

# European DesertNet

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR GLOBAL DESERTIFICATION RESEARCH

[www.european-desertnet.eu](http://www.european-desertnet.eu)

## European DesertNet Newsletter n. 2 – February 2008

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### 1. News from the Board of European DesertNet

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#### Status of European DesertNet

It is encouraging that more scientists from non-European countries are now joining European DesertNet. To date, 261 scientists from 44 countries have joined European DesertNet. Together with Members of European Parliament, European DesertNet is currently preparing a hearing on Desertification – socio economic, agricultural and forestry impacts and their political consequences. The meeting is scheduled for mid May 2008 at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium. The topic of this hearing also reflects this year's celebration of 17<sup>th</sup> June (World Day to Combat Desertification) which highlights the theme "Combating Land Degradation for Sustainable Agriculture".

*Mariam Akhtar-Schuster, on behalf of the Steering Committee and Advisory Board of European DesertNet*

Planet'Action: a new initiative of interest for EDN



**PLANET ACTION**

Spot the impacts, engage in action

**Planet Action** is a non-for-profit collaborative initiative launched in June 2007 by Spot Image, France, bringing together today ESRI, INFOTERRA, NSPO and supported by UNESCO. The financial contributions to projects will be coordinated and managed by the Planet Action Foundation. The purpose of Planet Action is to encourage the Earth Observation industry and geographic information professional communities to help and tackle climate change related issues. Earth imagery has a very powerful effect in understanding what is currently happening and at what pace, taking into account large archive as well as increasing observing capacities and combining different images of a same location over time. The Planet Action initiative supports any project, whether big or small, whether from the scientific or civil societies, that assesses climate change impacts and suggests ways for action; it supports cooperation within and between project teams, local communities, global organisations and to use Earth imagery and Geographic information as a link between these communities, and it helps any individual or community to engage into action. These objectives translate into three main **actions**: active and ongoing support to projects that meet the Planet Action criteria, launch and management of an information and exchange internet platform about climate change to make it a common depository of the knowledge generated around the Planet Action projects, education and outreach programs supported by the Planet Action projects and internet platform. Planet Action **supports projects that investigate and assess climate change related issues** in one of the five following focus areas: human dimensions & habitation, drought, desertification & water resources, vegetation, biodiversity & ecosystems, oceans, and ice & snow cover. The projects presently supported by planet Action are:

- Calha Norte in Brazil (Vegetation, Biodiversity & Ecosystems)
- Xingu project in Brazil (Vegetation, Biodiversity & Ecosystems)
- Orion in Madagascar (Vegetation, Biodiversity & Ecosystems)
- Tai National Park (Ivory Coast - Vegetation, Biodiversity & Ecosystems)
- Iceland's glaciers (Ice & Snow Cover)
- Coral Reef bleaching in Guadeloupe (Oceans)

Desertification is acknowledged to be the result of complex interactions between climate change issues and anthropic actions. As such, it is the second focus area of Planet Action. However, the above list does not include any project dealing with drought and desertification issues. There are obviously links to be created between Planet Action and EDN in order to take advantage of this generous initiative and push projects and initiatives in EDN field of actions to cooperate with Planet Action.

*Gerard Begni, member of the steering committee of European DesertNet, CNES, France and Louis-François Guerre, Planet Action project leader, SPOTIMAGE.*

"The Union for the Mediterranean" political initiative: a new opportunity for EDN?

The political concept of 'Union for the Mediterranean' (UpM) suggested by the President of the French Republic got a first multilateral endorsement through the so-called 'Rome Call' co-signed on Dec. 20, 2007, by the President of the Council of Ministers of Italy Romano Prodi, the President of

