, academia, national agricultural research and farmer organisations through mutually agreed roles, responsibilities and obligations
- Intellectual capacity, flexibility, innovation and facilitation
- Ability to link at north and south issues in an integrated way within a regional context
- Participation of local and regional actors in design and conduct of research and analysis
- Flexibility in working and operational relationships with partners
- Sensitivity and political maturity in claiming not to speak for local communities, supporting instead local groups to formulate and advocate own positions through joint research and learning
- Combining different sources of funding to establish and develop long term, independent projects, programmes
- Collaboration on relatively level playing field, generating quality analysis with shared ownership
- Creation of durable partnerships

#### **Box 7. GRAIN Partnerships and collaborations – some examples.**

In Asia GRAIN facilitated a collective research project involving 13 partners from the region on critical trends in agricultural research and development as they impact on small farmers. Five reports were produced which are now widely used by the partners<sup>2</sup>. While most of the research and writing for the briefings were done by a consultant who GRAIN contracted on behalf of the coalition, the partners were involved in defining the themes, contents, contributing information (cases and experiences from the national levels) and in the final editing, publishing, translation and distribution. As a result, the briefings are being widely used and circulated by the partners in their respective countries providing an important tool for the groups involved to promote awareness raising and discussions at the national and local levels.

Another example is the production of the magazine *Biodiversidad: Sustento y Culturas* in Latin America. Together with the Montevideo-based NGO Redes, GRAIN has sustained the production of this magazine for many years now. Over those years *Biodiversidad* has grown from an information outlet that mostly contained translated GRAIN materials, into a truly Latin American information and communication tool that enhances analysis. This is especially due to the constant effort from GRAIN's side to get Latin American NGOs networks involved in the definition of priorities and the overall shaping of the magazine. *Biodiversidad* has now an active Advisory Council, currently drawing from 7 NGO resource persons from all over Latin America. They serve the effort in their personal capacity and meet at least once a year to further develop the magazine and strategise on overall information work in the region<sup>3</sup>.

In Africa, GRAIN collaborative mode of working has most advanced in the formation and functioning of the African Biodiversity Network. GRAIN is member of the coordination group of this network, and

<sup>2</sup> All briefings are available at [www.grain.org](http://www.grain.org). The partners involved are: Biothai (Thailand), KMP (Philippines), MASIPAG (Philippines), PAN Indonesia, Philippine Greens and UBINIG (Bangladesh).

<sup>3</sup> All issues of *Biodiversidad* of the past few years are available at [www.grain.org](http://www.grain.org). The list of groups and people involved in its production and the advisory committee is printed in each issue.

helped pull together several network meetings, support a number research projects, and generally provides day to day backup support to the members of the network. In Francophone Africa, GRAIN has started working towards the same objective using similar strategies.

Participatory research and analysis are proving effective ways of contextualising big political debates within the regions. Local actors are enabled to deal with issues in an intelligible manner, developing positions that are subsequently used in coalition building and advocacy work.

Much of the trust, respect and collegial working relationships GRAIN has established with a variety of partners in Asia and Latin America flows from its commitment to devolving power and genuine local control over research and information. The evaluators are of the opinion that GRAIN's collaborative way of working, sensitivity to local culture, policy of keeping a low profile whilst building local skills and assets (human, social and financial) and commitment to the empowerment of its partners all set the organisation apart from many other international NGOs.

### **3.3 Impact of GRAIN analysis on international policies and processes**

The vast majority of respondents singled out GRAIN's work on intellectual property rights (IPR), biodiversity and peoples knowledge as cutting edge, relevant and influential. There is evidence that national government representatives engaged in international negotiations in WIPO and the WTO-TRIPs negotiations know of and use GRAIN' analysis. The more academic researchers interviewed see GRAIN's work on IPRs, biodiversity and livelihoods "hard to fault". More generally, negotiators and activist alike have found GRAIN's analysis on the conflicts between trade and biodiversity relevant, informative and useful in their work e.g. the GAIA-GRAIN Briefings and other special reports on bioprospecting/biopiracy in Asia and Africa (see Annex 7). Overall, GRAIN is perceived as an important reference point, with many of its research and analytical outputs used to influence policy in global and national fora.

