Drynet News
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Drynet welcomes new Coordinator

By Noel Oettle (Secretariat)

Drynet is pleased to announce that Nick Hamer was recently appointed to the position of the Drynet Network Coordinator, based at the EMG offices in Cape Town.

Nick and his family relocated to Cape Town from the university town of Grahamstown, where he worked as a research manager focusing on issues of Climate Change Adaptation and Water Resource Management. Nick has extensive experience of the challenges of sustainable development and natural resource management, and brings a wealth of networking experience to the job.

We are delighted to have Nick on the team. You can reach him at the office via email at nick@emg.org.za.

Congratulations to Noel Oettle on his election to the UNCCD SPI!

By Nick Hamer

The recent UNCCD election process of the UNCCD Science Policy Interface (SPI) was concluded with Noel Oettle from the Environment Monitoring Group of South Africa being elected as the in-coming CSO representative to the UNCCD SPI. In 2018 Noel will be alternate to the current member, Marioldy Sanchez from AIDER, Peru. When her term finishes, Noel will assume the seat, and a new alternate will be elected.

During the election process Noel committed to ensure that the perspectives of civil society are included in the SPI processes to ensure that the scientific work of the Convention is rooted in the realities of the people of the global drylands. He will consult the broader CSO community on contentious issues so as to ensure that the CSO perspective is put forward in ways that will be heard, understood and taken seriously by the UNCCD SPI.

We look forward to Noel vigorously championing the cause of civil society to ensure that sustainable land use practices are at the forefront of UNCCD efforts.

Meet the Membership: Environmental Monitoring Group EMG, Cape Town South Africa

By Nick Hamer

Over the next few months News from Drynet will provide a platform for all Drynet members to get re-acquainted with one another and so we have created a ‘meet the membership’ section where we will hear more about Drynet membership.

As EMG currently hosts the secretariat, we thought it be helpful to start with ourselves:

The Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) is an independent, not-for profit organisation established in 1991. In its 27 years of existence, EMG has contributed in many ways to developing practice and raising consciousness in the area of environmental justice, including being the lead civil
society organisation in the development of South Africa’s primary post-Apartheid environmental legislation, the National Environmental Management Act.

Our mission is to awaken the potential in ourselves and others to engage powerfully, mindfully and creatively in our relationship with the natural environment and resources that sustain life. We aim to encourage environmental practices that lead to a more human relationship with each other and the natural environment. We believe that society's relationship with the natural environment is inextricably bound to our relationships with each other, and that true "sustainable development" is not possible without economic and social justice. Our focus is thus on helping to build democratic and fair decision making processes that relate to the use and management of natural resources. We do this through research, facilitation, policy analysis, solidarity building and creativity.

EMG’s work spans issues relating to sustainable land use, biodiversity conservation, water and adaptation to climate change, all in the broader context of sustainable development. Our programmes focus on:

- Facilitating mutual learning, dialogue and effective action; and making processes that relate to the use and management of natural resources.
- Producing accessible resources that help people better understand key environmental and social issues, and their relevance to their own lives.
- Demonstrating and sharing best-practice through building partnerships, facilitating action-research and promoting dialogue.
- Disseminating information, analysis and alternative viewpoints into the public domain, and to specific target audiences.

EMG is an active member of three networks, Drynet, the Adaptation Network and the South African Water Caucus. These networks have a combined membership of over 50 organizations, with well over 500 individuals participating in them on a regular basis. In conjunction members participate in other networks and in doing so amplify the messages of the three core networks exponentially. In this way, the impacts of EMG’s work are widely shared, and reverberate widely.

Welcome to FARN: Drynet’s newest member

By Ana Di Pangracio

A warm welcome to FARN from the Drynet board and membership!

Overview of FARN

The Environment and Natural Resource Foundation (Fundación Ambiente y Recursos Naturales) or simply FARN, is a not-for-profit, non-partisan civil society organization located in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Its mission is to promote sustainable development through policy, law, and the institutional organization of society.

FARN was founded in 1985 and for the last 33 years it has been advocating for environmental sustainability, rule-of-law, and the strengthening public participation. Today, FARN occupies a unique niche as Argentina’s leading organization on legal-environmental issues. FARN’s activities include research and policy analysis, publications and training, conferences and meetings,
community legal advising and environmental litigation. These activities are carried out in diverse local, national, and international contexts.

The primary beneficiaries of FARN’s work are public, private and civil society decision makers, as well as disadvantaged populations affected by contamination, deforestation, unauthorized development, access to clean water, and other legal-institutional problems related to natural resources and specific environmental policies.

