The Sultanate of Oman is located in the Southern-Eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula and occupies a total land area of 309 500 km². It encompasses a wide variety of topography such as mountain ranges, coastal plains, desert plains and coast line. In the Southern part, Dhofar region has a subtropical climate with seasonal rainfall. The majority of biodiversity exists in this area. The rest of the country has mainly dry climate. Much is known of the Omani ecosystem and species diversity, with admittedly relatively little being known of the precise Omani genetic wealth, even though it is predicted to have global significance given the conditions it has evolved under for millennia.

The biodiversity of Oman reflects its position between two biogeographic regions, northern Oman’s more closely resembles that of Asia, whereas further south the principal influence is Africa. Oman is endowed with about 47 species of terrestrial mammal, 19 species of marine mammals, over 1 000 fish species, 1 208 species of plants, around 10 livestock species, 128 breeding species of birds, over 130 coral species, and 5 turtle species.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List criteria, in Oman 3 species of terrestrial mammals are critically endangered and 4 endangered, 2 species of turtles are critically endangered, 2 species of sharks are critically endangered, 20 species of plants are critically endangered and 16 are endangered. Resources still uncovered, should be protected and valorized. There is a sense of urgency to coordinate actions for the benefit of Oman and develop a local capacity in the sector, which is still lacking. Further, it is widely acknowledged that numerous organizations and dedicated professionals are involved in fragmentary projects without clear cooperation and with little resources.

That being said, the Sultanate has accumulated enough experience in genetic resources to transform the sector into a venture that creates valuable sustainability. The uniqueness of Oman imposes a moral and scientific obligation to conserve valuable genetic resources. Our genetic resources will be our legacy for the future generations, which is currently under threat and hence needs to be protected. Beyond scientific and moral reasons, Oman’s genetic resources are of direct value to humankind. Genetic diversity is the basis of food security, wealth creation and human well-being.

Genetic resources are the raw materials of all new crop varieties, animal breed improvements and many health benefits. Pharmaceutical benefits could be accessible to Oman through a systematic inventory and characterization of its genetic resources. Health benefits are valuable for the welfare of our population, not only directly but also in terms of associated business and potential for developing employment and wealth creation.

Considering this, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said requested a review of the opportunities related to the conservation and maintenance of globally significant genetic resources. In response, the Cabinet commissioned the Research Council (TRC) to lead this process. A steering committee was set up in 2010 with the objective of continuing the work initiated by an earlier committee, chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth, which conducted a preliminary study recommending the establishment of the Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Center (APGRC).

The Research Council (TRC) has, since then, facilitated the establishment of the Center to ensure the integration of all dimensions of the expected benefits of the center scientifically, economically and culturally in the areas of conservation of genetic resources. Genetic resources are the basis for commodities, consumer goods and innovative products in numerous industries. The sustainable use of genetic resources offers entrepreneurial opportunities and hence investment and employment. The creation of Intellectual Property Rights related to genetic resources would protect and enhance Oman’s assets. Food security could be enhanced through the conservation and better exploitation of genetic resources.
of indigenous genetic resources in the Country. Farmers and fishermen, in particular, would benefit from such sustainable exploitation, through an increase in their productivity. An appropriate strategy for the management of the Omani genetic resources would also generate social and cultural benefits.

The APGRC's mission is to promote the recognition, sustainable utilization and valuation of the genetic diversity inherent in Oman’s animals, plants and microorganisms as a natural heritage resource. APGRC envisions that in the coming decade, it will develop, as a collaborative hub for all animal and plant genetic resources activities. APGRC will promote the sustainable use of knowledge across economic sectors and social segments and create value from world-class research and practical innovation. This national collaborative effort will be open to the world of international science and have a specific concern for building a recognized local capacity in the field of genetic resources.

The APGRC aims at excellence across all the areas relevant to genetic resources, from education and research to innovation and investment; the comprehensive goals complement and reinforce each other in an integrated, open center for:

1 - Policy: Coordination and Advice.

2 - Capacity Building in the form of: Documentation, Conservation, Research and Education.

3 - Adding value through the facility of genetic resources use, innovation, services and investment in Oman.

The APGRC activities are translated into 28 core complementary programs. The APGRC plan is based on a pre-establishment phase of three years, in order to further refine the thematic and operational aspects. This phase will also contribute to raise awareness and build the foundations of the Center. After that, once the Center is established, Oman will increase and use this knowledge to harvest the results and the value of biodiversity.

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