GCP ARM 2008 survey: Summary of results and actions

1   Survey background

The 2008 ARM was held 16–20 September, in Bangkok, Thailand. This survey was the 2nd of its kind, though a marked difference with the 1st 2007 ARM survey is that the 2008 survey, with the exception of one question, was restricted to the ARM, whereas the 2007 survey was in two parts, including a section on GCP in general.

The non-ARM open-ended question in the 2008 survey (Q26) which, while touching on the ARM, also went slightly beyond the ARM content and process was:

> "One of the purposes of the ARM is to map and/or validate future directions in terms of GCP's investments in research. From what you gathered at the ARM, please state one clear area that you consider GCP should invest in as a top priority."

Clustering the open-ended responses, nearly half of the respondents (44%) indicated breeding tools as the top priority for future investments (see *Future investment areas* in the section 'Other ratings').

The 2008 ARM survey was administered online (via Survey Monkey) over a roughly 2.5 week period (Sep 20–Oct 6 2008).

2   Respondents

2.1 Targeted and actual respondents

- *Targeted respondents:* Survey sent to all ARM participants (164, including GCP management and staff, and intermittent attendees)

- *No of respondents to the survey:* 94, with 75 completing survey

COMMENTARY: Good response rate considering participants included GCP staff and management and a large number of intermittent attendees.

2.2 Respondents profile

- Gender: Female: 33%, Male: 67%
- 1st time ARM attendees: 43.6%
- PIs and Co-PIs: 63%
  Full and disaggregated percentages were as follows:
  - PIs – 45%
  - Co-PIs – 18%
  - Project collaborators – 12%
  - Travel Grant awardees – 9%
  - Invited speakers – 3%
  - GCP staff – 3%
  - GCP Executive Board members, RAP members and PSC members – 1% each
  - Other – 7%
- Regional representation:
  - Asia – 44.7%
  - Latin America – 14.9
  - Northern Africa – 2.1%
  - sub-Saharan Africa – 10.6%
  - Other – 27.7%
- Number of years of involvement in GCP activities:
  - Less than a year: 19.1%
  - 1–2 years: 26.6%
  - 3–4 years: 38.3%
  - Since 2003: 16%

3 Responses

3.1 2008 ARM background

The 2008 ARM comprised plenary sessions, parallel Subprogramme (SP) sessions, poster session, a World Café and an open afternoon, which also had an optional field trip. The open afternoon and optional field trip were in direct response to survey responses from the 2007 ARM where some respondents indicated they required more informal time.[1] To ensure that the next ARM in 2008 would follow the wishes of the majority, an open afternoon was included in the programme. In addition, GCP conducted a follow-up email survey prior to the ARM to gauge the preferences for this open afternoon among Principal Investigators (PIs), who are the core participants in, and key focus of, GCP's ARMs.

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[1] Respondents to the 2007 ARM survey indicated, inter alia: *"Future ARMs can be improved further by … more informal time (but not necessarily field trips)"* (see 2nd paragraph in page 2 of survey results summary)

For this open afternoon, the three options the PIs were requested to choose from (one choice only), and respective percentages of responses received, were:
- Option 1: Field trip – 9.8%
- Option 2: Open afternoon – 62.74%
- Option 3: Tour – 27.45%

DECISION: Based on the responses, and in an attempt to accommodate the diverse interests, the Management Team decided to provide for all three preferences in the 2008 ARM, but to make the field trip optional, unlike in the 2007 ARM, and to also leave it to participants to organise their own tour (should they so wish), again, unlike in the previous ARM where each field trip was followed by a pre-designated group tour. As it turned out, most of the participants chose to go for the optional field trip (see also *Open afternoon* and *Field trips* in the section 'Other ratings').

3.2 Ratings, comments and decisions taken

3.2.1 Plenary sessions

Respondents rated the plenary sessions on two aspects: i) quality of the session, and, ii) showcasing products and impacts, given the 2008 ARM theme was *Products and Impacts.*

i) Quality

Ratings for the quality of the full 10 plenary sessions (including GCP and stakeholder perspectives) were on a six-point scale – excellent, very good, good, acceptable, poor, very poor. Majority of the respondents rated all the seven plenary sessions between 'very good' (6 sessions) and 'good' (4 sessions).

A seventh response option was 'not applicable to my area of expertise'. This option was included because the GCP community has grown in number and diversity, and anecdotal evidence suggested that one size no longer fitted all. The survey was an opportunity to gather empirical evidence on trends in the community. Responses would also be instructive in structuring the next ARM in 2009.

