



drynet

www.dry-net.org

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News from Drynet

A global initiative giving future to drylands

Drynet is a project of 14 organisations from all over the world. They work together to combat land degradation

GLOBAL NEWS

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OFF THE SHELF NEWS

PUBLISHED BY



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Drynet Update

Welcome to the fourth issue of "News from Drynet", a newsletter from the Drynet project on local concerns and views on drylands. This issue focuses on the importance of international events like the CRIC (see box) and national programs like the NAPs for reaching sustainability in drylands. The question is which role can and should civil society play in these processes? The seventh session of the CRIC took place in Istanbul, Turkey from November 3rd to 14th 2008, simultaneously with the first special session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST). Members of the Drynet network were present and engaged through the Drynet information stand and two side events on the following topics: "The Myth of the Wastelands: Mobile Pastoralism in Dryland Areas - Can biofuel production offer new opportunities for pastoral peoples' livelihood?" and "Strengthening civil society partnerships for promoting sustainable land management and monitoring progress in overcoming land degradation". Besides this they also provided new publications for practical use as well as discussion such as a Drynet and Global

Mechanism co-production "Civil Society Organisations in Drylands - Practical guide for mapping, profiling and analysing community and policy level engagement", and a Drynet position paper "The Biofuel Boom and its Consequences for Drylands". All of these are now available on our website. While civil society organisations can participate openly in these events the question remains how much influence they really have on the decision-making processes. This newsletter will provide some views on this issue, trying to shed some more light on what the individual organisations feel their position is both at the national and international levels. Furthermore there will be some discussion on the way in which the NAPs have been successfully incorporated in the member countries.

By Drynet partner: Both ENDS, the Netherlands - drynet@bothends.org



Drynet members during Side Event on "Pastoralism in Dryland Areas"

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The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has different structures of governance and decision making. We will run past the most important here:

COPs The **Conference of the Parties** (COP) was established by the Convention as the supreme decision-making body; it comprises ratifying governments and regional economic integration organizations, such as the European Union. One of the main functions of the COP is to review reports submitted by the Parties detailing how they are carrying out their commitments; the COP makes recommendations on the basis of these reports. It also has the power to make amendments to the Convention or to adopt new annexes, such as additional regional implementation annexes. In this way, the COP can guide the Convention as global circumstances and national needs change.

To assist the COP, the Convention provides for subsidiary bodies and allows the COP to establish additional ones if necessary.

CRICs The **Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention** (CRIC) assists the COP in regularly reviewing the implementation of the Convention. The review process leading to the CRIC, which includes input at sub-regional and regional levels, will allow it to draw conclusions and to propose to the COP concrete recommendations on further steps in the implementation of the Convention. The review is to be conducted along the thematic lines decided by the COP, with due regard to geographic dimensions.

NAPs The UNCCD Parties develop their own **National Action Programmes** (NAP) which are one of the key instruments in the implementation of the Convention. National Action Programmes should be developed in the framework of a participative approach involving the local communities and they spell out the practical steps and measures to be taken to combat desertification in specific ecosystems.

CST The **Committee on Science and Technology** (CST) is a subsidiary body of the COP; it provides the COP with information and advice on scientific and technological matters relating to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought using the most up-to-date scientific knowledge. It is multi-disciplinary, open to the participation of the Parties and composed of government representatives with relevant expertise.

Source: www.unccd.int

Interview with Mark Winslow

COORDINATOR OF THE DRYLAND SCIENCE FOR DEVELOPMENT CONSORTIUM (DSD) BY SILKE BREHM ON FRIDAY 7TH OF NOVEMBER 2008

Mark Winslow works for ICRISAT (International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-arid tropics), a non-profit agricultural research centre which tries to improve sustainable land management in the tropical dryland areas of Africa and Asia. I met Mark on Friday afternoon in the quiet CST meeting room of Cevahir conference hotel during the last week of CRIC7 in Istanbul. Outside in the corridors there was the buzzing of informal talks and the echo of ongoing official sessions. The CST (Committee of Science and Technology) was closing their session and giving their conclusions to the UNCCD, including their decision to charge the Dryland Science for Development (DSD) Consortium with the mandate for assistance in organizing the COP-9. This refers to Decision 13 of the 8th Session of the UNCCD Conference of Parties (COP) towards fulfilling the 10-year Strategic Plan, where the Committee on Science and Technology (CST) is recommended to conduct future sessions in a predominantly scientific and technical conference-style format.

