



**Founding
Institutions**

Arid Land Research Center
Tottori, Japan

Centro de Investigaciones
sobre Desertificación
Valencia, Spain

Cold and Arid Regions
Environmental & Engineering
Research Institute
Lanzhou, China

Desert Research Center
Cairo, Egypt

Desert Research
Foundation of Namibia
Windhoek, Namibia

Desert Research Institute
Reno, NV, USA

Dryland Research Centre
Hamburg, Germany

Gujarat Institute for
Desert Ecology
Bhuj, Gujarat, India

Instituto Argentino de
Investigaciones de las
Zonas Áridas
Mendoza, Argentina

International Center for Arid
and Semiarid Land Studies
Lubbock, TX, USA

Jacob Blaustein Institutes
for Desert Research
Ben-Gurion University
of the Negev
Sede Boqer, Israel

**International
Organizations**

International Crop Research
Institute for Semi-Arid
Tropics (ICRISAT)

**Minutes of
Steering Committee Biennial Meeting
Wednesday December 17, 2008, 1500-1830**

Taken by: Lonia Friedlander, M.Sc. student, BIDR

Edited by: Uriel Safriel

Present:

Chair:

- Uriel **Safriel** (GNDRI coordinator, on behalf of BIDR, Israel)

Participants:

- Elena Maria **Abraham**, Laura **Torres**, Instituto argentino de investigaciones de las zonas áridas (IADIZA, Argentine),
- Pedro **Berliner**, Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR, Ben Gurion University, Israel)
- A.C. **Corréa**, Richard **Zartman**, International Center for Arid and Semiarid Land Studies (ICASALS, Texas, USA)
- Scott **Hauger**, Desert Research Institute (DRI, Nevada, USA)
- Ryan **McAllister**, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO, Australia)
- Alon **Tal**, Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research (BIDR, Ben-Gurion University, Israel)
- Mitsuro **Tsubo**, Arid Land Research Center (ALRC, Tottori University, Japan)
- Avigad **Vonshak**, Blaustein Institutes of Desert Research (BIDR, Ben-Gurion University, Israel).
- Mark **Winslow**, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, (ICRISAT, India)

Apologizing for absence:

- Ismaïl Abdel-Galil Hussein, Desert Research Center (DRC, Cairo, Egypt).
- Norbert Jürgens, Hamburg Drylands Research Center, University of Hamburg, (DRCH, Hamburg, Germany)

Introductory segment

Prof. Avigad Vonshak, Director of the Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research, the rotating host institution, opened the meeting. He welcomed the participants and expressed wishes for a productive meeting leading to intensified operation of the network. He then handed over the chair to Prof. Uriel Safriel, GNDRI coordinator for the BIDR term of GNDRI chairmanship.

The Chair introduced GNDRI and the objective of the meeting. He cited a paragraph from the draft Working Plan of GNDRI, following the minutes of the GNDRI founding meeting that took place in San Francisco, USA, about a year earlier:

“GNDRI will organize one meeting during each term of every Host Institution, similar to the First Organizational Meeting, i.e., one meeting every other year.

A meeting will have three components:

- *Meeting of the Steering Committee to discuss GNDRI business.*
- *A scientific seminar on selected topic, with presentations of GNDRI members relevant to the agreed-upon topic*
- *A workshop for preparing joint research programs (similar to the "Collaboratory" initiative of DRI in San-Francisco, etc.)*
- *Field trip to research sites of the Host Institution*

Time table:

- *The BIDR will organize the first GNDRI meeting on its campus, in late 2008 or the beginning of 2009. Dates, seminar topic and workshop topics will be negotiated with GNDRI members.”*

This first biennial meeting convened as scheduled in “late 2008” has been subsumed into the Drylands, Deserts and Desertification conference, which included both a conference and a workshop, as well as field trips and visits to working sites of the hosting institution, the BIDR. This is thus a Steering Committee meeting, attended by one or two representative of each of seven founding institutions. Two additional founding institutions apologized and sent letters of support, while the other three did not respond to invitations.

The meeting then adopted the agenda prepared by the Chair. The Chair then distributed copies of email messages arrived a day before the meeting, from the Dryland Research Center, Hamburg, Germany and the Desert Research Center, Cairo, Egypt. The messages included an apology for not arriving to the meeting, and expressed support of GNDRI and its activities, as well as the meeting and its upcoming decisions.

