

European DesertNet

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR GLOBAL DESERTIFICATION RESEARCH

www.european-desertnet.eu

European DesertNet Newsletter n. 1 - December 2007

Contents:

1. European DesertNet Status Report 2007
2. News from the Board of European DesertNet
3. Activities and Products of the Working Groups of European DesertNet and its Partners
4. European Activities on Desertification Research
5. Important Upcoming Events
6. Publications 2007
7. Editorial Note

1. European DesertNet Status Report 2007

Mariam Akhtar-Schuster, Co-Chair of European DesertNet, Hamburg University, Germany on behalf of the Steering Committee of European DesertNet.

European DesertNet had an information stand at COP8 (3-14 September 2007 in Madrid, Spain). The network was acknowledged as both a European and global scientific network for desertification research. To date, European DesertNet has 250 members from 43 countries, and has established close cooperation links with other networks like Oasis and Drynet (see below). Together with Oasis, DesertNet organized a successful and very well attended side event on "Science and Policy Interface" at COP8, that clearly outlined the philosophy of European DesertNet as a scientific platform focused primarily on identifying cutting-edge-science at the international level and secondly, on providing scientifically-sound



Media and interview at the EDN stand during COP 8 in Madrid, Spain, Sept. 3-14, 2007 (Photo by M. Bock)

knowledge to decision makers responsible for implementing measures to combat and prevent desertification.

European DesertNet is a new network, founded in October 2006, but it is already acknowledged a service reference point capable of (1) fielding requests from European ministries to scientifically evaluate the 10-year strategic plan for the UNCCD, (2) providing specific expertise to policy-makers, scientists, NGOs and the media, (3) globally strengthening the communication links between scientists, and (4) conducting workshops on topics that are on the cutting edge of science.

At COP8, European DesertNet was identified as one of the three potential scientific initiatives (others included WMO and CGIAR) for organizing scientific conferences for the CST. On September 6-7, 2007, European DesertNet held an international workshop on Dryland Observation System in Hamburg, Germany. As ratified by COP8, the topic of the CST sessions for COP9 (autumn 2009) will be "Bio-physical and Socio-Economic Monitoring and Assessment of Desertification and Land Degradation, to Support Decision Making in Land and Water Management".

European DesertNet also has strong support from the EC's DG RECH. Several European ministries have stated that this new network is important to furthering process in combating and preventing desertification (see also: www.european-desertnet.eu /statements).

The Steering Committee and Advisory Board are aware that within a brief time span, European DesertNet has achieved a position where it is now necessary to take immediate steps to build on its current success by further consolidating the network's interior operation and structures. This will be one of the major tasks for European DesertNet in 2008.

2. News from the Board of European DesertNet

Future Cooperation between European DesertNet and MEPs in Brussels

On November 27, 2007, a delegation from European DesertNet met with Members of European Parliament (MEPs) at the European Parliament to discuss closer cooperation between scientists and policy makers in supporting sustainable development in drylands. Both parties agreed to cooperate closer on agricultural topics. A follow-up workshop is currently being planned in close cooperation with European DesertNet and MEPs in Brussels. The event is scheduled for May 15, 2008, and is titled "DESERTIFICATION - SOCIO ECONOMIC, AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY IMPACTS AND THEIR POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES". The workshop program and invitation will be sent to members in early 2008. *Carlos SAN JUAN MESONADA, Chair of European DesertNet, University Carlos III of Madrid, Spain.*

Results of the Meeting of the EU WPIEI Desertification Group - Expert Meeting

"Monitoring, Targets and Indicators for Strategic and Operational Objectives of the UNCCD Ten-Year Strategic Plan 2008 – 2018: Follow-up Steps and New Developments Required at EU Level", (November 27, 2007 - Portuguese REPER, Av. Cortenbergh, 12, Brussels).

The meeting provided a thorough overview of existing and past initiatives that were developed in this field with the support of various organisations, mainly the European Commission and European Space Agency. Due to a limited time frame, the meeting did not allow for an in-depth discussion on the value and applicability of existing indicators and monitoring strategies. The main conclusions emphasized that the existing funding mechanisms are oriented exclusively towards new themes and approaches but do not provide a platform for testing research outcomes under real world conditions; this was perceived as a major pitfall. A second concern, raised by the Commission, was to make information and results from research activities on desertification available to other stakeholders. European DesertNet was represented by Chairman, Carlos San Juan, and several members of the Steering Committee who have direct knowledge and expertise in the field. In a special presentation, European DesertNet was introduced as a structured network of scientists and independent experts. Specific perspectives associated with the theme of the meeting and that have emerged from the European DesertNet Working Group on “Dryland Observation System” were presented.