#### **3.3.1 The FAO negotiations and the FAO-CGIAR Trust Agreement**

The new International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture was adopted on November 3, 2001. The Treaty had been under negotiation for the past seven years. During this period GRAIN was one of the few NGOs with RAFI that tried to influence text negotiated at the FAO, - bringing the North-South dimension to the debate through support to governments of the South and working with more open minded governments from the North.

An earlier voluntary version of the Treaty (called the 'International Undertaking' or IU) had been agreed to by the member states of FAO back in 1981. The IU framed genetic resources as the common heritage of humanity and aimed to protect them accordingly. But the IU was overrun by the new political reality of the Convention on Biological Diversity (1993), which brought genetic resources under jurisdiction of national governments and linked access to these resources with the fair and equitable sharing of benefits accrued from them.

The central challenge in the final stretch of the Treaty negotiations was to reach agreement on whether and to what extent intellectual property rights (IPR) should be allowed under the rules of the Treaty. Since the beginning, GRAIN had argued against allowing any IPR on the material covered by the Treaty: it should clearly ban patents, plant breeders' rights and other mechanisms that privatise and restrict access to agricultural genetic resources. But the compromise text that governments finally agreed on contains an article basically stating that

the seeds and other genetic materials governed by the Treaty can be patented - as long as they are modified in some way. For these reasons GRAIN has argued in international fora such as the FAO that the Treaty is a weak instrument to safeguard the rights of farmers against the pervasive privatisation of biodiversity.

Respondents expressed strongly diverging views on GRAIN's recent track record in relation to international negotiations on genetic resources at the FAO.

One set of respondents were quite critical in their assessment of GRAIN's effectiveness and impact on policy discussions on access to plant genetic resources, agricultural biodiversity, farmers rights, benefit sharing and IPRs within the FAO. There is a strongly held view that GRAIN has, to a large extent, withdrawn from *direct* work on the FAO Treaty negotiations in particular. These respondents argue that GRAIN's presence has been missed and more gains might have been achieved had it prioritised the recent FAO negotiations more.

A more fundamental critique relates to the quality of some of GRAIN's recent analysis on the FAO-CGIAR Trusteehip agreement on gene bank materials<sup>4</sup> and the FAO International Treaty. The issue here is not so much that several feathers have been ruffled by GRAIN's analysis, - challenging assumptions and "rocking the boat" are, after all, important roles for an independent and critical organisation such as GRAIN. The deeper concern is that GRAIN's recent writing on these FAO agreements has eroded some of GRAIN's credibility and capacity for leverage in the FAO fora for two reasons:

a) the analytical rigour of these pieces of GRAIN writing has been questioned and seen as polemical, - throwing the "baby out with the bath water" rather than offering policy options, b) GRAIN has not been attentive to the value of ambiguous text which gives room for interpretation in the context of a multilateral rather than bilateral agreement.

As a result, developing country governments may turn away from the FAO treaty, allowing the views of the industry and the North to prevail.

The perception that GRAIN's recent writing on this particular topic has been unusually off target in its analysis, combined with the view that GRAIN is less directly active in FAO fora than previously, has led some to question the value of GRAIN presence in these international processes. As expressed by one international observer, the bottom line here is "Either focus on these issues in depth or stay out".

However, these views are in sharp contrast with the opinions of several other respondents who emphasise the following points:

a) GRAIN has contributed several other analytical pieces on the international negotiations over the last 3 years and either senior GRAIN staff or Board members have been present at virtually every meeting since the negotiations picked up in 2000<sup>5</sup>. Historically, GRAIN has had a positive influence on the FAO negotiations on agricultural biodiversity because staff quality time and programme priorities were partly geared to help frame policy developments in the FAO arena.