the Spanish Government José Luis Zapatero and the President of the French Republic Nicolas Sarkozy. The Head of States and Governments of the Mediterranean Countries and of the European Union will be invited to meet in Paris on July 14, 2008 in order to define a common vision. This summit should be preceded by a meeting of riparian countries (plus Jordan, Mauritania and Portugal – the so-called '22+3' group) on July 13. Such meetings should take into due account recommendations based upon sound scientific interdisciplinary basis. Such a political event and the requested scientific background should draw the utmost attention of EDN and among others its Users Group and Science/Policy Interface Working Group. EDN has actually in hands key scientific knowledge about most of pressing environment and sustainable development issues in the Mediterranean region. It should be noted that the chairman of the S/P IF WG has been, is and will remain active in preparing the scientific background of this event in connection with the so-called 'GID', an association of Academies for development, located mainly in the Mediterranean region and created under the impetus of the '*Institut de France*'. Actually, the GID is the independent top-level scientific authority which supervises the scientific preparation of the UpM. This political meeting will be prepared by a top-level scientific symposium under the high moral authority of the GID. This symposium will be nurtured by three one-day parallel and interrelated inter-academic international workshops: (1) agriculture and sustainable development, (2) natural and halieutic resources (3) climate change impacts and mitigation/adaptation. These three workshops will be immediately followed by a half-day synthesis session. Conclusions and recommendations will be transmitted to the top-level scientific symposium, which will in turn transmit conclusions and recommendations of its own to the political Conference(s) of Heads of States and Governments (July 13 & 14, 2008) Such a concept has been endorsed during a key meeting held on January 24 in the '*Institut de France*' premises. The work started immediately, since the story has now to be written down without further delay. No doubt that it will offer again to EDN some opportunities to demonstrate its reactivity, its wide skill range, its total independence and its willingness to address scientifically some key societal needs in the framework of a regional political initiative.

*Gerard Begni, member of the steering committee of European DesertNet, CNES,*

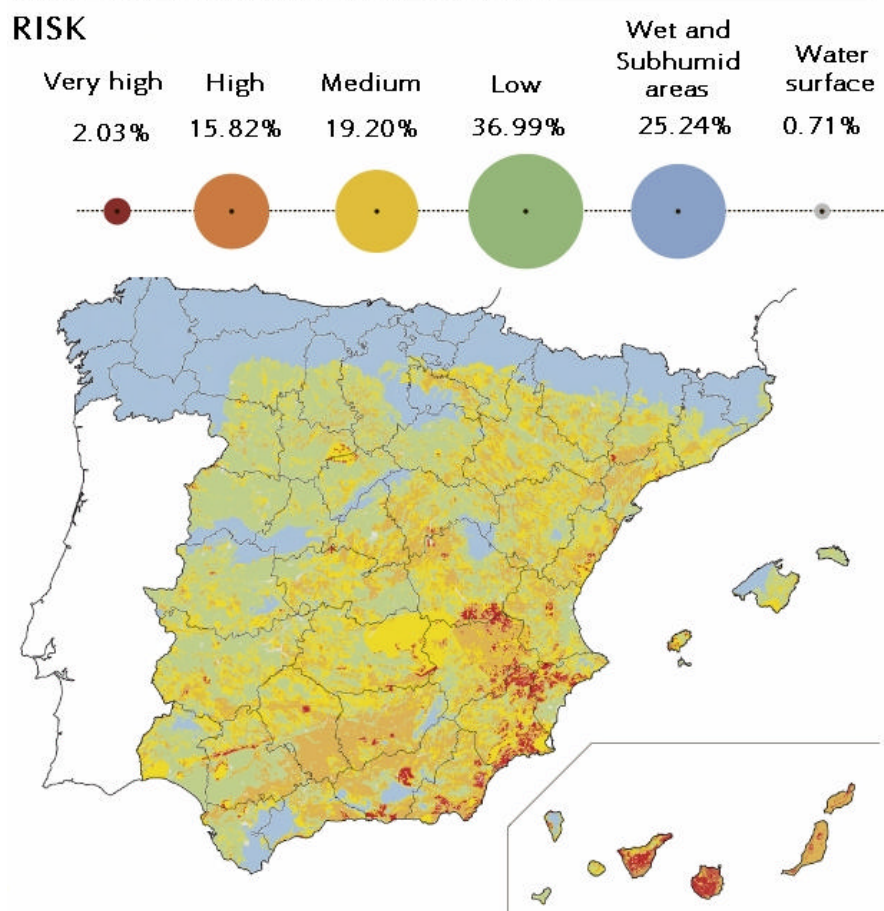


*The famous Palace and cupola of the 'Institut de France', Paris, 23 Quai de Conti. The Institute nurtured the so-called GID international inter-academic initiative under the high moral authority of which the scientific background of the 'Union for the Mediterranean' political initiative will be built upon. A key decision meeting about the organization and start of the related works was held here on January 24, 2008.*