Joachim Hill, member of the Steering Committee of European DesertNet, Trier University, Germany

3. Activities and Products of the Working Groups of European DesertNet and its Partners

Dryland Observation System – Follow-up Workshop

At the 1st Workshop of European DesertNet on Dryland Observation System (September 6-7, 2007, Hamburg, Germany), over 30 scientists from France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Spain, Syria and the United Kingdom discussed the development of an international terrestrial observation system for land use impacts and climate change in drylands. The declaration formulated at this workshop (see www.european-desertnet.eu / Working Groups / Observation System) clearly supports the scientific components of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

One of the main outcomes of the workshop on “Climate Change and Desertification”, held in Wengen, Switzerland, on September 10-14, 2007, was the strategic objective of supporting the establishment of integrated dryland observation strategies. The Wengen group of international scientists agreed that the declaration formulated by the European DesertNet Working Group after its first successful workshop in Hamburg would be an excellent starting point for further developments. It was also agreed that J. Hill and M. Loireau, as members of the European DesertNet Working Group, should actively participate in the preparation of a follow-up workshop with global perspective. Efforts are now underway to draft a conceptual design document that will also serve as a basis for the meeting to be organized in Europe in 2008.

Joachim Hill, member of the Steering Committee of European DesertNet, Trier University, Germany



Pictures taken at the two-day international and interdisciplinary workshop on Observation of Desertification in Hamburg, Germany, September 6-7, 2007.

Manual on Desertification

The European DesertNet Working Group "Training and Capacity Building" started the process for outlining a "Manual on Desertification". The grant announcement of last November "Env. 2008 2.1.3.1. Support Actions" would be an appropriate funding source for such a project. The manual will be divided in two sections. The first will deal with the socio-economic aspects of desertification, demography, loss of ecosystem services, all aspects of physical and chemical degradation and consequences on ecosystems, and the second section will report the results and the ways to combat desertification and environmental degradation. This manual should consolidate the scientific experience, research and know-how of European DesertNet members. The manual will be a practical tool for technicians "working in the field", and will provide best practices in the field in a simple, clear and useful way. The response we have had from European DesertNet scientists is very promising. On the basis of this collaboration, we will be able to present a scientifically based manual by mid-February 2008. *Stefano Grego, member of the Advisory Board of European DesertNet, Chair of WorkingGroup on Training and Capacity Building, Tuscia University, Italy.*

The Science Policy Interface

European DesertNet and OASIS jointly organized a side event during COP-8 of the UNCCD, entitled "*Desertification: Science, Policy, and the Web of Stakeholders. Is there a straightforward path from science to end-users? Who must be involved, and how can the interactions be made more effective?*". This event took place on September 4, 2007, during which, EDN and OASIS also signed a formal MOU.

Following key presentations, a lively and very constructive debate took place among the participants. Many issues were addressed, bringing into light experiences and thoughts from various perspectives, and it is difficult to summarize such a rich apotation of conclusions in a few words, so the



*Signing of the MOU between EDN and OASIS during the Side Event, "**Desertification: Science, Policy and the Web of Stakeholders**" held in Madrid (Spain), Sept. 4 at the UNCD COP 8.*

following recap is only a sample. A full report can be downloaded from the European DesertNet website.

- At the top level, European DesertNet and OASIS must be more visible to the UNCCD Secretariat and CST. The European DesertNet Users Board must play a clear and formal role. European DesertNet needs to be consolidated as a worldwide structure. The European DesertNet-OASIS partnership opens new horizons, bridging cutting-edge research with result-oriented action.
- Finding ways to improve dialogue between scientists and policy makers is a major issue. Key actors are persons in charge of supporting the decision process of policy making, as well as NGO's and CBO's. Information and knowledge must be worded adequately to convey proper messages to the decision making world and to people involved.
- It is essential to lead user-driven international interdisciplinary research. Wide scale integration is needed. The motto is: "invite scientists, NGO's and policy makers to change frontiers".
- Ways to communicate were analyzed in detail. As a first step, a common language must be found to communicate with key stakeholders. The role of websites was widely discussed, including THEMANET, European DesertNet and OASIS websites.

This special event provided key inputs that European DesertNet should fulfil in its role as a scientific network servicing the millions of people who suffer from desertification and those who must make sound key decisions to alleviate this daily drama in the short, medium and long run. *Gérard Begni, member of the Steering Committee of European DesertNet, Chair of the Working Group on Science Policy Interface. Senior Expert: Environment & Sustainable Development, CNES, France.*