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<sup>4</sup> See: GRAIN (2002) "Biopiracy by another name?" *Seedling*, GRAIN, Barcelona, October; and Cary Fowler (2003), "The status of public and proprietary germplasm and information: An assessment of recent developments at FAO", *IP Strategy Today*, No. 7-2003, bioDevelopments, Ithaca, available at: <http://www.bioDevelopments.org>.

<sup>5</sup> During 2000 & 2001, much of the FAO negotiations were conducted in a closed working group. Only two NGOs were allowed to participate. GRAIN was one of them and participated actively.

GRAIN Articles and Briefings on the FAO negotiations: 2000-2001:

- An International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources - A challenge for Asia, GRAIN and Kalpavriksh briefing, February 2002
- A Disappointing Compromise, GRAIN, Editorial, *Seedling* December 2001
- IU Adopted: Now a Treaty, BIO-IPR, November 2001
- The IU: the Final Stretch, GRAIN briefing, October 2001
- The IU: Hanging on its Last Brackets, GRAIN briefing, July 2001
- The IU: Time to draw a line on IPRs, GRAIN, *Seedling*, March 2001
- IU inches towards the finish line, GRAIN, *Seedling* June 2001.

- b) the value of negotiations within the FAO is increasingly questionable. More specifically, the assumption that governments will translate gains in international fora into national legislation and practice is largely unproven.
- c) the roles of governments, FAO functionaries and NGOs such as GRAIN should not be confused or conflated. Open democratic processes must allow for dissenting voices, whistle blowing and expressions of views that reflect broad concerns in civil society and grassroots organisations.

As evaluators, we respect these different perspectives. However, on the basis of available evidence we suggest that:

- a) Contrasting opinions about GRAIN's recent interventions in FAO fora may be less about style, analytical rigour or tactics and more about ethics. Indeed, at a deeper level there is a clash between incommensurable values and normative views about what can and cannot be owned through patent regimes.
- b) GRAIN has over the years maintained a consistent position in arguing against the extension of IPRs to genetic resources important for food and agriculture. Shifts in positions have been more apparent in the FAO and the CGIAR as views on IPRs on crop germplasm have become more permissive, and IPRs have become accepted as the benefit sharing tool. Unlike GRAIN, organisations such the FAO, the CGIAR and many international donors have been much more permeable to the influence of the neo-liberal market culture. Individual actors within these institutions,- whose commitment to public service is unquestioned here- have fewer margins of manoeuvre today than they had five or ten years ago.
- c) GRAIN's decentralisation has strengthened its independent role in international negotiations. Moreover, GRAIN seeks to maintain distinct and separate roles from governments whose responsibility it is to write technical texts and negotiate treaties in international fora. Instead, GRAIN's comparative advantage, - and key role-, is to relay and amplify the voice and concerns of social movements and farmers organisations from the regions to the international level<sup>6</sup>.
- d) A small organisation like GRAIN can only do so much. Prioritising international work on IPRs and traditional knowledge in fora such as WIPO may result in less emphasis on the FAO and related work in the COP of the Convention on Biological Diversity. But it is noteworthy that all respondents agree that it is good to have disinterested external parties which can criticise policies and processes within the FAO. In addition to playing the roles just described (in c), GRAIN may thus need to better communicate the reasons for its current level,- and form of engagement-, with the FAO negotiations. Finally, GRAIN may have a more enabling and proactive role to play in bridging local and international perspectives by raising deeper questions about the epistemology and the deconstruction of ownership (see section 3.3), - in order to broaden the concepts of rights from the bottom up.

### 3.3.2 GRAIN effects on the CGIAR

The critical views some respondents have on GRAIN's analysis of the FAO-CGIAR trusteeship agreement also colour their assessment of GRAIN's work in relation to the CGIAR as a whole.