SB: Why was there a need felt for change in first place on the CST level?

MW: The CST was asked by the convention to increase the flow of science into useful forms in the convention, because the convention is made up of what is called the 'Conference of Parties' which are representatives in the political >>

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administration of almost all countries in the world. These political representatives want to use science to make better policies to reduce the suffering, the reduction of the productivity and the high risk of using dryland areas. So they asked us to help organize a conference that can summarize the available knowledge on drylands for policy in simple forms which can be used to make better policies. Just as the Climate Change Convention has found the measurement of carbon a very simple way to express policies, the goal of this conference is to have some simple measures for combating dryland degradation.

SB: The Consortium has a clear mandate to involve the CSO/NGOs especially in the development of a set of indicators of desertification. How will this be ensured and how do you see Drynet or other CSO initiatives to get involved in the process?

MW: What makes the UNCCD quite unique is that it recognizes the importance of local knowledge in solving this problem, because it is a problem of land use. The land-users have? experience for generations in ways they use the land. Scientists who are educated in a more classical way very often are not land-users in a traditional type of setting, so they can look at things in a certain way and miss other aspects of the environment that are important. We will look to CSO/NGOs to help us to add that additional viewpoint and perspective and help us understand how to put it in a scientific

framework. To help the scientists identify the knowledge gaps, the different priorities of land users and to identify case studies and socio-economic surveys and bring that knowledge on the table and into the deliberations of the conference and the DSD activities.

For more information on DSD, please visit the website www.drylandscience.org or contact the DSD coordinator, Dr. Mark Winslow at m.winslow@cgiar.org Listen to the entire interview under multimedia on our website www.dry-net.org

By Drynet partner: Silke Brehm of LPP, Germany – Silke.Brehm@gmx.de



Visit of the Indian Focal Point to the Drynet info stand at the CRIC7.

International Agenda 2009

12 - 16 January 2009 - 5th EGU

Alexander von Humboldt International Conference to be held in Cape Town, South Africa. Iphakade Climate Changes and African Earth Systems Past, Present and Future.

www.humboldt5.uct.ac.za/

21 - 23 January 2009 - WAFLA

International Conference - Improving Tools against Desertification and Drought Enhanced Integrated Agroforestry and Water Management Systems for Arid and Semi-Arid Areas in Latin America . To be held at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) headquarter in Santiago, Chile.

[www.wafla.com;](http://www.wafla.com/)

www.accionporlatierra.cl/conferencia

10 - 12 March 2009 - Climate Change:

Global Risks, Challenges and Decisions UNFCCC COP-15 Lead-in Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark.

<http://climatecongress.ku.dk>

13 - 17 April 2009 - International

Conference On Water, Environment And Health Sciences: The Challenges Of The Climate Change (ICWEHS) held in Cholula, Mexico. This conference will provide a forum for the interdisciplinary exchange of issues, views, experiences and needs for research in the areas of water, environment and health sciences under the influence of climate change.

<http://www.udlap.mx/ICWEHS/>

GLOBAL NEWS

Joint Drynet / DESIRE / enid paper: "Is the UNCCD stuck in a knowledge traffic jam?"

The paper focuses on how the UNCCD can more effectively build on a combination of the most recent, cutting edge research, and the wealth of evolving local knowledge from affected communities and CSOs. Two short excerpts as indication of the content:

"To improve the effectiveness of the UNCCD for dryland communities, the government representatives responsible for implementing the convention and its NAPs must base their interventions on relevant and up-to-date information. This includes knowledge from local communities and land users themselves (often channelled via NGOs and CSOs) on the current state of land degradation and desertification, traditional practices, local successes and obstacles. At the same time, knowledge needs to come from researchers, providing in-depth analyses of desertification processes and impacts, as well as assessments of the technical and financial feasibility of suggested solutions. It is also important to develop ways of monitoring and assessing desertification, as well as determining the impact of the UNCCD in addressing it.

This requires the integration of different types of knowledge and for appropriate pathways to be developed to allow this knowledge to flow to those charged with policy- and decision-making." "... there is no formal mechanism that ensures local and traditional knowledge is taken into account in UNCCD processes and negotiations. In some ways, this knowledge flow is complicated because it has a longer, more arduous journey to make, all the way from the local level via its intermediaries to the national and international levels. ... For local knowledge to be used effectively, the national roots of the international UNCCD process are therefore crucial."