For all 10 plenary sessions, there were respondents who indicated the session was not applicable to their area of expertise, and this percentages is indicated below, in brackets. The first percentage entry aggregates ratings of 'excellent', 'very good', and 'good'

1. GCP perspectives – 93.4% (3.9%)
2. Stakeholder perspectives – 75% (10.5%)
3. Impact pathways – 81.6% (6.6%)
4. Gene discovery – 85.8% (9.1)
5. Marker development and breeding applications – 84.2% (10.5%)
6. Reference collections – 75% (11.8%)
7. Genomic resources – 88% (8%)
8. Tropical Legumes I – 72% (24%)

9. Molecular Breeding Platform – 86% (9.7%)
10. Support services and enabling delivery – 85.5% (7.9%)

ii) Showcasing products and impacts, given the 2008 ARM theme was Products and Impacts

The plenary sessions rated in this section were the seven with ongoing and completed research. The three plenaries not included here were GCP perspectives, stakeholder perspectives and the Molecular Breeding Platform (then at proposal stage, so could not be rated for either products or impacts)

Rating scale: Excellent, very good, good, acceptable, poor, very poor; don't know[2]

a) Showcasing products
Majority of respondents rated the seven sessions as 'very good' (5 sessions), and 'good' (2 sessions).

Aggregated scores for 'excellent' 'very good' and 'good' are the first percentage entry below, while the percentage entry in brackets is for respondents who indicated 'don't know'. [2]
1. Impact pathways – 73.7% (6.6%)
2. Gene discovery – 80.6% (7.8%)
3. Marker development and breeding applications – 81.9% (9.1%)
4. Reference collections – 77% (9.5%)
5. Genomic resources – 84% (9.3%)
6. Tropical Legumes I – 67.1% (28.8%)
7. Support services and enabling delivery – 84.1% (6.7%)

a) Showcasing impacts
Majority of respondents rated the seven sessions as good (6 sessions), and very good (1 session).

Aggregated scores for 'excellent' 'very good' and 'good' are the first percentage entry below. The second percentage entry in brackets is for respondents who indicated 'don't know' (see footnote 2)
*   Impact pathways – 71.1% (7.9%)
*   Gene discovery – 67.6% (11.7%)
*   Marker development and breeding applications – 74.1% (10.4%)
*   Reference collections – 72.4% (10.5%)
*   Genomic resources – 74.6% (10.7%)
*   Tropical Legumes I – 64.7% (26.8%)
*   Support services and enabling delivery – 73.4% (8%)

COMMENTARY: Generally and relatively speaking, products appear to be more visible, and perhaps more readily understood, than impacts. Probably because products are more

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[2] 'don't know' was included as a response option to cover respondents who could not rate the session

tangible and lend themselves more easily to quantitative aspects, and therefore to objective interpretation, while impacts probably tend to be less tangible and are perhaps largely qualitative, and might therefore be more prone to subjective presentation and interpretation. One respondent commented 'I saw very little evidence of showcasing impact, mainly showcasing outputs/deliverables'.

ACTION TAKEN: In the 2009 ARM

1) Reduce and diversify plenary sessions, provide more literature in lieu (Programme-level posters and publications: while 43.6% were first-time ARM attendees, less than one fifth (19.1%) had been engaged with GCP for less than a year, therefore the level of familiarity with GCP's structure and trends was high).
2) Increase the 'themed' parallel sessions to match – as best as practical – the growing diversity in the GCP community.

3.2.2 Brainstorms, poster sessions and World Café

Ratings for the above were on a six-point scale – excellent, very good, good, acceptable, poor, very poor. Rating for the two brainstorms also included the response 'not applicable to my area of expertise', again, to gauge participant trends as was the case with the 'don't know' response in the previous section (see footnote 2).

Majority of respondents rated all the sessions above between 'good' and 'very good'.

i) Ratings: Brainstorms I and II

Aggregated scores for 'excellent' 'very good' and 'good' are the first percentage entry below. The second percentage entry in brackets is for respondents who indicated 'not applicable to my area of expertise'. Ratings were as follows:

- Brainstorm I: Genetic Resources Supply Service (GRSS) – 74.1% (14.3%)
- Brainstorm II: Molecular Breeding Platform (MBP) – 75.4% (9.1%)

ii) Ratings: Poster sessions and World Café

Majority of the participants rated the poster sessions and World Café as 'very good'. Aggregated scores for 'excellent' 'very good' and 'good' are as follows:

- Poster sessions – 96.1%
- World Café – 88.4%. This was the first time that the concept was used at ARM. Constructive comments included that the session needed more structure and facilitation; that there were too many topics, and that a report-back to plenary would have been useful.

ACTION TAKEN: 1) Continue the poster sessions 2) In view of reduced timeframe for ARM, replace World Café with increased interactive sessions in smaller thematic or by-crop groups (see also *Comments on improving the ARM structure* in the section 'Other ratings').

3.2.3 Other ratings

Open afternoon

Majority (93.4%) found the open afternoon productive and useful for them, and 97.4% recommended that future ARMs include this open window. Comments included:

- Since most participants chose to go for the field trips, it wasn't really an open afternoon
- Have both field trip and open afternoon
- two open afternoons
- A full open day.