Whilst an important number of Seedling subscribers are CG scientists or administrators, there is very little evidence that GRAIN materials are *directly* used within system wide GGIAR meetings and decisions on genetic resource management, IPRs and biotechnology

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<sup>6</sup> GRAIN's critique of the FAO-CGIAR trusteeship agreement draws from ongoing inquiry with farmers about how they see their relationship with the seeds held in the CGIAR genebanks. The Jasmine rice controversy of late 2001 – involving Thai rice farmers, IRRI, FAO, the Thai government, the US government and US scientists – triggered GRAIN to write up the issues in Seedling

issues. However, in assessing GRAIN's effectiveness and impact it is important to note that, at no time, has this organisation aimed to change the CGIAR directly. Instead, GRAIN has sought to foster debate on "what would be a good role for the public agricultural research to play?". Most partners in the regions have benefited from GRAIN's analysis and monitoring of the CGIAR as well as its thinking on alternative research paradigms and the re-organisation of agricultural R&D. There is considerable evidence that local groups and networks either directly translate or adapt GRAIN's reports and policy briefs into their own campaign materials, educational videos and position statements on the CGIAR, and *vis à vis* IRRI in particular.

GRAIN analysis has generally fostered greater awareness on the social and ecological impacts of the CGIAR, helping to open up regional and international debates on both the governance and research priorities of the International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs). But whilst GRAIN's work (analysis, dialogues on the CG system) has helped sensitize donors and their advisors on funding priorities for and in the CGIAR, it is clear that uptake of GRAIN analysis has been stronger among farmers and rural organisations at the receiving end of technologies developed by the IARCs. A good illustration of this trend among farmer organisations is provided by the recent 2002 street conference held at the time of the CGIAR meeting in The Philippines<sup>7</sup>.

More generally, it is significant that GRAIN is one of the few NGOs involved in discussions with *Via Campesina* on how to set up an alternative international agricultural research system that is more farmer centred and citizen controlled. Such recognition of an international NGO by civil society organisations and social movements is rare and noteworthy.

### **3.4 Staying relevant: emerging challenges for GRAIN**

There are a number of areas that may need further attention by GRAIN to ensure its continuing relevance and achieve positive effects and impact. Throughout this report, we have highlighted specific challenges as a mix of problems still to be resolved, new opportunities and options for action. In this section, we focus on challenges related to broader questions of choice of approach and strategy. The following in particular may have implications for the future operation of GRAIN.

#### **3.4.1 Giving more equal emphasis to different strands of GRAIN's programme work.**

Several respondents have expressed concerns about a possible mis-match between existing programme priorities and newly emerging challenges in the regions. Whilst generally praising the quality of GRAIN's work on the rights agenda, there is a perception that a) too much emphasis is put on this area (as judged by staff time and skills) and b) there is now a strong risk that other key programme areas are not sufficiently developed or may not meet regional expectations in the very close future. These perceptions have their origins in regions undergoing rapid changes that pose new threats to people and the environment. For example, threats associated with the large scale introduction of GMOs and the downsizing or/and privatisation of national agricultural research and extension systems. There are also new questions about the relevance of work on rights as the focus of campaign work at a time when national governments have already adopted IPR legislation on genetic materials and innovations. Last, there are strong expectations that GRAIN provides some support and follow up to the Growing Diversity project in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

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<sup>7</sup> People's Street Conference Against the Annual General Meeting of the CGIAR in the Philippines, Los Baños & Makati, 29-31 October 2003. Organised by RESIST (KMP, MASIPAG, SEARICE, AGHAM, etc.) with support from Via Campesina and GRAIN. See [http://www.geocities.com/resist\\_agtncs/](http://www.geocities.com/resist_agtncs/) for full account. A 20-minute video CD documenting the event has been prepared by MASIPAG on behalf of RESIST. To obtain copies, contact [info@masipag.org](mailto:info@masipag.org).