For our suggestions for improvement, please read the full paper on www.drynet.org

Excerpt from the Closing Statement by Civil Society Organisations participating in the CRIC7:

"We appreciate the new format of the Committee on Science and Technology, which will engage entities and representatives of the scientific community and renew its membership so as to include more scientific and technical expertise. In this regard, we note that

some civil society organizations have a scientific and technical orientation. The Consortium recently selected for the organization of the Scientific Conference must include within its group of scientific experts those of civil society who have expertise in this area.

In relation to the biophysical and socioeconomic indicators, we emphasize that work has already been undertaken in the various regions, which must be considered and adopted in the short term. We also believe that indicators of participation are needed to monitor the inclusion of CSOs in the implementation of the Convention, and that these should be reflected in national reports. In the same vein, we request that the Committee on Science and Technology should take into account the work done by civil society on issues concerning the knowledge, technology and practices in the fight against desertification and drought. Furthermore, noting the poor performance of the Thematic Program Networks (TPNs), we call upon the Parties and the Secretariat to support the revitalisation of the TPNs."

For full statement please see our website www.dry-net.org

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If you like to receive this newsletter electronically or for more details on the articles published, contact us at drynet@bothends.org or check our website www.dry-net.org
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REGIONAL NEWS

Recent Drynet workshop “superb and fantastic!”

Participants in the recent Drynet workshop unanimously hailed the event as an unqualified success!

In October, Drynet South Africa hosted an advanced training workshop for lobbyists. The workshop was a follow-up to the initial training provided in the course of the Kempton Park Drynet workshop in June 2008.

The aims of this event were to create an opportunity for members from civil society organisations to identify areas of common interest relating to desertification, land degradation and sustainable land management; and to provide participants with a practical combination of theory and methods for lobbying in a process that would enable them to plan how to apply these with the support of a skilled facilitator. The process also created opportunities for developing lobbying strategies and plans for promoting sustainable land management and livelihoods in development planning and policy development.

A total of 22 people from South Africa, Kenya, Lesotho, Niger, Zambia and Zimbabwe met for two days in the breathtaking setting of Monkey Valley Resort in Noordhoek, Cape Town.

Facilitator, Linden Booth, reminded participants that we are all lobbyists, and that as parents or children we practice the basic skills of lobbying frequently. Participants were given a refresher of the lobbying training provided during the first national Drynet workshop. Participants then focused on applying the



© Karen Goldberg – EMG. Delegates of the Second National Workshop held in Noordhoek, Cape Town.

methodology to three practical issues identified by the group, which were as follows:

1. The development of university curricula that would equip students with the theory and skills needed for practical, participatory engagement in local communities faced by desertification;
2. The development of strategies to involve local communities in local municipal decision making processes; and
3. The creation of a climate change adaptation and mitigation fund at a national level that can be accessed by communities affected by climate change.

Due to the time constraints, strategies were not fully developed. Rather, the participants chose limited aspects of the strategies on which to work.

The closing sessions of the workshop enabled participants to share lessons learned and to discuss future plans and intentions. It was agreed that effective strategies need to be developed that focus on specific issues and decision makers. The group agreed that Drynet would act as a facilitation network to keep all the participants up to date on strategies that each member may develop within their work context. This will allow the members to share ideas and strategies across issues and identify areas of cooperation as strategies emerge from the various participating organisations.

The workshop was a profound experience for many of the delegates. What stood out for most was the deeply respectful, welcoming and caring atmosphere within the group itself. One person shared that his experience had been “unbelievable”; that he had “never experienced” a workshop quite like this one. He felt that “we are building relationships that will last forever”.

The workshop was an inspiring example of what can happen when development practitioners set time aside from their busy professional lives to come together and share knowledge and inspirations: dreams that we need in order to achieve a more sustainable world can be born.

For a copy of the workshop report, please contact Karen Goldberg (karen-goldberg@telkomsa.net or 072-634-7515).



© Noel Oettle – EMG. Breakaway groups work on developing lobbying strategies.

