

**A tropical onion information project, 1990-2004: collaboration with no finance can work when you have something really useful to trade**

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An international collaborative scheme to obtain onion yield and storage data over a wide range of environments in the tropics ran from 1990 to 2004, even though formal funding ran out in 1995. A UK development agency, seed companies, a Gene Bank and scores of collaborators in the tropics, made an effective informal network to exchange seeds and results over the years 1990 to 1998. The trials results were published in two collections in 1997 and 2004. The co-ordinator was located in the UK. She retired during the project but kept working until it finished. The key to keeping the scheme going after funding ended was to offer something which everyone needs: information. Seed companies maintained their interest over the long term, perhaps because the annual seed requests indicated which short-day onion cultivars were the most popular. Collaborators in the tropics often have difficulty in obtaining samples of seeds for trials, so their association with a well-known development organization which was prepared to supply them with up to 25 onion cultivars per season was beneficial. They also received research notes and results forms to help them with trials methodology. The Gene Bank gained credibility with donors due to its association with the scheme as the seed stockholder and dispatcher. Currah Consultancy benefited from acting as the information interface throughout the life of the scheme.