Chair's report

“Historical” milestones

The Chair reiterated that -

- GNDRI is a network of institutions and not of individuals
- Institutions that qualify as members are those committed to drylands research

He also reiterated the decision of the founding meeting that –

- Management of GNDRI will be lead by one institution (“Host Institution” and this leadership (“Chairmanship”) will rotate such that a term lasts 2 years, at the end of which another institution takes the lead.
- The founding meeting elected the BIDR, Israel, as the first Host Institution, and the DRC, Egypt, as the second Host Institute.
- Furthermore, it was then decided that the second Host Institution functions as the Vice Chair of the network during the term of the first Host Institution.
- Therefore, the task of this meeting is to elect the third Host Institution that will function as Vice-Chair when the DRC will take over the chairmanship, during early 2009.

Activities of the first year of the BIDR Chairmanship

1. Communication with members

The BIDR issued in August 2008 a package to members, including draft minutes of the founding meeting, a draft of budgeted two-year work plan, a “Launching GNDRI” PR document to be used at the discretion of the founding institutes, and a letter from the BIDR Director that introduced these documents and announced on allocating \$50K of the BIDR budget for covering the expenses of the two-year coordination of GNDRI, through implementing the proposed Plan of Work. This as an act of goodwill and a signal to indicate that this may be expected of the rotating chairs of GNDRI. In his letter the BIDR Director requested comments on the above draft documents, so that they can be revised and approved. The package was sent first to the institutes who are members of the Executive Group (the co-chairs), and then to all members. However, no responses have been received.

2. Components of the draft Plan of Work

The plan of work included the following activities and mechanisms:

- Exchange of information on current activities among member institutions
- Data base on availability of research facilities
- Data base of information on ongoing research activities
- Development and use of outreach tools for conveying research results to policy makers and to the general public
- GNDRI meeting – the only activity that was implemented

3. Website of GNDRI

The Hamburg DRC, who is the co-chair for website, and is already managing the European DesertNet website, kindly allocated human resources for constructing GNDRI's website. The DRC's webmaster triggered the creation of a logo for GNDRI, so that the website can be easily recognized. The BIDR hired a PR agency that produced several version of a logo. These were sent to all members for selection. A few members responded and by their vote one of the options was selected. This also enabled issuing a letterhead for GNDRI correspondence.

The website is not yet on the air, and access is enabled by a username and password sent to all members. Members were asked to provide a short, formatted and structured profile. The BIDR provided a template. To this day 5 members posted their profile on the website.

4. GNDRI and the CCD platform

One of the missions of GNDRI spelled out in the founding documents is to use international arenas such as UNCCD meetings for making the voice of science heard by policy-makers. In San Francisco meeting the upcoming CoP of CCD in Madrid was targeted. This was missed for lack of response of members to the BIDR messages to partners. Yet, because the BIDR happens to function as the Focal Point of Israel to the CCD, the BIDR representative took the floor in the COP's plenary and announced the establishment of GNDRI, its mission, objectives, and members.

5. Proposal for establishing a network of Dryland Monitoring Sites

Since the Madrid CST session (at the COP) decided that the topic for discussion in the next CST, at 2009, will be dryland monitoring, the BIDR contacted all GNDRI members through a message suggesting that GNDRI will make plans to establish a network of dryland monitoring sites, and this plan will be presented to the CST, as GNDRI support of the work of the CST. In the nutshell, each GNDRI member will modify or use one of its research sites, either at home or in other countries this institute is active, as a long-term monitoring site. The site needs to be one of current land use, in which both biophysical and social indicators will be measured, and evaluated against baselines in benchmark sites. The methodology of monitoring will be standardized to the extent possible for all GNDRI sites, as well as the data management. Monitoring results will be exchanged and shared. Most importantly – the long-term component of the program will be secured due to institutional commitment of each of the institutes, regarding its own monitoring sites. Funding for the monitoring will be raised by each institute, yet being part of the GNDRI network is likely to assist each partner in its fund-raising.

Some partners commented on the proposal by suggesting that consultation of and with other monitoring projects need to take place. Some supported the proposal, and some did not respond. The idea, in its present status of a draft, was presented in a side event during the CST-S1 (special session of CST in Istanbul, November 2008), in a form of a short PPT presentation, which was also presented at the meeting. The UNCCD's Committee on Science and Technology (CST) is currently conducting a survey to identify the most

common indicators utilized globally by Parties to the Convention; and the Dryland Science for Development (DSD) consortium is also assisting the CST to analyze the scientific state-of-the-art in monitoring and assessment of dryland degradation and desertification. These two CST processes, which take place during 2009, will be useful for GNDRI in forming its plans for its monitoring sites.