Anticipating on what an organisation should do to remain relevant and effective for its partners, networks and the wider agenda is always difficult. Nevertheless, GRAIN may hedge its bets by giving more equal emphasis to its work on rights and two other programme areas in particular:

- Agricultural research for whom? There is strong expectation that GRAIN provides “more intelligence” on the corporate control of agricultural R&D as well as the role of GMOs and other biotechnologies (e.g. nutraceuticals) in the restructuring and privatisation of the global food chain and food system. “Intelligence” here means more in depth analysis and readily accessible information (e.g. a new list server based on the BIO-IPR model, policy briefs) Similarly, GRAIN is increasingly expected to play an enabling role in developing an alternative model of agricultural research. With the recruitment of a new staff person in February 2003 GRAIN has already taken steps in this direction. But this is a potentially very demanding agenda. Should GRAIN give more priority to this area additional resources and staff time may be needed to ensure its continued relevance, both nationally and internationally. One option that merits closer attention is to develop joint activities with organisations and individuals committed to change through participatory research and local empowerment, - bringing together the right mix of skills, funding and other assets for the task.
- Growing Diversity. Whilst the evaluators were not asked to evaluate the Growing Diversity project<sup>8</sup>, many respondents referred to it and were concerned that GRAIN continues to support the emerging regional processes which this project help give birth to in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Local control and bringing back diversity into food, farming and rural economies are, after all, important end goals of GRAIN’s vision. Although the Board has recently recommended that Growing Diversity approaches should more directly inform all aspects of GRAIN’s work,- and possibly act as a unifying umbrella framework-, there are practical issues that need more attention. First, being clear that GRAIN’s role is not to act as an administrator of small grants to local groups but more as a conduit for analysis and information that helps strengthen sustainable farming and food systems based on high levels of biodiversity. Next, recognise that GRAIN alone has limited capacity and inadequate technical skills to work with farmer organisations and networks that experiment with biodiversity rich farming and complex agro-ecological processes. Third, form alliances, -or platforms for joint learning and action-, with like minded organisations and/or individuals who can offer, or help secure, the range of skills and funds needed to strengthen alternative agricultural R&D and promote more diverse and democratically controlled food systems.

**3.4.2 Broadening the rights agenda.** Whilst many respondents pointed to the need for GRAIN to balance its work on rights with other programme areas, a strong case was also made for GRAIN to deepen and broaden its thinking on rights. In particular, several respondents argued for the need to more proactively incorporate broader notions of human and environmental rights into GRAIN’s agenda on rights.

For example, relevant work on the protection of indigenous knowledge may depend on GRAIN better understanding the specific history of Indigenous Peoples’ struggles to reclaim

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<sup>8</sup> Launched in January 2000, the Growing Diversity Project (GD) was a collaborative effort in which GRAIN participated outside its core programme. It was a unique initiative involving local organisations working on biodiversity management in its broadest sense, which includes those involved in agriculture, forests, aquatic resources and indeed all life that sustains people. The GD Project’s main objectives are: to provide a forum for discussion and sharing of experiences; to contribute to the empowerment and strengthening of the groups involved; to promote the local management of biodiversity within the wider context of rural development and policies. See <http://www.grain.org/gd/>

their rights and self determination. It is noteworthy that Indigenous Peoples organisations have always stressed more holistic definitions of rights, linked to concepts of territorial control, sovereignty over resources and self-determination. Similarly, GRAIN's capacity to influence the knowledge-policy interface on rights may benefit from work on the epistemology and deconstruction of ownership (property, commons, common property, ownership as responsibility...). Conceptual innovations in this area may help GRAIN inject new meanings and interpretations of rights in both government-led and civil society-led fora and processes.

For some respondents, broadening the rights agenda referred more to the choice of GRAIN partners in the regions. In particular, there are concerns that GRAIN risks being too aligned with more radical political groups that emphasise first and foremost rights issues. As a result, GRAIN appears to be distancing itself from more plural, issue based groups engaged in both sustainable agriculture *and* reclaiming rights. Some argue that the pursuit of a rights agenda and exclusive siding with advocacy /political groups could harm relationships that GRAIN has with other actors in region, jeopardising its future relevance for a broad constituency. How can GRAIN ensure that political correctness and values do not lead to an imbalance in allocation of resources for political work that could alienate some of GRAIN's existing partners? Does this matter? These are questions of broad political choice and strategy which merit further discussion and clarification by the staff and Board of GRAIN.