In terms of thematic scope, FARN works to improve policy and governance on a wide range of issues, including water and watershed management, conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, wetlands (including a restoration experience), energy (promoting renewables), land use change, agriculture and pesticide use, climate change, mining and glaciers, private land conservation, local communities and indigenous peoples’ rights, among others. Lastly, FARN litigates on behalf of individuals and communities whose rights to a healthy environment have been threatened by inadequate implementation of the law.

FARN participates in diverse national and international networks, which bring together NGO’s and other private sector actors, to exchange information and build common ground on issues of shared concern. It is also an observer at all Rio Conventions, ECOSOC and IPBES.

FARN has recently presented the tenth edition of its Annual Environmental Report before an audience of 400 people, a publication that has become a reference in environmental policy at the national and regional level. It will be available for free download next June 5th (only in Spanish).

On World Wetlands Day FARN presented an audio-visual clip on the Santa Catalina wetland based in the most polluted basin in the country - the Matanza Riachuelo - and one of the most polluted in the world. The video aims at putting in value a natural space in the basin that makes great contribution to the clean-up process of the basin ordered by the National Supreme Court of Justice.

FARN has also launched the 9th number of its magazine on environmental policy and debate Pulso Ambiental. This number addresses infrastructure from an integral perspective (only in Spanish).

Finally, FARN has launched its yearly analysis of the national budget. It aims at comparing the investment on activities for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, against those which are all the contrary, causing negative impact on the environment (only in Spanish).

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**First Thematic Assessment of Land Degradation and Restoration**

*By Noel Oettle*

Whether we work in government or academia, or are field-based practitioners, we have all been exposed to the stifling effects of “silo” thinking and acting. Even though overwhelming evidence shows the fundamental interdependences between biodiversity, land and the climate, so much action and science addresses only isolated parts of the puzzle. It is thus heartening to know that the first ever comprehensive assessment of land degradation and restoration was recently tabled at the meeting of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) held in March in Medellín, Colombia.
Land degradation is a global scourge, impacting negatively on people’s ability to feed themselves at a global level. The destruction of the land and the biodiversity that it supports also impacts on the cultural identity of what are described as ‘Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities’ (IPLCs). Land degradation is a major contributor to climate change, and climate change can also exacerbate the impacts of land degradation.

Sustainable Development Goal 15 is to “Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”, and one of the targets agreed to in this context is “by 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world”. While the concept of ‘land degradation neutrality’ is admirable, there is much debate about what the term actually means especially as regards life on and in soils. This debate prompted IPBES to focus its attention on the question.

Left: South Africa’s Professor Robert ‘Bob’ Scholes (who served as the Co-Chair of the IPBES assessment) argued that distinguishing between “natural” and “transformed” ecosystems implies the use of different biodiversity baselines. Societies transform ecosystems so that they will provide specific ecosystem services, such as food production, which may lead to a loss of other services, such as water storage.

The main drivers of biodiversity loss include unsustainable agriculture and forestry, construction of infrastructure, mining and extraction, urban expansion and climate change.

The benefits of halting land degradation and investing in restoration to ‘avoid, reduce, and reverse’ land degradation include increasing food and water security, contributing to the adaptation and mitigation of climate change and reducing the chance of conflict and migration.
The key findings of the IPBES Thematic Assessment of Land Degradation and Restoration are summarised in a set of key messages for policy makers:

1. Land degradation is a pervasive, systemic phenomenon: it occurs in all parts of the terrestrial world and can take many forms. Combating land degradation and restoring degraded land is an urgent priority to protect the biodiversity and ecosystem services vital to all life on Earth and to ensure human well-being.

- Currently, degradation of the Earth’s land surface through human activities is negatively impacting the well-being of at least 3.2 billion people, pushing the planet towards a sixth mass species extinction, and costing more than 10% of the annual global gross domestic product in loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Investing in avoiding land degradation and the restoration of degraded land makes sound economic sense as the benefits generally by far exceed the cost.
- Timely action to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation can increase food and water security, can contribute substantially to the adaptation and mitigation of climate change, and could contribute to the avoidance of conflict and migration.
Succulent *Animina* *spp.* establishing on a degraded surface [Source: Noel Oettle]

2. Unless urgent and concerted action is taken, land degradation will worsen in the face of population growth, unprecedented consumption, an increasingly globalized economy, and climate change.

