

Meeting on Thursday, 15 November 2012, 3pm at Sede Boqer Campus of the BIDR.

Minutes by Nina Gordon-Kirsch, edited by Norbert Juergens

## **GNDRI – Global Network of Dryland Research Institutes**

Aims:

- Provide mechanisms and tools for the exchange of information by and among the participating institutions
- Plan and carry out institutional training, teaching, as well as student and faculty exchange for promoting dryland research
- Provide scientific information and advice to policy makers in multilateral, global forums for dryland research advocacy, such as the UNCCD
- Cooperate in the above activities and exchange information with professional networks of individuals working in areas of dryland science and policy advice

Introductions: name, where you are from, what you do, research you are currently working on; see contact sheet attached.

Final Agenda:

- Chair's report
- Discussion on the GNDRI concept
- Acceptance of a new member
- GNDRI courses
- Discussions of giving GNDRI a new drive

### **1) Chair's report and recommendations (by Norbert Juergens)**

History

- 2007 founding meeting, San Francisco
- 2008, 2010 biennial meetings at BIDR
- Stabilization of the structure, website, publication list etc.
- Accredited by UNCCD as Civil Society Organization (CSO)
- Presently 14 member institutes all around the world

Strength: GNDRI is the only network of those research institutions that really do the daily work within the deserts and other drylands.

Thereby, GNDRI could organize coordinated research activities within the different deserts and other drylands of the world. It could also lobby for the common interests of all member institutes.

Weakness: While GNDRI has been successfully established, the network has yet not taken up more intense activities. Therefore, also the intensity of communication and the number of responses to requests from the chair could be improved. The identification and initiation of proper common activities should therefore become the goal of the next year.

The Chair proposes that for this goal it would be helpful to reconsider the structure of GNDRI and to open up the somewhat rigid precondition for membership in order to attract highly motivated additional institutions or even individuals to the network. Especially newly founded institutions are not able to prove the track record which at present is a precondition for membership. On the other hand it is important that the core members of GNDRI remain those institutes which are fully dedicated to dryland research.

For this careful expansion of the network and for a robust development of joint activities a proper meeting of all member institutes (all hands meeting) should be set up in 2013. The Chair proposes to plan such a meeting for September/October 2013.

## **2) Membership applications**

- The network received several applications for membership. The applications were quite different with regard to the information submitted with the application. The Chair recommends to approve (I) full membership to one of the applicants (Sassari) while the other applications should find a positive response by inviting the applicants to become (II) associated members or accept the applying individuals as (III) corresponding members with observer status.

List of present members:

**Alice Springs laboratory of CSIRO** 

Alice Springs, Australia

**Arid Land Research Center (ALRC)** 

Tottori, Japan

**Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture (CRIDA)** 

Hyderabad, India

**Centro de Investigaciones sobre Desertificación (CIDE)** 

Albal, Spain

**Desert Research Center (DRC)** 

Cairo, Egypt

**Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN)** 

Windhoek, Namibia

**Desert Research Institute (DRI)** 

Raggio Parkway, NV, USA

**Dryland Research Centre Hamburg (DRCH)** 

Hamburg, Germany

**Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE)** 

Bhuj-Kachchh, India

**Instituto Argentino de Investigaciones de las Zonas Áridas (IADIZA)** 

Mendoza, Argentina

**International Center for Arid and Semiarid Land Studies (ICASALS)** 

Lubbock, TX, USA

**International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)** 

Andhra Pradesh, India

**Jacob Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR)** 

Sede Boqer Campus of Ben-Gurion University, Israel

**Semi Arid National Institute (INSA)**  **New**

Campina Grande, Brazil

### **List of new applications:**

- (1) Desertification Research Group, University of Sassari, Italy.
- (2) Center of Desert Studies – Al Anbar - Irak
- (3) Center of Dryland Research and Study, University of Gadarif, Sudan
- (4) One individual from Somalia

### **3) Discussion**

#### **a) Membership**

The proposal to also allow an additional membership status at a less rigidly defined level was discussed in detail.