### New map on desertification threat in Spain

Spain is one of Europe's most affected nations by desertification. The Spanish environment ministry has recently prepared a new map on desertification threat as one of the measures to face this process in its National Action Plan against Desertification (PAND). This information will shortly be included in <http://www.mma.es/portal/secciones/biodiversidad/desertificacion/>

#### **Threat of Desertification in Spain**



SOURCE: Ministerio de Medio Ambiente de España  
The figures represent the surface percentage

2008

*María José Marqués Pérez, member of the Advisory Board of European DesertNet, IMIDRA, Spain*

### Training and Capacity Building – a proposal by European DesertNet

The EDN working group “Training and Institutional Building” has presented the project “Manual on Desertification” under the call FP7-ENV-2008-1 with the coordination of Stefano Grego from Viterbo, Italy. The Manual is targeted at stakeholders including decision-making and policy-making administrators in developing countries, NGOs, and private sector companies working in areas experiencing desertification. It is comprehensive, touching all aspects of desertification (physical, chemical, social, economic and others), drawing on international case studies from a variety of different environmental and socio-economic contexts.



The manual has two main sections. The first considers all the aspects of physical and chemical degradation and its consequences for ecosystems, biodiversity, socio-economic well being and the loss of ecosystem services. The second section reports the results and best-practices in combating desertification and degradation. The manual is reviewing and compiling cutting-edge scientific research, taking into consideration the lessons learned, best-practices and success stories in combating desertification.

The Manual provides a space for critical arguments regarding desertification and will play a key role in building consensus between positions, which represents one more strong point in its content. The partners involved are from Italy, Spain, UK, Israel, Slovakia, Malta, France, Germany and Swiss.

*Stefano Grego, Viterbo, Italy*

## **2. Activities and Products of the Working Groups of European DesertNet and its partners**

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### *Drynet - Harnessing nature's adaptation mechanisms*

Researchers in South Africa have been investigating the astonishing phenomenon of how some plants manage to grow in extremely harsh arid environments where nothing else can survive. Research has proved that many seed producing plants have genes coded for drought tolerance in their roots and leaves. The only difference is that these hardly plants, called resurrection plants, have found a way to switch these genes on and off as needed. Extensive research is therefore underway to understand just how these resurrection plants switch these genes on and off. The answers to these questions could have huge implications for sustainable agriculture especially in light of global climate change, as this could result in breeding non-GMO plants that are far more drought, heat and salt tolerant.



*Karen Goldberg, DryNet Coordinator, Environmental Monitoring Group. Photos by Prof J.M. Farrant*

17 June 2008 World Day to Combat Desertification on "Combating Land Degradation for Sustainable Agriculture".

As the 16th and 17th sessions of the third implementation cycle of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will focus on the issues of Agriculture, Rural development, Land, Drought, Desertification, and Africa, this year's celebration of 17 of June will focus around the theme of "Combating Land Degradation for Sustainable Agriculture". This will certainly constitute a concrete way to support the discussions of the 16th and 17th sessions and provide useful inputs that could be brought to the attention of the CSD, in the current cycle.

Link: <http://unccd.int>

Marcos Montoiro, External Relations and Public Information Unit, UNCCD-Secretariat

### 3. Calls of interest to European DesertNet

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Climate change with a gender perspective: a global call from UN/ISDR

The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat in collaboration with IUCN and WEDO has issued a global call for good practices and lessons learned that link disaster risk reduction as a key tool for reducing the impact of climate change, with a gender perspective. They are seeking examples of projects and initiatives across humanitarian, environmental and development sectors that promote positive changes to how women and men's capabilities are used to, build community resilience to climate change; and which integrate a gender perspective in natural resource management, environmental protection and climate change adaptation policies. The resulting publication will prove valuable for addressing gender gaps in disaster risk reduction. UN/ISDR secretariat invites all interested to share their initiatives at community, national, regional or international levels. Guidelines in English, French and Spanish are available at PreventionWeb <http://www.preventionweb.net/English/themes/gender>. Contributions that fulfil the criteria of selection will be reviewed by a UN/ISDR secretariat gender officer and submitted to a voluntary board of gender professionals of the ISDR System working in the fields of Environment, Climate Change, Development, and Disaster Risk Reduction. Deadline: 15 March 2008. For more information, contact: [thorlund@un.org](mailto:thorlund@un.org).

Mariam Akhtar-Schuster, Co-Chair of European DesertNet, Hamburg University, Germany

### 4. Important upcoming events

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List of links to 2008 meetings regarding desertification, water conservation and land degradation.