- Widespread lack of awareness of land degradation is a major barrier to action.
- High consumption lifestyles in more developed economies, combined with rising consumption in developing and emerging economies, are the dominant factors driving land degradation globally.
- The full impact of consumption choices on land degradation worldwide is not often visible due to the distances that can separate many consumers and producers.
- Institutional, policy, and governance responses to address land degradation are often reactive and fragmented and fail to address the ultimate causes of degradation.
- Land degradation is a major contributor to climate change, while climate change can exacerbate the impacts of land degradation and reduce the viability of some options for avoiding, reducing, and reversing land degradation.
- Rapid expansion and unsustainable management of croplands and grazing lands is the most extensive global direct driver of land degradation.

3. The implementation of known, proven actions to combat land degradation and thereby transform the lives of millions of people across the planet will become more difficult and costly over time. An urgent step change in effort is needed to prevent irreversible land degradation and accelerate the implementation of restoration measures.

- Existing multilateral environmental agreements provide a platform of unprecedented scope and ambition for action to avoid and reduce land degradation and promote restoration.
- More relevant, credible, and accessible information is needed to allow decision makers, land managers, and purchasers of goods to improve the long-term stewardship of land and sustainability of natural resource use.
Coordinated policy agendas that simultaneously encourage more sustainable production and consumption practices of land-based commodities are required to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation.

Eliminating perverse incentives that promote degradation and devising positive incentives that reward the adoption of sustainable land management practices are required to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation.

Landscape-wide approaches that integrate the development of agricultural, forest, energy, water, and infrastructure agendas, all informed by the best available knowledge and experience, are required to avoid, reduce, and reverse land degradation.

Responses to reduce environmental impacts of urbanization not only address the problems associated with urban land degradation but can also significantly improve quality of life, while simultaneously contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Note: The Summary for Policy Makers (SPM) of the IPBES thematic assessment report on land degradation and restoration is annexed to document IPBES/6/L.9/Rev.1 and the assessment chapters are contained in IPBES/6/INF/1. See more at https://www.cbd.int/

Reflection on the Thari Women Project, SCOPE, Pakistan

By Tanveer Arif

This article reflects the experiences of a dryland project, known as Thari Women Project, which was funded by Scottish Government and was implemented by SCOPE Pakistan and Bioclimate, a Scottish NGO.

SCOPE Pakistan use a number of participatory assessment techniques to engage with the communities they work with. They include participatory wellbeing assessments (PWAs), social and resource use mapping exercises, power analyses (chapatti diagrams) and seasonal calendars in several villages. In 2013 several exercises were carried out to enable them to identify the 30% most vulnerable households that would subsequently be targeted for water storage tanks and kitchen gardens. This article outlines some examples of the processes used and the key findings of the assessments:

Participatory Wellbeing Assessment

A Participatory Wellbeing Assessment (PWA) was done in each project village to help measure the change in beneficiaries’ wellbeing over the life of the project. Representatives from each project village were asked what they consider to be important to their wellbeing and then they ranked these indicators according to their importance.

Seasonal calendar

A participatory exercise was also used to make a seasonal calendar, which improved our understanding of the nature and impact of seasonal variations on local activities and livelihoods. The process involved marking seasons on a calendar and writing on the various village activities, as well as their duration. Understanding seasonal changes in the availability of water, food production and income allows us to control for variations in project outcomes over the seasons.
Social mapping exercise

A social map was drawn with approximately 30 women in the village of Wadharaiy. This was used to build an understanding of the physical infrastructure, natural resources and land management practices of each village and how these affect livelihoods strategies. We discussed and mapped features and resources, including: wells and rainwater harvesting ponds and dams; cultivated land; grazing land; roads; settlements; buildings such as schools, shops and community centres and neighbouring villages.

Participatory Power analysis

A participatory power analysis was conducted to learn about the dynamics of power in the community and how different groups, structures and institutions operate to frame, influence and constrain village development and livelihood activities. It involved:

1. Identifying groups and institutions that influence decision making and opportunities in the community
2. Assigning each group or institution a different sized and coloured circle of paper, depending on the level of influence and type of group or institution (local village group, NGO, government agency or departments, private/other)
3. Arranging the circles of paper on a larger piece, to reflect the interaction among structures and proximity to village groups

Key findings and insights

Natural resources

Water was ranked as the most important wellbeing indicator in the villages. Even if there is enough rain for the well to provide water all year, women still have to walk up to 3 km every day to collect it
and the quality is not good. Without access to water, people struggle to produce enough food during the dry season, which leads to most people only being able to have 2 meals per day at this time of year.

Livestock was also found to be an important indicator of wellbeing, as they are an important asset that can generate income during periods of drought.