Drynet Activities During 2007

In 2007, the 14 Drynet worldwide partners have focused on collecting basic information, knowledge and contacts necessary to strengthening civil society organizations (CSO) and networks. The aim is to address dryland degradation and poverty issues in the context of strategic development frameworks and the UNCCD. Contacts have been established with over 1000 CSO's active in drylands issues and information on their activities has been registered. The goals of the project have been shared with policy makers, donor organizations and international institutions, directly as well as through side events at CRIC-5 in Argentina and COP8 in Madrid. A joint Drynet website www.dry-net.org now facilitates outreach and information sharing. To highlight the work in drylands, an initial sample of 15 success stories ranging from Iran to Bolivia is offered on the website. *Silke Brehm, Drynet Science and Technology Officer, Brussels, Belgium, www.dry-net.org*

A Drynet Request to Scientists of European DesertNet

Within our Drynet project, one of my tasks is to monitor science news and research findings. Currently, I am working on a survey on biofuels and dryland ecosystems. I want to take a closer look at environmental (pollution caused by biofuel plant production, biodiversity, non-food / food feedstock, etc.), energy, and socio-economic aspects. It is a fast evolving and much debated hot topic, so it would be very interesting to include recent results. I would greatly appreciate any material that members of EDN could provide me with for this work.

Silke Brehm, Drynet Science and Technology Officer, Brussels, Belgium, silke.brehm@gmx.de

Oasis - A Global Agricultural Research-for-Development Partnership Against Desertification

'Oasis' is an initiative that targets the CGIAR Challenge Program mechanism to promote new science approaches to agriculturally-related topics to combat dryland degradation and desertification in the developing world. European DesertNet is a co-proponent of Oasis. Oasis has three main focuses: new ways to assess and understand the drivers that cause dryland degradation; new ways to improve the management of natural resource assets for sustainable dryland agricultural productivity; and new ways to overcome socio-economic impediments leading to better livelihoods and better land care drylands. For more information visit www.oasisglobal.net

4. European Activities on Desertification Research

Desertification Related Items in FP7.

FP7 Cooperation Work Programme: Theme 6 Environment (including climate change)

Call Title: Environment

- Call identifier: *FP7-ENV-2008-1*
- Date of publication: 30 November 2007
- Deadline: 25 February 2008 at 17.00.00, Brussels local time
- Indicative budget: EUR 212 million

ACTIVITY 6.2. SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

Sub-activity 6.2.1. Conservation and sustainable management of natural and man-made resources and biodiversity (EUR 30 million)

2.1.3. ENV.2008.2.1.3.1 Assessment of methods to combat desertification

ACTIVITY 6.3. ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGIES

Sub-activity 6.3.2. Protection, conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage, including human habitat (EUR 9 million)

3.2.1. ENV.2008.3.2.1.1 Development and application of methodologies, technologies, models and tools for damage assessment, monitoring and adaptation to climate change impacts.

ACTIVITY 6.4. EARTH OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sub-activity 6.4.1. Earth and ocean observation systems and monitoring methods for the environment and sustainable development (EUR 21 million)

4.1.1. ENV.2008.4.1.1.1 European Environment Earth Observation system supporting INSPIRE and compatible with GEOSS. (Global Earth Observation System of Systems)

Sub-activity 6.4.2. Forecasting methods and assessment tools for sustainable development taking into account different scales of observation (EUR 12 million)

4.2.2. ENV.2008.4.2.2.1 Engaging civil society in research on Sustainable Development Indicators.

4.2.3. ENV.2008.4.2.3.1 Rethinking globalisation in the light of sustainable development.

4.2.3. ENV.2008.4.2.3.2 Enhancing connectivity between research and policy-making in sustainable development.

FP7 People Work Programme

Call Title: Marie Curie International Research Staff Exchange Scheme

- Call identifier: *FP7-PEOPLE-IRSES-2008*
- Date of publication: 30 November 2007
- Deadline: 28 March 2008 at 17:00:00 Brussels local time
- Indicative budget: *EUR 25 million* of the 2008 budget .

More information at: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/calls/>

5. Important Upcoming Events

Conference on Desertification

On Tuesday January 22, 2008, the Unesco Chair on Eremology will be inaugurated in Ghent (Belgium), and on the following day (Jan. 23), there will be a one-day conference on the interdisciplinary aspect of desertification. Registration is free, but interested parties must sign up prior to the event. Abstracts of presentations are still welcome. For more information contact: Donald Gabriels, Board of European DesertNet, Co-Chair of the Belgian expert group, Unesco Chair of Eremology (Donald.Gabriels@UGent.be).

For more information on upcoming events contact: www.european-desertnet.eu / Events

6. Publications 2007

Please see: http://www.european-desertnet.eu/publ_select2a.php

7. Editorial Note

We welcome members of European DesertNet and other interested individuals and institutions to send relevant events, new peer-reviewed publications and other relevant information on desertification and dryland research to the Secretariat of European DesertNet for review and publication in upcoming editions of the European DesertNet newsletter and for the network's website. The deadlines for submission will be announced to you.



The Editorial Staff wishes all of you a healthy New Year!!

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