6. Finalization of the report

On terminating his report, the Chair opened the floor for comments and discussion of his report, as well as on other matters. Dr. Scott Hauger (DRI) complimented BIDR for its performance as Host Institute. He recognized the difficulty in getting international institutions to respond or agree on anything. Most participants then expressed opinions and made suggestions on various matters, and decisions were adopted by consensus during the discussion. The following is a report by issues, not necessarily in the order they were brought up during the meeting.

General discussion

1. Communication between the Host Institute and the Network's members

Dr. A.C. Correa (ICASALS) suggested that difficulties of communication were due, at least in part, to the communication being through electronic mail alone. He suggested that the Host Institute will communicate both through the regular paper mail as well as electronic mail. Dr. Hauger attributed the communication problems with the DRI to multiple addresses and internal changes.

Decision 1

Communications issued by the Host Institute to member institutes will be carried out by both regular airmail and electronic mail. Each of the representatives of the institutes present in the meeting provided both addresses of their respective institute, and these will be used by the Host Institute. **The Host Institute will ask the other members not present in the meeting, using the addresses at its disposal, to provide their preferred addresses.**

2. The length of term of GNDRI Chair (Host Institute)

Dr. Scott Hauger (DRI) observed that a two-year term is insufficient and suggested to extend the term to three years. This was seconded by Dr. A.C. Correa (ICASALS). All other participants agreed. The Chair reported on communications with the Desert Research Center (DRC, Cairo, Egypt) and noted that the most recent message from the DRC implies that it would prefer to take over at the end of 2010 rather than earlier. All participants expressed the hope that the rotating chairmanship of the Network will move to DRC, as originally decided, but in compliance with the decision to extend the length of GNDRI's Chair term. Prof. Vonshak, the BIDR Director, agreed that the BIDR will extend its term to comply with the suggestion of a 3-year term. He suggested that this additional year will also provide the DRC the time to come up with the necessary funds to act as Host Institution and to overcome difficulties in assuming this task. Participants

expressed their thanks to the BIDR for agreeing to extend its term, and their wish and hope that the DRC will be able to assume the rotating chairmanship at the end of 2010.

Decision 2

2.1 GNDRI's term of the rotating chairmanship will be a 3-year term.

2.2 The BIDR will terminate its term at the end of 2010.

2.3 The DRC will function as Vice-Chair until the end of 2010, when it will assume the role of Chair and Host Institute until the end of 2013.

2.4 The third rotating Chair of GNDRI will be determined by the next meeting of GNDRI steering committee.

3. Membership of GNDRI

3.1 ICARDA recused from membership

Dr. Mark Winslow suggested that on top of representing ICRISAT, he may represent ICARDA too. The Chair reported that following the request of ICARDA, transmitted by Dr. Winslow earlier this year, that the name of this organization cannot be listed as a GNDRI member, ICARDA name was removed from all communications of GNDRI. Without further elaboration on the motivation of ICARDA to request refraining of mentioning its association with GNDRI, the Host Institute interprets this as a request to be recused from GNDRI membership. No objection to this interpretation was voiced.

3.2 Contacts with DesertNet

Dr. Mark Winslow (ICRISAT) asked whether GNDRI had considered merging with the European DesertNet (which now accepts non-European members too). Dr. Elena Abraham (IADIZA) reported that her institute had communication difficulties with this network; Prof. Avigad Vonshak (BIDR) recollected that the issue had been discussed during the founding meeting, where it was agreed that the European DesertNet differs from GNDRI and need not be merged with GNDRI; and Dr. Correa (ICASALS) highlighted the activity of GNDRI as contrasting with that of DesertNet. The Chair concluded the discussion reasserting that GNDRI is a network of institutions and not of individuals, the difference being that only institutions, unlike individuals, can make long-term institutional commitments to a specific research focus. Nevertheless, GNDRI can cooperate with other networks, and indeed there is cooperation between DesertNet and GNDRI; DesertNet is a member of GNDRI, and DRCH, which manages DesertNet's website, also constructs the webpage for GNDRI.