8-11 April	Workshop on Forest Governance and Decentralization in Africa, a country-led initiative in support of UNFF <a href="http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/NR/exeres/A0029870-D094-471C-91C6-9839F31159A6.htm">http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/NR/exeres/A0029870-D094-471C-91C6-9839F31159A6.htm</a>	Durban, South Africa
13-18 April	<a href="#">European Geosciences Union</a>	Austria

	<a href="http://meetings.copernicus.org/egu2008/">http://meetings.copernicus.org/egu2008/</a>	
15-17 April	ACIAR Teak Project Annual Meeting. <a href="http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/Events/CIFOR/aciar_teak.htm">http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/Events/CIFOR/aciar_teak.htm</a>	Yogyakarta, Indonesia
18-23 May	15th ISCO conference <a href="http://www.isco2008.com/">http://www.isco2008.com/</a>	Hungary
27-31 May	Third international scientific conference on water observation and information system For decision support <a href="http://balwois.viabloga.com/">http://balwois.viabloga.com/</a>	Ohrid, Republic of Macedonia
27 Apr- 2 May	<a href="http://www.asprs.org/portland08/index.html">American Society for Photogrammetry &amp; Remote Sensing, 2008 Annual Conference</a> <a href="http://www.asprs.org/portland08/index.html">http://www.asprs.org/portland08/index.html</a>	Portland, OR, USA
15 May	Desertification - socio economic, agricultural and forestry impacts and their political consequences. <a href="http://www.european-desertner.eu">http://www.european-desertner.eu</a>	European Parliament Brussels
14 Jun – 14 Sept	Expo Zaragoza 2008 'Water and Sustainable Development' <a href="http://www.expozaragoza2008.es/">http://www.expozaragoza2008.es/</a>	Zaragoza, Spain
30 June-4 July	<a href="http://la.cesam.ua.pt/cost634/cost_leaflet.pdf">On- &amp; off-site environ. impacts of runoff and erosion</a> <a href="http://la.cesam.ua.pt/cost634/cost_leaflet.pdf">http://la.cesam.ua.pt/cost634/cost_leaflet.pdf</a>	Portugal
13-20 July	37 <sup>th</sup> Committee on Space Research (COSPAR) Scientific Assembly <a href="http://cospar-assembly.org">http://cospar-assembly.org</a>	Montreal, Canada
20-23 July	<a href="http://www.icpaonline.org/">9th In conference on precision agriculture</a> <a href="http://www.icpaonline.org/">http://www.icpaonline.org/</a>	USA
25-29 Aug	EUROSOIL Congress <a href="http://www.ecsss.net/web/frontend/view.php?MENUID=230">http://www.ecsss.net/web/frontend/view.php?MENUID=230</a>	Vienna, Austria
25-28 August	Adaptation of Forests and Forest Management to Changing Climate with Emphasis on Forest Health: A Review of Science, Policies, and Practices. <a href="http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/Events/CIFOR/conference_sweden.htm">http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/Events/CIFOR/conference_sweden.htm</a>	Umeå, Sweden
10-21 Sept	UNESCO-IHE Regular Short Course: Spate Irrigation and Water Management under Drought and Water Scarcity <a href="http://www.unesco.org/water/water_events/Detailed/1598.shtml">http://www.unesco.org/water/water_events/Detailed/1598.shtml</a>	Delft, The Netherlands
18-22 Sept	<a href="http://www.geocities.com/eswaranpadma/5ICLD.pdf">5th International conference on land degradation</a> <a href="http://www.geocities.com/eswaranpadma/5ICLD.pdf">http://www.geocities.com/eswaranpadma/5ICLD.pdf</a> Please note that the deadline for abstract submission has been extended until 29 February	Bari, Italy
5-9 Oct	ASA-CSSA-SSSA International annual meeting <a href="https://www.acsmeetings.org/">https://www.acsmeetings.org/</a>	USA
5-14 October	The World Conservation Congress <a href="http://www.iucn.org/congress/2008/">http://www.iucn.org/congress/2008/</a>	Barcelona, Spain
14-17 Dec	Deserts, Drylands and Desertification <a href="http://cmsprod.bgu.ac.il/Eng/Units/bidr/desertification2008/">http://cmsprod.bgu.ac.il/Eng/Units/bidr/desertification2008/</a>	Israel

Please notice that matters regarding our EDN network are going to be introduced and discussed in some upcoming presentations in:

April-2008, European Geoscience Union, Vienna.