**Institutional arrangements**

Women’s community organisations are vital as they make it possible to save, borrow and manage the introduction and ongoing care of new infrastructure such as solar panels, wells and water tanks. They are critical to the success of this project and the management and empowerment activities we are trying to foster in this project.

NGOs & civil society groups have assisted the villages with support for water and sanitation infrastructure, solar panels and supporting microfinance.

Government departments and agencies provide minimal support in the area, though the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) did provide a generator pump for drinking water supply. Nonetheless, the Revenue Department still collects annual tax on income from agricultural activities and villagers report being harassed and pressed for bribes by the Police Department. Villagers are also fined by the Wildlife Department for contravening hunting restrictions, whilst elite groups are usually not.

**Powerful individuals (Wederas)** were found to be colluding with corrupt government departments and officials and other political elites to promote their own interests at the expense of local people. This undermine the rights of local people and suppress opportunities for generating income.

**In the News: Desertification, land degradation, drought cost India 2.54% of its GDP: study**

*Economic Times, India*

NEW DELHI: Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD) cost India about 2.54 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2014-15, a new study commissioned by the environment
ministry has found. Union environment minister Harsh Vardhan had released the study of Economics of Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (EDLDD) conducted by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) and commissioned by the ministry during the inaugural session of the four-day Asia Pacific Regional Workshop of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Desertification is the process of fertile land becoming desert, typically as a result of drought, deforestation, or inappropriate agriculture. "The report has highlighted that DLDD factors had cost India about 2.54 per cent of its GDP in 2014-15," an official statement released at the end of the workshop today said. Vardhan during the inaugural session had said that globally, drylands lose 23 hectares per minute to drought and desertification which translated into a loss of 20 million tonnes of potential foodgrain production in a year. The workshop had been jointly hosted by the environment ministry and UNCCD secretariat.

Addressing the closing session, Union environment secretary C K Mishra said the workshop will enable country parties to participate effectively and efficiently in the UNCCD reporting process, to submit the national report in time and in particular for target 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). He added that the workshop has not only provided a diverse and multi-disciplinary knowledge-sharing platform addressing DLDD issues, but also an opportunity to bring all key stakeholders from Asia to India and discuss key aspects of reporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN).

Deputy executive secretary UNCCD Pradeep Monga highlighted the importance of addressing land degradation, desertification and drought for developing countries including India. He commended India for its leadership role in supporting the Convention and putting land agenda at the core of SDGs.

Director General of Forests Siddhanta Das said the targets under the Convention can be achieved through carbon sequestration and preventing soil erosion by enriching forests. The four-day workshop (April 24-27) trained the participants in the use of an innovative land degradation monitoring tool by Conservation International, for the reporting process of UNCCD.

"This can significantly increase access to large amounts of Earth observation data and make it available in a comprehensible form for decision-makers at national and state level, thereby contributing to achieving the objectives underlined in the Convention".

The participants included delegates from about 40 Asia Pacific countries, as well as representatives from 12 Indian states affected by land degradation, scientists and researchers from scientific institutions of national importance and line-Ministries. The participants were trained in the use of the state-of-the-art tool called "Trends.Earth" developed by Conservation International, an NGO.

"The loss of productivity in both natural and managed ecosystems has serious ramifications for food security and nutrition, water availability and employment. "Knowing where hotspots or problem areas are, is the first step ahead towards combating land degradation. With this data, policy-makers
can prioritize areas for interventions to improve the livelihoods in rural communities that directly depend on healthy land," the statement added.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the only legally binding international agreement on land issues. The Convention promotes good land stewardship. Its 197 parties aim, through partnerships, to implement the Convention and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The end goal is to protect land from over-use and drought, so it can continue to provide food, water and energy.

Original article from The Economic Times:

In the News:
Great Green Wall Project launches in the Gambia

Climate change and desertification play a significant role in destabilizing human development gains. A holistic approach is needed to curb the environmental menace that impedes the sustainable development of the African continent. Poverty reduction and sustainable economic development are deeply intertwined and dependent on the effective management of natural resources such as land, water, forest, aquatic resources and biodiversity, which provide the basis for livelihoods and growth.

These resources, however, are highly vulnerable and under stress due to climate factors, population growth and poor management practices. Nearly half of Africa’s population live in ecologically sensitive drylands. The increasing frequency of severe climate-related shocks, especially droughts, has created severe challenges. Land and related natural resources are under threat from degradation and desertification, which in turn threaten the continent’s livelihoods and development chains. There is an urgent need for the sustainable management of Africa’s drylands. This constitutes the main challenges of the twenty first century and calls for a committed and holistic approach.