3.3 New members

The Chair reported that since the establishment of GNDRI two institutes requested, on their own initiative, to join GNDRI. The Centro de Investigaciones sobre Desertificación (CIDE) of Valencia, Spain approached the Chair and was responded that the request will be discussed in this meeting (but meanwhile CIDE was requested to post its draft profile on the provisional website of GNDRI). The Centro de Estudios Ambientales del Mediterraneo (CEAM - Mediterranean Environmental Study Centre) of the University of Barcelona, Spain approached Dr. Elena Abraham during the Sede Boqer conference, with a request to join GNDRI too. With regard to the latter request, the Chair noted that though the name of this institute does not explicitly address commitment to dryland research, all Mediterranean areas are by definition drylands.

These requests elicited a discussion regarding the criteria for accepting new members to GNDRI. Dr. Scott Hauger (DRI) suggested that while GNDRI needs offer automatic membership to any institution doing dryland research, formal application is required, followed by some sort of a review process. Dr. Mark Winslow (ICRISAT) pointed at the need to define “institute” and suggested that university departments that focus on drylands research will be able to join GNDRI. A question was then raised - what if a department changes its focus? It was also suggested that an organization with at least 5-10 scientists and a commitment of at least 5 years on dryland research may qualify for a GNDRI membership (Dr. Scott Hauger, DRI), and that whether or not an organization is dedicated to dryland research and thus is eligible for joining GNDRI, can be evaluated by inspecting the written mandate or mission statement of candidates (Dr. Correa, ICASALS). Dr. Winslow (ICRISAT) also asked whether GNDRI strives to include institutes from every part of the world. The Chair responded positively, but stressed that acceptance will be determined by qualification, with no motivation to have “geographical balance”. He also warned that though GNDRI is currently quite small and may benefit from increasing its membership, being too big would reduce its focus and impact. He then concluded that the issue of criteria and procedure for accepting new members will be discussed following a proposal to be made by the BIDR.

Decision 3

3.1 BIDR will compile a questionnaire to be filled-in candidate institutions. The draft questionnaire will be sent to members for comments, will then be revised and resent to members for approval. Once the questionnaire is approved it will be sent to the two institutes that requested to join GNDRI.

3.2. The Co-Chair institute for membership will inspect the filled-in questionnaires and will be responsible for handling the accession process. It will also explore which existing institutes over the globe may qualify as candidates for membership, and approach them with regard to becoming candidates.

4. Network of Dryland Monitoring Sites

Several representatives voiced their opinion on this proposal. Dr. Ryan McAllister (CSIRO) noted the organizational complexity of CSIRO that hampers taking decision regarding this proposal. Dr. A.C. Corr ea (ICASALS) praised the proposal and asserted the interest of his institute. Dr. Scott Hauger (DRI) explained that the DRI is a soft-money institute without a discretionary budget to commit itself to projects like the monitoring effort. Dr. Mark Winslow (ICRISAT) informed that the CST is seeking to identify indicators that are currently used by Parties to the Convention for monitoring their drylands, which may help the operation of the monitoring sites (see also discussion in item 5 of Chair’s Report). He reported that the indicators to be recommended by the CST will be ones within the capacity and the means of developing countries to use them, such that they are both affordable and manageable. The issue of the spatial scale of the monitoring came up too, and it was explained by the Chair that each partner will determine the scale independently, depending on the site’s conditions and the institute’s means.

Next came up the issue of how the monitoring sites will be supported. Prof. Avigad Vonshak (BIDR) pointed at an increasing global awareness of the need as well as the lack

of global monitoring, what suggests that funds for such an initiative is likely to be available. To support this assertion he reported that UNESCO that had been presented with the proposal expressed a warm interest. Since the proposal is not to establish new site but to take advantage of existing sites and adapt them for functioning also for monitoring, it is likely that it will be favored by funding organizations. He also suggested that the work of the monitoring sites will not wait until the CST comes up with agreed-upon indicators, but will go hand in hand with the CST work. The Chair pointed out that while each partner can approach local funding sources, its proposal can be strengthened when the local site is presented as a part or a partner of a global, coordinated effort. Furthermore, each partner will be able to approach also international funding agencies, as a representative of a “link” in an international, globally coordinated monitoring network. Prof. Avigad Vonshak (BIDR) suggested that while GNDRI can be a global player in this monitoring effort, the individual institutions can approach funders at home with the backup of the network. Dr. A.C. Corr ea (ICASALS) proposed that the implementation of agreed upon indicators and benchmarks by the network can strengthen the claim of the network for outside funding. He also suggested that the monitoring activity would encourage sharing of relevant databases, not only between GNDRI members, but also with other organizations that maintain data sets of global significance. This elicited a suggestion of Dr. Scott Hauger (DRI) for cooperation between the DRI and the ICASALS on database sharing. Dr. Elena Abraham (IADIZA) suggested that the skeleton of the GNDRI monitoring network proposal can be used also by other organizations, thus leading to a global monitoring system. She also observed that once funding for the monitoring effort is secured, part of the proposed and approved budget can be allocated for analysis of data publications and other activities of each of the partners and of the network as a whole. In this context the Chair reported that several GNDRI members suggested that monitoring of the kind proposed is already being carried out by other organizations and projects. He said that GNDRI does not offer a monitoring “project”, which has a set time horizon, but a permanent monitoring effort, one that will be periodically assessed, but with a commitment to be a long-term one. He also suggested that the current global monitoring efforts will be surveyed in order to establish links and cooperation between the relevant efforts and the GNDRI monitored network.