By Karen Goldberg and Noel Oettle, Environmental Monitoring Group

REGIONAL NEWS

Drynet South Africa at CRIC



© Noel Oettlé - EMG. Drynet partners at the CRIC. From left to right: Mariam Akhtar-Schuster (Dryland Science for Development Consortium), Patrice Burger (CARI/ Drynet), Emmanuel Seck (ENDA/ Drynet) Silke Brehm (Drynet Scientific Officer)

Unlike a full Conference of the Parties (COP), the CRIC and the CST are not decision making bodies. As the official CRIC report states, "this report identifies potential action that could be undertaken by Parties and other stakeholders ... after consideration and appropriate decision by the COP".

From our perspective the formal process of the CRIC 7 and the parallel process of the CST 9 can be judged as relatively successful: a positive CRIC report was adopted at the conclusion of the meeting, and the mood of delegates was generally positive. This was a great relief to those who had endured the negativity of some previous meetings of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention.

Despite this relative harmony, there were some hot issues under discussion. The role and mandate of the Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD was heavily criticised by the G77 (Group of 77) and its efficiency was questioned. The Global Mechanism was established as a mobiliser of funds for actions to combat desertification at a time when no global fund for desertification work existed. The G77 wanted a fund to be established, and not merely a "mechanism", but donor countries would not agree. This proba-

bly accounts for some of the perennial criticism of the GM, despite the fact that the Global Environmental Facility subsequently established an Operational Programme for land degradation.

Despite previous decisions of the COP calling for a joint work programme between the Secretariat and the GM, these bodies appear to have largely developed their own work-plans independently. There are some overlaps and in some cases they appear to have exceeded their individual mandates, but they do not seem to have created synergies between the two organisations.

The CRIC report included text related to civil society: "There is need for stronger involvement of civil society in the proceedings of the CRIC and a need for civil society organisations (CSOs) to be involved in the review of the implementation of the Convention and the Strategy, through a specific segment at the intersessional sessions of the CRIC." Somewhat repetitive, but the meaning is clear: civil society has a role to play in the UNCCD processes, and we should rise to the occasion.

The success of the IPCC in influencing decision makers and the public about climate change has led to a re-assessment of the role of science within the UNCCD. As a result it has been decided to hold a scientific conference on desertification immediately before the next UNCCD COP in the latter part of 2009. We would urge all South Africans involved in research that is broadly related to desertification to prepare to participate in the event.

For more information, please contact Noel Oettlé at dryland@global.co.za

By Noel Oettlé, Environmental Monitoring Group

Biodiversity, land reform and sustainable livelihoods

In recent years decision makers have been realising that biodiversity conservation cannot be sustainably achieved merely through the conservation of fauna and flora within protected areas. With current and imminent changes in regional climate regimes, plants and animals need to be able to shift their distribution ranges if they are to have any chance of survival in the long run. To achieve this it is vital to conserve "corridors" between different habitats so that plants and animals can move relatively easily in response to changing temperatures and rainfall. Conservation areas, whether in protected or unprotected areas, achieve far greater impact if they are linked to one another by biodiversity corridors. These corridors need to be relatively undisturbed indigenous habitats, so that free movement of (for example) insects, birds, reptiles, mammals, pollen and seeds can occur.

Apart from formally protected areas, most of the key conservation areas in South Africa lie on private or communal farm land. Approximately 82% of the surface area in South Africa is classified as agricultural land, most of which is currently still owned by White farmers under freehold title. Because of the relative wealth of many White landowners, and the relative ease with which they can enter into individual legal agreements with conservation authorities, much of the effort invested in enhancing the conservation status of agricultural land has been focused on this sector. In most provinces, networks of "conservation stewards" have been established and are making an excellent contribution to the establishment of corridors. However, the stewards have not yet succeeded in including previously, and currently disadvantaged land users.

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Biodiversity conservation stewardship involves a voluntary commitment between landowners and/or users and conservation government agencies. The landowners and/or users remain the custodians and managers of the land, but they enter into legally binding agreements for conserving areas of high biodiversity value. Exemption from land tax has been extended to freehold land users as an incentive.