**3.4.3 Embracing gender and community differences.** Collaborations with women groups associated with *Via Campesina* in Latin America are encouraging GRAIN to acknowledge and work more with an "analysis of difference". Similarly, there have been relatively more articles on gender and biodiversity in Seedling issues published after the Sida 1997 evaluation. However, it is striking that key concepts such as community, farmers and people are often spoken of as single, undifferentiated entities in GRAIN materials and discussions. Although these terms (farmers, local communities) are no doubt used in a short hand way and for effect in campaigning, GRAIN may need to be more critical of too homogeneous a view of community, - neglecting gender issues and other dimensions of difference.

These are not academic questions, - they are of fundamental and practical relevance for GRAIN's work in regional and more local contexts. Social stratification is common in almost all communities and different groups have differing interests and capabilities in the conservation of agro-biodiversity *and* different priorities for breeding and genetic resource management. All policies have social implications with some groups benefiting more than others from any specific policy reform. Much more attention needs to be given to the following: Who is the local community? Who should have the right to participate in decision making and to share in the benefits of conservation and development? What methodologies could GRAIN and its immediate partners use to identify primary actors and other stakeholders, thereby basing policy research and recommendations on a more comprehensive analysis of difference? How does gender and social stratification within and between rural communities affect GRAIN's programme work with partners? How do gender relations influence the ways in which local people understand, manage and conserve biodiversity? What is the significance of gender in indigenous knowledge systems, and women's entitlements therein?

Apparent neglect of such important social relations and of the gendered nature of knowledge about biodiversity is problematic. This shortcoming needs to be corrected in GRAIN's future work with local actors in the regions. As a first step, appropriate training and experiential learning could help GRAIN develop the necessary skills and methodological competence that would help staff better address questions of gender and difference in their work.

**3.4.4 Adjusting to new political realities.** A new political map of the world is emerging. A map in which dividing lines and polarisations between corporations/governments and civil

society/social movements are becoming clearer. How should GRAIN respond to this emerging challenge? Where does/should GRAIN place itself on the spectrum of social activism and critical analysis?

On a day to day basis, staff posted in the regions are faced with fast changing and new political realities as corporate led change in national economies is increasingly contested by the excluded and dividing lines harden. Decentralisation has exposed GRAIN staff more to regional and national politics and in-fighting among NGOs and other local actors. The risk of isolation and of getting sucked into local politics and fights is real. Whilst GRAIN keeps to policy of not taking sides, of being issue based and plural in approach, there is a perception “out there” that in working through networks GRAIN is sticking with the same groups. However, the nature of coalitions and political alliances are typically dynamic and prone to change. At times, splits and re-compositions among partner coalitions and social movements, may force GRAIN to choose sides. To stay relevant, GRAIN may need to re-assess relationships, check its assumptions, make conscious choices and not be bound by historical partners.

During the last decade or so, it made sense for GRAIN to position itself in the middle ground between the macro and micro levels. Today, some argue that GRAIN may need to position itself at the interface between social movements and NGOs, but without losing a link with the macro level. These are important matters of political choice and strategy that require more thorough debate within GRAIN,-among staff and the Board-, and between GRAIN and its partners and donors.

### **3.4.5 Learning to stay relevant**

A key element of any organisation that works at the cutting edge of ideas and influence is its ability to learn internally, to build on experience to ensure enhanced effectiveness and to shift to new areas of activity. This is both the challenge and the hallmark of an organisation that is building on its internal intellectual strengths and developing as a coherent learning organisation.

In many ways, this evaluation is part of the learning process both GRAIN and its main donors are committed to. The same is true of the search for relevant criteria and indicators that could be used to monitor and evaluate GRAIN’s work, feeding lessons learnt into programme planning and reporting. We offer some ideas in Annex 8 on indicators and the development of a user friendly planning, monitoring and evaluation framework for GRAIN.