- [Networking to strengthen research and solutions on land degradation and desertification. European Desert-Net.](#)
- [European Desert-Net, the scientific knowledge for stakeholders and policy-makers. Some facts.](#)

May-2008, in the European Parliament, Brussels.

- [Desertification - socio economic, agricultural and forestry impacts and their political consequences.](#)

Your participation will be welcome.

*María José Marqués Pérez, member of the Advisory Board of European DesertNet, IMIDRA, Spain*

## 5. New Publications and Databases

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### *Sustainability and Non-renewable groundwater*

The German Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) has compiled a brochure outlining 'Strategies for the Sustainable Management of Non-renewable Groundwater'. The brochure tries to bridge the apparent gap between sustainability and the widespread use of non-renewable groundwater. It is available in German, English and Arabic.

Link to the publication:

[http://www.bgr.bund.de/cln\\_006/nn\\_459814/EN/Themen/TZ/Politikberatung\\_GW/Grundwasser\\_I\\_WRM/Nicht\\_Erneuerbar/nicht\\_erneuerbar\\_node\\_en.html?nnn=true](http://www.bgr.bund.de/cln_006/nn_459814/EN/Themen/TZ/Politikberatung_GW/Grundwasser_I_WRM/Nicht_Erneuerbar/nicht_erneuerbar_node_en.html?nnn=true)

*Mathias Polak, Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR), Hanover, Germany*

### *The African Geographic Pictures Database*

The Royal Museum for Central Africa, in Tervuren, Belgium has realised the 'African Geographic Pictures', a database containing some 2000 images related to physical geography, covering several countries in Africa. The collection is still growing monthly. A lot of images are related to problems of land degradation and desertification. To have a look from worldwide: <http://www.metafro.be/geopic>

From inside the museum for higher precision images: [http://www.metafro/afrigeopict\\_visit](http://www.metafro/afrigeopict_visit)

*Jan Moeyersons, Royal Museum for Central Africa, Belgium*



## 6. Other information

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### *BIOTA AFRICA Project does long-term research on desertification*

From February 4 to 10 2008, Dr Annette Schavan, German Federal Minister of Education and Research, and a German delegation visited the BIOTA AFRICA research sites in southern Africa in order to be informed about the importance of long-term monitoring on the effects of land use and climate change in Africa. The area is severely hit by land degradation and desertification and the BIOTA AFRICA Project is working on measures ecological and cost-efficient restoration and the formulation of sustainable land use. BIOTA AFRICA is currently one of the largest international projects on the development of global multidisciplinary standards for permanent biodiversity observation sites for collecting and assessing data on human and climate-induced biodiversity changes. Capacity Development in the drylands of Africa is one major focus of the African-German Project. For more information contact: <http://www.biota-africa.org>

*Norbert Jürgens and Ute Schmiedel, University of Hamburg, Germany*

### *Guide - The Gujarat Institute Of Desert Ecology*

Gujarat Institute Of Desert Ecology (Guide) is an institution since its inception in 1995 working on the dryland issues like State Environmental Action Plan, Natural Resource enhancement, Biodiversity conservation and Environmental Impact Assessment. The institute has been actively involved in priority research areas like dryland linked biodiversity issues, combating desertification and addressing livelihood of the stakeholders. A significant contribution was arresting degradation and restoration of a major grassland called Banni; restoring saline waste land (*Rann*) and rehabilitation of degraded mangroves. Besides, the research areas extend to coastal/marine biodiversity in arid zones. Further information about GUIDE may be seen on: [www.gujaratdesertecology.com](http://www.gujaratdesertecology.com)

*G.A.Thivakaran, Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology, Bhuj*

### *International Conference Highlights Socio-Economic Dimensions of Desertification*

During the "International Conference on Combating Desertification (Beijing, China, 22-24 January 2008) participants identified the need for more holistic coping strategies to address the socio-economic dimensions of desertification. The outcomes of the conference contained The outcomes of the conference, contained in the *Beijing Statement on Combating Desertification and Promoting Sustainable Development* will provide a major input to the CSD process, informing member states in their deliberations on desertification-related issues in 2008 and 2009.

For more information, please visit the GM Newsletter archive: <http://www.global-mechanism.org/news--events/default-name>

*The Global Mechanism, member of the User Board of European DesertNet*

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