The establishment of Action Against Desertification (AAD) Project is the realisation of the need to translate this vision into implementable programmes. It is an EU-ACP funded initiative supporting the implementation of the Gambia Green Wall for Sahara and Sahel Initiatives (GGWSSI), with the aim of promoting integrated Sustainable Land Management (SLM) approaches in an effort to combat desertification.

Launched in the Gambia in May 2016, in the provincial regions of North Bank Division, Central River Division and Upper River Division, the project covers a total area of 589,000 ha of degraded land and is being implemented effectively with relevant stakeholders and partners. The project is being executed by the Gambian Country Office of the FAO with the Government of the Gambia as the implementing agency. Four collaborating partners have signed a “Letter of Agreement” with the FAO Gambia Office: the Department of Forestry, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, Natural resources Consulting (NACO) and the Agency for the Development of Women and Children (ADWAC).
The AAD project’s priority areas include food security, poverty alleviation, employment and improving resilience to climate change. The project’s Country Programming Framework Outcomes aims to improved coordination mechanisms and Institutional and policy frameworks at national and local level towards sustainable and equitable land and forest management. It aims to assist local communities in the three selected landscape units to adopt and use improved sustainable land/forest management practices and technologies and to enhance acquisition of knowledge and create awareness among key target audiences and stakeholders.

Implementation of project field activities started in January 2017, and in general there are good indications of progress in achieving a resounding success through the delivery of the planned products and services.

There is partnership and collaboration between AAD and other FAO supported projects like the Forest Farm and Facility (FFF), working in common areas of sustainable forest management. This has supported the development of management plans by Community Forest (CF) committees with the support of the Forestry Department.

The project has also supported the review of the Agriculture and Natural Resource (ANR) policy document that is crucial for the implementation of certain activities of both the AAD project and the GEF-funded Community-based Sustainable Forest Management project, which has just started. Three regional platforms have been put in place, one in each Region to help guide the implementation of different projects. Members of the regional platforms have committed to provide technical support while NACO is responsible for capacity development of project partners.

The project through Forestry Department provided certain number of nursery inputs such as wheelbarrows, poly bags etc. to village-based nurseries to facilitate the upscaling of production of tree seedlings. Successful tree nursery beds were established in different intervention sites for onwards distributions for plantation at local implementation sites.

The communities of CRR-N have had their five-year management plans and first generation of five year matrixes developed through FFF support in collaboration with the Department of Forestry. Forest Management Agreements for Community-Based Sustainable Land Management have been processed to transfer of legal ownership to concerned communities by the Department of Forestry.

A number of other environmental awareness initiatives have been conducted. Three school tree nurseries were established one in each region and are securely fenced, and contracts were awarded for construction of Stoves with Chimneys in ten schools identified in each of the three regions to improve the cooking environment and cut down the usage of firewood.

Priority was given to supporting the local communities to develop Forest Management Agreements to provide a legal basis for the local communities to embark on any forest management interventions including the development of small and medium forest-based enterprises.

One of the activities implemented by ADWAC is the production of metal cooking stoves by local artisans. The overall project target assigned to ADWAC is to install 720 stoves during the 42 months of the project. Thus far, 180 stoves have been successfully completed and distributed. Improved stoves with chimneys are also being installed in selected schools.

Save the date: Adaptation Futures conference (18-21 June 2018)

Adaptation Futures 2018 provides an opportunity to debate new approaches to climate change adaptation and to connect with more than 1000 international delegates from academia, government, civil society and business.

Key note speakers:

- Aromar Devi, Director of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS), India
- Dr Cheikh Mbou, Executive Director of the International START Secretariat
- Dr Edna Molewa, Minister of Environmental Affairs, South Africa
- Dr Masonda Mumba, Coordinator of the Flagship Programme for Ecosystem Based Adaptation, Climate Change Adaptation Unit, UN Environment, Kenya
- Saleemul Huq, Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development, Independent University, Bangladesh
- Stéphane Hulme, Lead Economist with the Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction at the World Bank
- Steve Nichols, Head of Environmental Sustainability, National Business Initiative, South Africa

Conference Chair

Mark New, Director of the African Climate & Development Initiative (ACDI), University of Cape Town, South Africa

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World Desertification Day, 17 June

Don’t forget World Desertification Day on 17 June! Please send us details of any actions you participate in to nick@emg.org.za

Credits
This newsletter is produced by the Drynet Secretariat which is hosted by Environmental Monitoring Group.

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The Secretariat would like to thank the authors for their contributions.

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