However, learning does have both financial and human resource costs and often is difficult to prioritise and formalise. The following recommended actions in particular are likely to be important for GRAIN’s continuing learning and search for relevance:

- Barriers to learning need to be removed i.e. sufficient investment and organisational commitment to its importance needs to be in place
- Develop a performance management system that provides incentives and rewards for learning
- Developing mechanisms that provide staff with the necessary incentives to invest in learning before, during and after programme and project development, implementation
- Develop, pilot test and implement a user friendly planning, monitoring and evaluation framework. For reasons described in Annex 8, preference should be given to alternatives to the logical framework analysis (LFA). Impact assessments and ongoing learning should ideally be based on criteria and indicators appropriate for

tracking change within the flexible process approaches that characterize GRAIN's work.

- Organisational investment in staff learning and the acquisition of new skills in areas that can strengthen participatory policy processes and action research designed to link the local with the global e.g. new skills and methodologies for deliberation and inclusion in framing policies and technological options – pioneering new processes of citizen engagement that create spaces for marginalised actors to influence policy processes at various levels
- Further diversification of funding sources, new hiring to consolidate regional presence (Africa, South Asia), training “second lines”, anticipating on possible staff departures are all key to sustained learning in GRAIN, -especially in areas of GRAIN's programme that are fragile because they rest on a single person. Critical analysis and participatory styles of working in the regions are dependent on having quality staff with specific skills and cultural values. If these key intellectual assets are not sustained through lack of funds or because key staff decide to leave, whole areas of GRAIN' s programme could be at risk.
- Ensuring that staff have ongoing opportunities for experiential learning. With GRAIN's decentralisation there is a strong pull for staff to communicate with each other through electronic means, from their regional offices. However, this can happen at the expense of staff going out of the office environment, - to speak with local actors and learn by directly experiencing complex and changing realities. As one observer remarked: “GRAIN must not become Genetic Resources Action on the Internet”.
- Raise visibility for donors of GRAIN's particular ways of working. Convincing donors that joint learning, building local capacity and not being extractive all have relatively high human resource and financial implications- and particularly a need for long term funding of process oriented approaches.

Learning also challenges an organisation to reinvent itself or, at the very least, shed aspects of its past that are no longer relevant or at variance with present day reality. In this regard, several respondents argued that the organisation's name “GRAIN” suggests too narrow a focus on Genetic Resources. Moreover, Board members have recently argued that the term “resources” in the organisation's name is no longer appropriate given the character of exploitation and attitude this term implies towards nature/creation. Is a name change needed to more accurately project the scope of GRAIN's work today? From “genetic resources action” to a name that more fully encompasses action research on biodiversity, rights and livelihoods in the globalising food system?

### **Recommendation(s)**

- 14.** Give more equal emphasis to different strands of GRAIN's programme. More specifically, GRAIN's work on rights needs to be complemented with a comparable effort in the areas of agricultural research and growing diversity in order to meet regional expectations and ensure that the organisation remains relevant in the next decade.
- 15.** Seek to deepen the rights agenda in the arena of biodiversity management, shifting the debate from narrow definitions of farmer rights to broader notions of human and environmental rights. Focus on reframing the knowledge-policy interface on rights by a) building more on the legacy of Indigenous Peoples struggles around rights to self-determination, b) working on the epistemology and deconstruction of the notion of ownership (private property, common property, ownership as responsibility...), and c) addressing the gendered nature of knowledge and rights over biodiversity.
- 16.** Emphasise gender relations and community differences more in GRAIN's planning,

analysis, information materials and collaborative work with all partners. As a first step in this direction, develop staff skills and experiential learning in the areas of gender analysis and the analysis of difference.