To summarize, the Chair suggested that if the following principles are agreed, the BIDR will compile a proposal document:

- The monitoring is of **land use** in the **drylands**
- Use of agreed benchmark and indicators will enable to detect either **degradation** or a **sustainable use**
- **Socio-economic and policy indicators** will be monitoring **in conjunction with the biophysical indicators**
- The monitoring procedure will be **standardized and harmonized**, based on products provided by the CST
- The institute involved will provide an **institutional commitment** for the long-term nature of the monitoring.

These principles were unanimously accepted.

Decision 4

BIDR will prepare the first draft of a proposal of the Network of Dryland Monitoring Sites. This will be sent to partners for revision and approval. Once approved, the proposal will be used by those institutions who wish to implement it, for both planning and execution, as well as for fund-raising.

5. GNDRI Joint Teaching Program

Dr. Elena Abraham (IADIZA) briefed a draft proposal (also circulated to the meeting participants) for a GNDRI Joint Teaching Program to be executed by her institute, in partnership with other GNDRI members. The program is of 3 weeks theoretical and practical training of graduate students, implemented through field work across transect through the Argentina Monte desert, from the mountains to the plains, including a use of a biosphere reserve. The BIDR already agreed to send three of its researchers as instructors in this course. Under a cultural exchange agreement between Israel and Argentina some support for this course can be raised. UNESCO and UN University can be approached for supporting this course, given that UNU program allows students to take courses abroad, that will provide them with credits once these courses are recognized. The IADIZA proposed to carry out the course in September 2009, but this may be too ambitious, since funding has not yet been secured. Prof. Avigad Vonshak suggested that a detailed program of the course is required for obtaining both funding for implementation and recognition for credits. Dr. Elena Abraham (IADIZA) recognized the program is only at an initial draft state and requires more work. Ryan McAllister (CSIRO) suggested that his institute may be particularly interested in human ecology aspects of the program.

The Chair suggested viewing this initiative of IADIZA in the GNDRI context. He proposed that something similar to what was just presented by IADIZA will become a GNDRI training course, whose first cycle will be carried out in Argentina, the host institution will be IADIZA, and other interested GNDRI members will be partners. After the first cycle the course will move to another GNDRI member (and country), so that the course will be rotating, and its program modified and adapted according to the host country and its conditions, and upon the requirements of the participating institutes. Whereas the costs of instructor and hosting the students may be covered by the participating institutions as in-kind contribution, the international travels involved need to have outside support.

Decision 5

The IADIZA, in cooperation with the BIDR, will prepare a full proposal of the teaching program, including a detailed curriculum and both will initiate fund-raising for the program, such that the course to take place first in Mendoza, Argentina, will constitute the test of an evolving GNDRI training program.

6. GNDRI and the Dryland Biosphere Reserves Network

The Chair reported on a new initiative proposed to UNESCO on establishing a network of dryland biosphere reserves, and initiative that may be of interest to GNDRI. He explained that the “biosphere reserve” concept is one of combining biodiversity conservation with sustainable land use, and therefore dryland biosphere reserves are instruments for combating desertification through the involvement of local populations of land users in the local biodiversity assets. UNESCO, through Man and Biosphere (MAB) program certifies both national and transboundary biosphere reserves and harmonizes their operation through its global network of biosphere reserves. The proposal is to organize within this network a sub-network of dryland biosphere reserves. Because the biosphere reserve concept is heavily based on scientific research that is required for making the biosphere reserve achieving its goals, GNDRI, being a network of dryland research institutions, may become instrumental in providing research support to dryland biosphere reserves. Furthermore, the biosphere reserve concept is also heavily dependent on monitoring, and here the monitoring network of GNDRI may be instrumental too. The Chair summarized by suggesting that GNDRI can become instrumental in bridging the gap between the UNCCD and the Man and Biosphere program of UNESCO, thus creating a synergy between a UN multilateral agreement and a UN organization (UNESCO), with regard to the latter actions in drylands.