DECISION: Include an open day in 2009 ARM for self-organised meetings

Field trips

The field trip was optional and there were four different sites. Of the respondents who rated the field trips (52.7% of respondents), majority rated the trips between 'excellent' and 'very good', and the aggregated score for 'excellent', 'very good' and 'good' was 90%.

DECISION: Include field trip in 2009 ARM, given actual high level of participation, despite findings of email survey (see *2008 ARM background* in 'Responses' section)

Informal networking

More than half (56.6%) rated the value of informal networking as very high, 28.9% as high and 14.5% as moderately high. No respondents rated informal networking as low, very low or irrelevant to their work. 84.2% rated the amount of time allocated on the ARM programme for informal networking as adequate/just right, while 14.5% found the time inadequate.

Comments on informal networking included:
- This was one of the most important aspects of ARM for me. An inspirational group of scientists.
- Invaluable for first-time participants
- This was the best and most valuable part of the meeting
- One of the great benefits of the meeting
- The longer time during coffee and lunch breaks helped me organise many meetings and saved me a couple of trips
- One afternoon dedicated explicitly for networking would be great
- All these scientists and no time to discuss....
- It was difficult to schedule in all meetings due to limited time
- Time was fully booked and it was sometimes difficult to meet with all the persons that you need. A 'rendez-vous' counter could be offered where you put the name of the person you wish to meet. I had sometimes hard time to find the reseacher I was looking for when I did not know him from before! Printed list of participants would be useful as well.
- It is never enough. One extra day would be useful.

ACTIONS TAKEN: For 2009 ARM, 1) a participant list was included in participant documentation, 2) the programme provided a full day for participant self-organised meetings, 3) The longer coffee and lunch breaks were retained.

Mix of participants
Majority rated this as very good. Aggregated ratings for 'excellent' 'very good' and 'good' were 92%.

Order/sequence of sessions on the agenda
Rated as 'very good' by majority. Aggregated score for 'excellent', 'very good' and 'good' was 93.3%.

Future investment areas
To the open-ended question on ONE clear area that GCP should invest in as a top priority, clustered responses were as follows:

- o Breeding tools – 44%
- o Products, impacts and delivery – 21%
- o Capacity-building – 7%
- o Genomics and genetics – 7%
- o Developing country/national programme issues – 4%
- o Databases and information management – 4%
- o Miscellaneous – 9%
- o Invalid responses – 4% (ie, responses given did not address the question)

Logistics
Background information provided before ARM, documentation for ARM, support before and during ARM and organisation were all rated as 'excellent' by the majority of participants (49%). Aggregated ratings for 'excellent', 'very good' and 'good' were 97%.

Comments on improving the ARM structure
- Fewer plenary sessions and more parallel sessions by area of research (not necessarily by SP) as was done for the breeding platform
- More small-group discussions which are more interactive and therefore more productive
- Presentations by crop, as was done for legumes

COMMENTARY: Small-group discussions, including the World Café, were highly rated by participants. Clearly, plenary sessions were not relevant for all participants, providing a strong rationale for more parallel sessions, to cater for the different interests.
ACTIONS TAKEN: For 2009 ARM, 1) plenary sessions were reduced, and 2) small-group meetings increased in the form of parallel by-crop or thematic (and not SP) discussions and brainstorms.

Sample of general comments on the ARM (and GCP)
Although the last question on the survey was restricted to the ARM (Q27: Any other comments you would like to make on the ARM?), some of the responses were on GCP in general, and these are included and separated out in the sample below.

Constructive feedback

ARM

- Needs more, and better, facilitation: hire a skilled professional facilitator
- Reduce total period by one day
- Travel grants should not be restricted to region hosting the ARM
- Presentations:
  - More interactions and discussions on science, and less emphasis on products and impacts for a gathering of scientists
  - Fewer presentations, and less detailed presentations that do not repeat what is in project reports

GCP

- Scientists in advanced labs are making some basic mistakes and being defensive: technology being developed may be too high-tech to be useful to national programmes
- Greater national programme participation in GCP projects
- Periodic review of research investments in projects
- Important GCP remains focused: its diversity is both a strength and a weakness

Positive feedback

ARM

- Very well organised
- Excellent platform for exploring knowledge in an organised manner
- Wonderful opportunity for networking and learning
- Well-run, productive and efficient meeting
- Good opportunity for self-evaluation
- Useful and very fruitful
- Strong family atmosphere
- Right mix of participants, conducive atmosphere where learning is guaranteed
- Best ARM so far – by far!

GCP

- Congratulations to GCP on support to capacity building for national programmes
- Science quality superb
- Wonderful programme and exceptional progress: The move from basic research to research for impact is now apparent. Need to now carefully select and invest more in cases that are likely to be successful and have large impact.