To date much stewardship has focused on conserving biodiversity for its own sake. However, several farmers who have taken the stewardship model to heart have discovered direct, tangible and economic benefits of conserving biodiversity on their farms. For example, when Neil McGregor was farming in the Northern Cape he learned how the indigenous vegetation offers sheep a healthy and sustaining “6-course meal” throughout the year: the animals can pick and choose what grazing or shelter they need at any given time. Furthermore, mammals such as bat-eared foxes and aarvark, which are often killed by farmers, are excellent natural controllers of insects, rodents and pests. Even the much-maligned caracal keep the dassie population in check, which in turn increases the carrying capacity of the veld to support livestock. When well-managed, the economic and livelihood benefits of stewardship are enormous. The Land Reform policy intends to change the demographic ownership of agricultural land. Currently about 4.1 million hectares (or 5% of previ-



© Mark Botha – Botanical Society of South Africa.

ously White-owned farm land) has been transferred to historically disadvantaged South Africans. A target of 24.9 million hectares (or approximately 30% of previously White-owned farm land) is set for 2014. If biodiversity is going to be sustainably conserved, it will be essential to engage land reform beneficiaries in conservation.

Because of the high cost of agricultural land, and the relatively small grants available to individuals, most land reform beneficiaries are members of collectives and farm communally in one way or another. Stewardship under collective forms of land access or ownership is a complex affair. Not only must a considerable body of conservation management knowledge be shared by the decision makers, but they must also agree to manage their shared resources sustainably. This usually includes setting aside some areas of land, which is always a sacrifice in terms of income. It also involves sacrificing some immediate benefit in order to gain a longer-term economic advantage. Without the benefit of savings to draw on, and usually under pressure to service loans with the land bank and other financiers, land reform beneficiaries are not usually in a good position to make these sacrifices.

One must then ask critically: what sorts of incentives are likely to make conservation stewardship viable for land reform beneficiaries? The following elements are crucial:

Knowledge: Knowledge development and sharing via peer learning, participatory research, training and education will help the beneficiaries of land reform to understand the direct and deferred livelihood benefits derived from conserving the biodiversity of their land. Equally important will be understanding of the elements of management plans that are required by conservation authorities, and how these can be applied and adapted in the living landscape.

Alternative livelihood strategies: Land users who have a stake in community-based eco-tourism will have a clear



© Bettina Koelle - Indigo development & change

incentive to maximise the biodiversity benefits of conservation.

Direct incentives: The exemption from land tax that have been extended to freehold land users are not likely to be attractive to land reform beneficiaries, as they are largely exempted from paying land taxes. Other, more direct incentives will be needed to motivate them, for example financing for fencing of conservation areas, or provision of inputs to increase the productivity of already transformed land (for example, establishing high-yielding pastures).

Relationship: The three elements mentioned above must be woven into a relationship of mutual respect and trust, within which land reform beneficiaries are able to draw on the support of conservation agencies and NGOs. If these relationships are strong, verification of conservation efforts will become a living and transparent process.

We will be monitoring stewardship efforts made by land reform communities and will report on successes and challenges in the future.

For more information on biodiversity stewardship please contact Lala Steyn at Conservation International (lala.steyn@gmail.com or 021 799 8853) or Angus Burns from the Botanical Society (egtproject@mweb.co.za or 034 318 6158).

By Noel Oettlé and Karen Goldberg, Environmental Monitoring Group

REGIONAL NEWS

Slow Food and Terra Madre: Reassessing our relationship to the earth and the food that it produces

The Slow Food Movement has its roots in Italy, a country with ancient cultural traditions of food production and consumption. It was initiated 13 years ago by Carlo Petrini, who was concerned by the spread of industrial agriculture and the “fast food” culture. He noticed that not only was the land becoming progressively more degraded, but people were increasingly eating unhealthy food in ways that are bad for their well-being. Ways of producing and consuming food that had sustained people and their culture for thousands of years were under threat. He decided to do something to bring together the many custodians of farming and food culture.

The ethos of the Slow Food Movement is that food should be slowly grown, as nature intended, in balanced and healthy soil, avoiding the forced growth that is caused by artificial fertilizers and result in plants that are more susceptible to pests and diseases, and poorer in flavour. It should also be “slowly” harvested when ripe and ready, and not picked green and treated chemically to enhance its shelf life.