In the discussion that followed the Chair’s proposal regarding the network of biosphere reserves, Dr. Elena Abraham (IADIZA) informed the meeting that her institute is involved in the administration of one dryland biosphere reserve in Argentina. She asked how many dryland biosphere reserves are already established. Answering to questions the Chair suggested that the involvement of GNDRI in the network of dryland biosphere reserve that is currently being evaluated by UNESCO, will enable GNDRI to support not only the CCD but also a “sister” Rio Convention, the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), when the latter is applied to drylands. Furthermore, GNDRI will become thematically associated with UNESCO, a UN organization that recently expressed a specific interest in the drylands and extended support to dryland-relevant scientific activities, such as the recent conference on Drylands, Deserts and Desertification 2008.

Decision 6

The BIDR will contact the Israeli MAB Committee who proposed to UNESCO the establishment of a network of Dryland Biosphere Reserves, will explore options and modalities for interactions between GNDRI and UNESCO. The BIDR will report to the parties on the findings in a form of a concept paper from which a plan of action may emerge.

7. Website management

The Chair requested members that did not yet provide their institutional profile for posting it on the website, to compile it (using the template of the BIDR profile already placed on the webpage (<http://www.gndri.net/gndriprev/>; User: gndriprev, Password: phase1, and press the Founding Institutes button), and email it to uriel36@gmail.com

Dr. Ryan McAllister (CSIRO) informed that his organization needs to attend some legal issue regarding the profile, and hopes these are to be overcome. Dr. Mark Winslow (ICRISAT) suggested using **Google groups** facility for sharing information, making contacts, distributing and editing documents.

Decision 7

BIDR will explore the option of using Google groups for GNDRI communication management.

8. GNDRI as an NGO

The Chair proposed to explore the option of providing GNDRI with the status of an NGO, which will enable it to approach the CCD for enabling it to become an NGO accredited to the CCD. This process requires filing a request by filling-in forms, and an approval of the Conference of Parties of the CCD. Once approved, GNDRI can send delegates to represent it in CCD functions, and enable it to deliver both oral and written statements in plenary and other sessions of the CoPs and the CST meetings. This will enable GNDRI to address one of its missions, which is to “*Provide scientific information and advice to policy makers in multilateral, global forums for dryland research advocacy, such as the UNCCD*”. Dr. Elena Abraham (IADIZA) and Prof. Avigad Vonshak (BIDR) informed that their institutes are already NGOs accredited to the UNCCD.

Decision 8

The BIDR will explore the option of making GNDRI an NGO accredited to the UNCCD, and will inform members on its findings.

9. Revising the structure of GNDRI management – meetings and the structure of the Executive Group

9.1 Frequency of Steering Committee meetings

The Chair reiterated that in the founding meeting it had been decided to have the Steering Committee (the 12 founding institutes) meeting every second year, namely at the mid-term of the rotating Host Institute (or GNDRI Chair). The decision of this meeting to extend the term of a Host Institute to three years calls for a revision of the time table. He suggested that too many meetings (such as 2 meetings within 3 years) place an undue financial burden, but too few meetings may cause stagnation in activity. In the following discussion Dr. Scott Hauger (DRI) proposed that the Executive Committee meets annually, Prof. Avigad Vonshak (BIDR) proposed that GNDRI link its meetings to conferences (scientific and policy), and this was seconded by A.C. Corr ea (ICASALS) noting that in June 2009 there is a relevant conference on “Water in Arid and Semiarid Lands III” planned for Cape Verde, and by the Chair suggesting that the Executive Committee meets once a year, linked to an event so that the members do not have to travel for just the Executive Committee meeting. Dr. Scott Hauger (DRI) on the other hand motioned that the Steering Committee meets at least once in 3 years, while the chairs will be able to call meetings of the Executive and Steering Committees according to needs. Prof. Avigad Vonshak (BIDR) then reminded that it is obligatory to verify the

passing of the chair to the DRC, hence the Steering Committee will have to meet one year prior to passing the chairmanship from the BIDR to the DRC, i.e. sometime in 2010. This may be in conjunction with the third Drylands, Deserts and Desertification Conference in Sede Boqer, but a consideration should be taken not to overlap with the CST meeting.