On the one hand side this would make the network more powerful. Especially relationships with newly founded “young” institutions were regarded as important, because the network could help them to get established and they could strengthen the network.

On the other hand the present precondition to have a clear mission statement or mandate dedicated to dryland research was seen as an important attribute.

As a solution it was proposed and finally supported by the meeting, that - in addition to the full members - there should be associate members and even individuals with an observer status. While these new members are welcome to all GNDRI activities this status does not allow taking decisions on the future of the network.

It may become necessary to define the difference between members and associate members in more detail.

#### **b) Identifying the unique role of GNDRI**

For the discussion of future activities it was regarded as helpful to first identify the specific or unique role or potential role of GNDRI.

Compared to other networks like DNI the specific power of GNDRI lies in the fact that it is a network of those institutions that are mandated for

dryland research, and are therefore fully dedicated to desert and other dryland research. Firstly, this constitutes a very robust and longtime dedication compared to perhaps more opportunistic strategies of other institutions. Secondly, the geographical location within the drylands allows a set of activities which would be far more difficult and/or expensive for other institutions. As a third aspect GNDRI therefore is well qualified to propose joint research projects which require activities within several drylands or continents. A fourth role could be to act as a lobby group expressing the common interests of the dryland research institutes. A fifth role could be related to the implementation and testing of new approaches or technologies within the different dryland regions. A sixth role could be seen in the implementation of the dryland component of global programme activities. All these roles would constitute an important partnership with UNCCD.

### **c) Discussion of potential core activities**

Based on the above-mentioned characteristics a number of potential core activities for GNDRI were discussed. Among these were the following themes:

- **Observation and Monitoring**

Some initial work has been done by the Dryland Observation System group (DOS) within DNI. It would be an important opportunity for GNDRI to fully conceptualize and implement a DOS. In consideration of global environmental and socio-economic change a Desert Margin Observation System could be established along natural gradients and degradation gradients. GNDRI institutes are perfectly located to do the observation work in regular time steps.

- **New approaches and technologies for sustainable use of drylands**

This goal, also formulated as part of the ZNLD (Zero Net Land Degradation) goal, requires implementation of test sites within the dryland regions. It is very close to the core mandate of many of the GNDRI member institutions.

- **Restoration**

Perhaps the most challenging goal of desert & other dryland research aims at restoration of degraded ecosystems. Again, GNDRI institutes

are most suitable implementers because of the location within the dryland systems.

- **Training Courses**

Training activities and capacity development have been identified as goals of GNDRI. Presently championed by Elena Abraham (of IADIZA) these activities could easily be broadened by the network, thereby also enabling exchange between the member institutes.

#### **d) Discussion of a road map to mobilize the potential of GNDRI**

In order to create a team spirit and a joint decision on the future core activities it is regarded as necessary to organize a meeting of all member institutions and partners. Such an "all hands meeting" should take place in the second half of 2013. The Chair will try to find funding for this meeting.

Additional ideas/suggestions for the meeting were discussed:

The meeting should not be a formal meeting but we are looking at a productive meeting with a good vibe for reporting and discussion and decision making regarding the future road for GNDRI. It should allow participation of additional interested institutions and individuals, also including students. Depending on opportunity it may be of advantage to organize the meeting as a combination of an open-to-all conference with a GNDRI meeting. Parts of the meeting should be organized in a way allowing presentations that may lead to GNDRI publications.

Several topics were discussed with regard to their suitability to structure the meeting. Among these were:

- Observation and Monitoring
- Sustainable land management
- Restoration
- ZNLD
- Communication/cooperation with local land users
- Training Courses

(Each topic needs a champion)

The discussion was deepend around the question whether ZNLD should be the frame topic for next meeting?