Slow Food supports local production, marketing and consumption of traditional varieties of food crops so that real relationships exist between producers and consumers, and so that the carbon footprint of food is as low as possible. Slow Food also advocates slow preparation of food, using the natural flavours and cooking styles so as to enhance the enjoyment and health-giving properties of foods. Slow food is also about eating slowly in the company of friends and family, and savouring the different flavours, aromas, textures, colours and shapes of safe and nutritious food. The Slow Food Movement has grown to be a global phenomenon, and every second year farmers, cooks and other supporters of the movement meet at the Terra Madre conference in Turin. The third Terra Madre conference was held

in October 2008, and attended by 7,200 people from 154 countries. The conference showcased a host of examples of wonderful foods produced in culturally embedded ways that are not destructive to the planet and its peoples. Indeed, many of these production systems mitigate the effects of climate change, contribute to addressing the global health crisis and feed millions through sustainable and natural methods. Slow Food holds many of the keys to addressing the global social, food and environmental crises.

The South African delegation of farmers and chefs at the 2008 Terra Madre learned that a number of countries are successfully feeding all of their people predominantly healthy foods, including the poor, through small family farming units using sustainable agricultural practices and organic methods. They were inspired by what they learned from the Italian farmers with whom they stayed, and were motivated to do something about it.

As a follow-up to the enthusiasm generated at this event, on Saturday 29th November 2008 the founding meeting

of “Terra Madre South Africa” took place. 60 people from all walks of life, backgrounds and ages met to form a “movement” to unite South Africans who care for our country’s biodiversity and food traditions, and whose vision is to ensure that South Africa’s food is safe, healthy, nutritious and available to everyone. The founding meeting was attended by 30 young black emerging farmers from around South Africa, belonging to YARD (youth in agriculture) and WARD (women in agriculture), as well as a wonderful mix of other interested and committed people - scientists, organic farmers, agronomists, consultants, community workers, bee keepers, cheese makers, etc. A working committee was formed and will organise a conference to launch the movement in Cape Town in April/May 2009.

If you would like to know more about Terra Madre South Africa and the Slow Food Movement please contact Liz Eglington on 083 653 3635 or Pat Featherstone on 021 794 4982 for more details.

By Liz Eglington – Terra Madre SA, edited by Noel Oettle - EMG



Founding members of Terra Madre South Africa. © Liane Greeff.

REGIONAL NEWS

New SANBI Unit to monitor and research biodiversity impacts of GM crops.

The introduction of genetically modified (GM) crops into South Africa is a hotly contested issue, with deeply polarized views and opinions. Three “first generation” GM agricultural crops, namely maize, soya and cotton, were released for commercial use in South Africa some years back, and the majority of maize produced in South Africa is now GM. Whereas the main focus of the debate over the desirability of GMOs has focused on the issue of human health and food sovereignty, the question of environmental health has arguably received too little attention.

South Africa is a signatory of the UN Convention on Biodiversity, and takes its responsibilities under the Convention very seriously, as is reflected by our National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Act 10 of 2004). In the context of the Act, the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) has recently been mandated to carry out post-commercialization biosafety monitoring and research. Established in March 2008, the GM Monitoring and Research Unit at SANBI is in partnership with the Norwegian Government, through their Centre of Biosafety (GENOK). Together, GENOK, SANBI and South African Universities have started field trials on Bt Maize. Research and monitoring will focus on three primary areas of investigation, namely:

1. Impacts on insect diversity: Research will focus on surveys and basic monitoring of non-target insects on GM and non-GM crops.

2. Gene-flow and protein production: A fair amount of research has already been conducted on gene flow (cross-pollination) in maize. It has been shown to have a high degree of gene flow, over vast distances, as it is wind pollinated. The research at SANBI will investigate gene-flow further and will also investigate the degree and scale of transfer of the Bt protein (the active toxin that has been incorporated into the plant material) to hybrid seeds as a result of cross-pollination. At this stage, it appears that cross-pollination may lead to sub-lethal dosages of Bt toxin in the out-crossed seed, resulting in target insects building resistance to the toxin more quickly.

3. Impacts on soil microbe biodiversity: research in other countries has shown that soil microbes incorporate genetic material from plants under natural conditions. This is called “horizontal gene transfer”. They have also been shown to incorporate GM genes, but, based on limited research, there are no known deleterious effects to date. SANBI intends to conduct pioneering research in South Africa, focusing both on potential differences in soil microbe diversity between GM and non-GM areas, and also investigating the potential impacts (and scale of potential impact) on the functionality of beneficial microbes, if the Bt gene is incorporated into their genome.