17. Consider forming alliances, -or platforms for joint learning and action-, with like minded organisations and/or individuals who can offer, or help secure, the range of skills and funds needed to strengthen alternative agricultural R&D and promote more diverse and democratically controlled food systems. With the right mix, this option could help GRAIN simultaneously deepen its work in key areas (Recommendation 15) and give more equal emphasis to all aspects of its programme (Recommendation 14).
18. Facilitate an open debate among Board and staff members on matters of political choice and strategy that are likely to deeply influence the role and relevance of GRAIN in the next decade. Key questions include: how and where should GRAIN position itself in relation to social movements, NGOs and in between the micro and macro levels? Is there a need to reassess relationships with historical partners? Is GRAIN's main focus on the South still relevant in a globalising world? Should other regions such as Eastern Europe also receive more attention? Does GRAIN need to change its name and emphasis to one that more fully encompasses action research on biodiversity, rights and livelihoods in a globalising food system?
19. Continue to develop monitoring and evaluation systems and incentives to ensure learning in GRAIN. It is strongly recommended that preference should be given to alternatives to the logical framework analysis (LFA). Impact assessments and ongoing learning should ideally be based on criteria and indicators appropriate for tracking change within the flexible process approaches that characterize GRAIN's work.
20. Continue investing in staff and organisational learning, - with a focus on feeding monitoring and evaluation back into planning as well as acquiring new skills that can strengthen GRAIN's capacity to engage in action research that links the local to international decision making arenas through participatory policy processes.
21. Focus on convincing donors that joint learning, building local capacity and not being extractive all have relatively high human resource and financial implications. Continue to diversify funding sources to support long term financing of process oriented approaches.

### **3.5 Donor relationships as an opportunity**

Feedback from all those with whom we have discussed GRAIN's funding has been positive about the past but cautious about the future. Several respondents spoke of new risks for GRAIN, including:

- A changing global economic environment and downgrading of donor priorities in, for example, the contribution biodiversity makes to rural development and poverty alleviation
- GRAIN keeping pace with changing donor priorities and yet maintaining independence of thought and action
- GRAIN's increase in size heightens the need for long term funding to help generate surpluses for continued investment in the organisation (human resource development, intellectual assets...) and to secure its financial stability through contributions to reserves.
- Losing "market" to competitor institutions, including Southern organisations

Many respondents also stressed the multiple opportunities of closer engagement between GRAIN and its main donors (Sida, Novib and Hivos) to influence policies and institutions in the future. There are many different ways in which engagement can happen including

support to donor policy processes, personnel exchanges to develop understanding of the particular institutional environments and sharing of experiences around particular issues.

We suggest the following as *examples* of practical areas for GRAIN engagement with donors:

- Exchange of personnel – placement of Sida/SwedBio, Hivos and Novib staff into GRAIN on short-term exchanges to develop competence in a particular area to feed for example into development of a policy or strategy (e.g. to help in development of biodiversity and poverty alleviation strategy/ policy). Similarly placement of GRAIN staff in these donor organisations to help develop particular policy areas where donor staff do not have adequate time to facilitate the process.
- Help-desk provision: Sida, Novib and Hivos often out-source advice in those areas where they cannot retain core competence but need to be able to provide advice. This is becoming an increasingly important institutional model for Sida in particular and could be a possible avenue for engaging GRAIN’s intellectual assets in specific areas.

In all cases, GRAIN’s engagement with donors should simultaneously guarantee the independence of both parties and “deliver” on mutually agreed tasks.

GRAIN’s 3 year rolling Programme, - *Harnessing Diversity*-, is a major instrument for donor dialogue and has helped GRAIN reduce transaction costs in dealing with its many different donors. We suggest that it would be beneficial to both GRAIN and its donors, to shift from a 3 year to a 5 year *Harnessing Diversity* Programme. This would give additional financial stability to the now 13 person strong GRAIN. All major donors could also jointly contribute to a five yearly review of the programme and achievement of outcomes. This could then form the basis for joint funding of future 5 year cycles of the *Harnessing Diversity* programme.

### **Recommendation(s)**

**22.** Recognise and provide adequate future funding for the full cycle of GRAIN’s integrated way of working: from needs identification, analysis and research, capacity building, implementation with partners and networks, information and dissemination, and reflection and learning.

**23.** Investigate the opportunity for donors to work together and finance GRAIN through an agreed programme plan with a five year time horizon. This could include joint five-yearly reviews.

**24.** Closer mutual engagement between Sida, Hivos and Novib on the one hand and GRAIN on the other to address the opportunities, weaknesses and challenges identified in this evaluation report.