#### **4) Website**

The function of the GNDRI website could be expanded:

- A "News" window could highlight upcoming events at all member institutions, could also stream recent article publications, etc.
- Metadata forum: Data that has already been collected can be brought together for discussion
- Acquired funding can be communicated
- Partnership opportunities for joint project development and application can be advertised

#### **5) Publication database**

The publication list could be equipped with statistics in order to increase the motivation to actively participate in submissions to the website.

#### **6) Training programme**

(Elena Abraham from Argentina (IADIZA) asked to be represented by Uriel Safriel for this meeting an in connection with the Training programme). Uriel Safriel presented the following state of the matter:

GNDRI Course taught in Mendoza, Argentina

- The University of Mendoza recognizes the course for students will give the credits for the students
- Called "Environmental and Sustainable Development in Drylands"
  - The name of the course is very broad – what does it specifically cover?
- Officially open to students of GNDRI institutes

- Any GNDRI member can be invited to teach in this course, giving the students exposure to worldwide issues

#### Comments / Points of discussion regarding GNDRI Course

- If the course is just taught at this university, in Spanish, and only has students from its own university, then it should not be a GNDRI course. It is a course of that university, which just happens to be part of GNDRI.
  - The Mendoza university got funding to bring students from Chile and Brazil, so it's not just limited to Mendoza students, but yes, it is not really international
  - We don't have financial resources to fund students from US or Germany and send them there
  - Good example that we might want to mimic is the Summer school by Alternet, FP6 project in Europe. The course is held in English.
- If this course is approved, then all institutes in GNDRI should be told about it and other universities can follow this model and make their own GNDRI courses
- Is this all said and done? Or is there room for more change and openness? Who can participate, is there room for more participation?
  - Elena will be asked to identify slots where she can welcome professors / lecturers from GNDRI Institutes to teach certain areas
  - Should be formulated to be open and flexible, not closed and done
- This was on the agenda 2 years ago at the meeting, so it's been 2 years waiting.
- Agree to approve the course?
  - **YES, the present GNDRI members approved the course.**

#### **7) Discussion of the character of this Interims SC meeting**

These decisions we just made are not official because this is not an official meeting, we need all the decisions made to be approved by the official committee, because this is an interim meeting.

- Send to all GNDRI members, and say "Here is what we decided on at the interim meeting. If you disagree with anything, let us know. If we do not hear back from you until 31. May 2013 we will take that as approval from your institution."

## **8) Conclusions - Decisions and To Do List:**

### **a) Global Meeting Next Year:**

We will have a global meeting next year, ZNLD theme, dates are TBD

- We need a volunteer to spearhead finding funding sources to bring people to the meeting
- We need a champion for each sub topic

-> **ACTION:** Chair to contact funding institutions and find champions

### **b) Membership Applications:**

Full Membership for Desertification Research Group, University of Sassari, Italy. Associated member status for Center of Desert Studies – Al Anbar – Irak and Center of Dryland Research and Study, University of Gadarif, Sudan

New member applicants that do not have a Dryland research Institute as such but are involved in dryland research and manage researcher networks (e.g. Benz Kotzen from England) can get an *observer status*, or else they must get an approval letter from the head of their institution that dryland research is an important aspect of their research agenda.

-> **ACTION:** We need to distinguish the difference between *members* and *associate members*

### **Argentina GNDRI course – Approved:**

- Ask Elena if there is any way to get the rest of GNDRI members included somehow – opportunities for professors / lectures to teach, or overseas students to participate.

-> **ACTION:** Chair to ask Elena to do so

**Marketing ourselves to become more popular:**

- We need to find unique niche → possibly, how to turn non-dryland research approaches into dryland research: methods, equipment, and design
- Find money to start research projects that other institutes can just jump on
- Better collaborative forum on website – article sharing, etc.

**Interim Meeting Approval:**

- Send the decisions out to the unrepresented GNDRI institutions and tell them if they don't write back with any questions or comments by 31 May 2013, it means they are providing their approval.
- **ACTION:** Chair to send out minutes with the above-mentioned request to all members