Field trials will run for two years. However, preliminary results should be available after the first year of study. Should any of the results indicate negative impacts on biodiversity, a report will be submitted to the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism for executive intervention.

For more information on GMO post-commercialisation research to be carried out by SANBI, please contact Ms Lukeshni Chetty, Deputy Director of the GM Monitoring and Research Unit on chetty@sanbi.org or (012 843 5000).

By Karen Goldberg and Noel Oettlé, Environmental Monitoring Group, and Lukeshni Chetty, SANBI

Off the Shelf

BOOKS, FILMS & OTHER MEDIA

DESERTIFICATION – COPING WITH TODAY’S GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STRATEGY OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION 2008

Editors: Nater, Timothy, Duchrow, Anselm and Sörensen, Levke
Published by GTZ
Website: <http://www.unccd.int/meetings/global/hlpd/docs/HLPD-Report-2008.pdf>

This is a report on the High-Level Policy Dialogue that was held in Bonn on May 27, 2008, under the official title “Coping with Today’s Global Challenges in the Context of the Strategy of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.”

EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE: A SOUTHERN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE 2008

Editors: Burns, Michael and Weaver, Alex
Published by SUN Press
ISBN: 978 19 2010 951 6
Website: <http://www.sun-e-shop.co.za/>

Southern Africa is well-blessed with a diverse and vibrant human population and a wealth of natural capital. The key challenge for sustainable development is to grow society’s capacity to use this natural capital to meet the needs of the region’s human population, especially the poor, in ways that sustain environmental life-support systems. Sustainability science has much to contribute in this regard. Collaborating across disciplines, the authors explore the underpinning principles and the potential of sustainability science in a number of case studies.

Off the Shelf

BOOKS, FILMS & OTHER MEDIA

(continued)

BENDING THE CURVE: YOUR GUIDE TO TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICA 2008

Editor: Zipplies, Robert

ISBN: 978 06 2041 542 2

Website: <http://www.africageographic.com/shop/productInfo.asp>

Rob Zipplies has edited this book at a time when knowledge of the science of climate change felt like it was changing every week. He has managed to bring together an impressive range of recognized experts to write about what they know best. The book provides an initial overview of climate change science and includes descriptions of the latest research by leading scientists and journalists. In particular, it provides an inspired review of the broader socio-economic implications and a reflection of how we as a society have created this situation. The main body of the book consists of chapters written by sector experts and explores detailed actions that need to be taken by specific sectors of society. Later chapters cover how each of us can be part of the solution, and what actions we need to take as a society to prepare for and tackle climate change. The book will appeal to a wide spectrum of readers – individuals, parents, business leaders, government officials and educators who are keen to develop a lucid, current perspective on what we know about the science of climate change and what it is that we can all do. (Review provided by Brenda Martin, Project 90x2030).

THE WORLD OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE STATISTICS AND EMERGING TRENDS 2008 2008

Authors: Willer, Helga, Yussefi-Menzler, Minou and Sorensen, Neil
Published by Earthscan with IFOAM and FIBL

ISBN: 9781844075928

Website: <http://www.earthscan.co.uk/>

The new edition of this annual publication documents recent developments in global organic agriculture. It includes contributions from representatives of the organic sector from around the world and provides comprehensive organic farming statistics that cover surface area under organic management, numbers of farms and specific information about commodities and land use in organic systems. The book also contains information on the global market of the burgeoning organic sector, the latest developments in organic certification, standards and regulations, and insights into current status and emerging trends for organic agriculture by continent from the world's foremost experts.

EVENTS

19 March – 4 April 2009, Galilea, Israel.

Agriculture Development through Human Capacity Building. A series of agricultural programmes will be offered, with the following themes: The Role of agro-technology in poverty alleviation and food security; agribusiness, export and marketing management; and water and crop production management. Galilee College offers a limited number of tuition scholarships to qualified candidates.

<http://www.galilcol.ac.il/page.asp?id=2>

21 – 22 May 2009, Cape Town, South Africa.

Environment & Economy: Mind the Gap. The conference will cover environmental resource economics as it applies to natural resource management. This includes the economics of biodiversity conservation, water resource management (especially natural aquatic environments), agricultural resource management (especially natural landscapes), climate change and marine resource management.