Decision 9

The BIDR will select a suitable time and location for the next meeting of the Steering Committee, trying to link it, but also avoid clashes with relevant events. The issue of meeting frequencies of the Steering Committee will be resolved in that meeting.

9.2 Structure of the Executive Group

The Chair reiterated that the Executive Group as decided in the founding meeting included the following members and tasks:

- **Co-Chair for Website support and development:** Dryland Research Center Hamburg (DRCH)
- **Co-Chair for Publications:** International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, Aleppo, Syria (ICARDA)
- **Co-Chair for Education:** International Center for Arid and Semiarid Land Studies, Lubbock, Texas, USA (ICASALS)
- **Co-Chair for Membership:** Desert Research Institute, Reno, Nevada, USA (DRI)

He pointed out that this list has to be revised since ICARDA requested to be recused from active membership in GNDRI. In the discussion that follows several other changes were proposed. It was suggested and agreed that the task of “publications” originally allocated to ICARDA may be redundant and should be replaced by “outreach”, to be allocated to ICRISAT. Also, it was suggested to add a task, “databases”, since the Plan of Work of GNDRI includes the construction and maintenance of several databases. Since the task “membership” is not expected to constitute a heavy work load, it was suggested that “databases” will be added to the tasks of the DRI, on top of the “membership” task, or to consolidate the “membership” task into the responsibilities of the coordinating institution (which will also reduce DRI’s task load). Alternatively, a fifth Co-chair will be established, with the task of “databases”. In this context, Dr Scott Hauger (DRI) informed that he cannot commit DRI to swapping membership for database management at this time. It was also suggested that the Executive Group will meet as frequently as required, using internet or phone communications.

Decision 10

The structure of the Executive Group is to be as follows:

- **Co-Chair for Website support and development:** Dryland Research Center Hamburg (DRCH)
- **Co-Chair for Outreach:** International Crops Research Institute for the Semi Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)
- **Co-Chair for Education:** International Center for Arid and Semiarid Land Studies, Lubbock, Texas, USA (ICASALS)

- **Co-Chair for Membership and/or Databases – to be determined: Desert Research Institute, Reno, Nevada, USA (DRI)**
- **Co-Chair for Membership: Institute to be determined, depending on the above.**

The BIDR will contact the other member institutions to find a volunteer institution to take on the co-chair position for database or for membership. The BIDR will convene the Executive Group as required, for internet and/or phone meetings.

10. Revision of the Plan of Work

The Chair reminded that the Plan of Work is currently only in the form of a draft, since none of the members commented on it and a decision to adopt it has never been taken.

Decision 11

BIDR will revise the Plan of Work, taken into consideration that it is now extended to the end of 2010, and that changes in the frequency of meetings and the structure of the Executive Group have to be incorporated in the revised plan. The revised document will be sent to members for their comments and then resent to the Executive Group for approval.

11. GNDRI contributions to the CCD-CST Scientific Conference at COP-9 in late 2009

Dr. Mark Winslow (ICRISAT) explained that a major reform of the UNCCD is underway, and one of its goals is to increase the flow of science into its deliberations. Towards that end, the UNCCD has asked its Committee on Science and Technology to reform its official Sessions from a bureaucratic format, into a scientific conference format. Towards that end, the Dryland Science for Development (DSD) consortium, coordinated by Dr. Mark Winslow (who also represents ICRISAT in GNDRI) is seeking outstanding dryland management scientists to participate in global Working Groups that will prepare the background analyses and proposed recommendations of the Conference. Dr. Winslow asked GNDRI for assistance in helping the DSD identify outstanding scientists for participation in these desertification working groups.

Decision 12

GNDRI will receive a formal request from ICRISAT and the Host Institute will produce and circulate a relevant document to all GNDRI members, and coordinate the assistance of GNDRI to DSD.

The meeting was closed at 5 minutes prior to the allotted time. Participants thanked the BIDR staff for its work during the first year of GNDRI existence and for organizing the first biennial meeting. Most participants then reassembled for dinner at a desert restaurant operated by small goat farming in the Sede Boquer vicinity.

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