<http://www.capeaction.org.za/index.php?C=events&P=2>

20 – 24 July 2009, Roodepoort, South Africa.

44th Annual GSSA Congress. Meeting Rangeland, Pasture and Wildlife Challenges in a Changing Landscape. The deadline for Title submissions is 31 March 2009 and the deadline for abstract submissions is 20 April 2009.

<http://www.grassland.org.za/annual-congress/2009>

13-16 October 2009, Cape Town, South Africa.

DIVERSITAS Open Science Conference: Biodiversity and society: understanding connections, adapting to change. The call for abstracts will be issued in December 2008 (deadline 31 March 2009). More information will be posted on the website in due course.

<http://www.diversitas-osc.org/>

REGIONAL NEWS

NEWS

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A rescue plan for land reform failure in South Africa is ready for approval. Apparently the Department of Land Affairs will have a much more practical approach once farms have been handed over, and that commercial farmers' involvement will play a key role. According to Acting chief land claims commissioner Blessing Mphela, "We have to work fast to deal with the uncertainty among white farmers. They have lost faith in government structures, but we need to work closely with them now to come up with a sustainable plan." He warned land claimants that they would also be called to account. "They mustn't think when we give them the land they can do with it what they wish. We are now busy auditing all the projects that we've handed over so far and establishing the reasons for their failure. We're also establishing the viability of these projects," he said. In KZN, 19 commercial farms have been handed over to previously disadvantaged farmers. As many as 16 of those farms are no longer productive, owing to insufficient training and a failure by the KZN department of agriculture to provide adequate support services.

For more information go to: http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=124&artid=vn20081027054433279C837410

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As the perilous effects of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) on humans become more and more apparent, two United Nations organizations have come together more closely. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations University (UNU) have signed a memorandum of understanding, in which they agreed to combine resources to tackle the mounting challenge of environmentally

induced migration and vulnerability induced by DLDD. The agreement, to be carried out as a joint work plan over a two-year period starting in 2009, seeks to expand research on forced migration due to DLDD on how the two are related. A preliminary policy position paper shall first be presented at the 17th meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development in May 2009, to be followed up by a joint publication for policy, which will be prepared by October next year for the ninth session of the UNCCD Conference of the Parties. With the research conducted on desertification-induced migration, advocacy and awareness raising shall be promoted. The expanded focus of scientific and technological activity to create effective policy frameworks also reflects the UNCCD's 10-year Strategy plan that runs to 2018.

For more information, please contact Marcos Montoiro +49-228-815-2806 or press@unccd.int. Also see <http://www.unccd.int>

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Sugar cane yields on South Africa's Kwa-Zulu-Natal South Coast have risen from a plateau of 62 tonnes/ha to 69 t/ha a year as a result of initiatives promoted by the South African Sugar Association (Sasa) in this area of steep hillsides with marginal soils. Sasa has worked with commercial and small-scale growers to promote soil and water conservation, variety improvement, soil health and the management of pests and diseases. According to a Sasa extension officer, Dirk McElligott, strip planting and harvesting helped prevent soil erosion by retaining moisture and that the trash blanket left after green harvesting reduced the amount of chemical fertiliser farmers needed to use and also decreased the amount of compaction from machinery. "We also encourage farmers to plant a green legume crop after harvesting to allow the soil to rest, and encourage the local community to grow dry beans," McElligott said. In the 9- to 12-month rest between crops, the fields are rid of all noxious weeds and the soil is able to recover. While green cane harvesting is more labour intensive, and, therefore,

more costly, the indirect cash benefits in the form of improved weed control, nutrient replacement and soil moisture enhancement far outweigh increased harvesting costs. The study also showed that, compared with growers who burn cane at harvesting, those who only trash experience an average yield increase of about 15 t/ha of cane.

For more information go to: <http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/innovations-begin-to-show-in-higher-sugar-cane-yields-2008-11-07>

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The UNCCD has requested comments, by 15 December 2008, on the report, "Policies for fighting water scarcity and combating desertification," which the Secretariat commissioned, with a view to evaluating whether the report articulates options for a Water Scarcity Adaptation Policy Framework for the UNCCD and elaborates an appropriate strategy that would be used for advocating for the adoption of the policy opinions by governments.

For more information go to: <http://www.unccd.int/publicinfo/RecommendPolicy/waterscarcity.php>.

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