



## Poverty reduction in an emerging democracy: Decentralization in Malawi

As one of the latest fashions of development paradigms, democratic decentralization is widely orchestrated as a means of achieving the trio of good governance, development, and poverty reduction, especially at local level. The reasoning behind this is that the advent of democracy in a country coupled with democratic decentralization policy reforms creates or widens the political space for engagement between the state and society. This in turn curves out favorable patterns of interactions among various actors for viable governance and poverty reduction efforts. Democratic decentralization is supposed to involve building political capabilities of the poor. This enables them to exercise their rights, so they are going to demand improved services, transparency, and accountability. The main objective of this PhD study at ZEF was to assess the extent to which decentralization policy reforms create favorable conditions for reducing poverty and for consolidating democracy.

Malawi provided an ideal case study because of its experiences in the past 15 years. The country is regarded as one of the poorest in the world. The advent of democracy in May 1994 raised prospects and expectations of rapid progress in the socio-economic sector, especially since the collapse of the authoritarian regime was sealed with the introduction of democratic decentralization policy reforms at the urge of the foreign donors. Moreover, the new democratic government adopted the reduction of poverty as its overall operative development philosophy. Malawi has since implemented several poverty reduction policies. Their common striking feature is that they champion decentralization as a two-pronged strategy to combat poverty and consolidate democracy, especially at the grassroots level. The study was carried out in six districts across Malawi, two in each of the country's three administrative regions. One of the districts in each region was a Local Impact Area (LIA), i.e. a dis-



People at local level often have only limited knowledge about the decentralization policy reforms.

### Editorial

#### Hong Kong review

Only little was achieved at the 6th WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong in December 2005. However, the ministers decided the elimination of all agricultural export subsidies by 2013 and the removal of subsidies on cotton by the developed countries by this year, and the least-developed countries are to be offered duty-free and quota-free access. Nevertheless, much remains to be done in 2006 if progress is really desired.

With agriculture being the most protected industry, liberalizing trade in agricultural and food products would provide substantial economic gains. However, the interests of countries participating in the negotiations have become considerably more complex over the last decade. Dividing lines are obvious not only between developed and developing countries but also among developing countries. While agricultural exporters focus on most favored nations (MFN) tariff cuts, other developing countries have imposed agricultural tariffs, which exceed the level of developed countries. Least-developed countries as well as some other countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) receiving preferences mainly from the EU and the US would lose out on agricultural trade liberalization due to the preferences they receive mainly from the EU and the US.

Therefore, trade liberalization should encompass all countries and, at least, all merchandise trade. Nevertheless, such policies will not necessarily alleviate poverty and hunger. Compensating losers by transferring gains from trade in high-income countries to the ones stricken by poverty could help. ■ Klaus Froberg

The author is a Director at ZEF.

► **Poverty reduction in an emerging democracy: Decentralization in Malawi**

tract in which the decentralization policy reforms had been piloted in 1993 before they were officially implemented in the rest of the country in 1997. The inclusion of the LIAs was meant to provide benchmarks for a comparative analysis, given that they had had a relatively long history in implementing decentralization policy reforms. The underlying assumption was that the LIAs were to do much better than the non-LIAs.

The main finding of the study is that the implementation of the decentralization policy reforms in Malawi has created new spaces within the realms of both governance and poverty reduction. There has, for instance, been a dramatic change in the way poverty is conceived. Whereas in the one-party authoritarian system of government, the existence of poverty was officially denied, it is now considered as a social problem, while its existence, magnitude and depth are widely acknowledged. This has been borne out by the proliferation of the poverty reduction initiatives since 1994.

However, the progress of the reforms has stagnated, mainly because of problems with the legal, institutional, and policy frameworks facilitating their implementation. For instance, the legal framework is imbued with inconsistencies, laxity in enforcement and numerous oversights. The findings indicate that the government has not really committed itself to the reforms. There are two main reasons for this. First, the government is sceptical of fully devolving decision-making powers to the local levels because of the fragmented nature of the polity along regional lines. Second, a sense of ownership of the reforms is lacking because they are donor-driven to a large extent. This means that political reforms are implemented primarily to be in terms with the foreign donors, which is imperative because Malawi depends almost entirely on donor aid for its development budget.

The findings of the study also show that, contrary to the initial expectation, there are no discernible differences between the LIAs and the non-LIAs. In both instances, the competitive spirit among various stakeholders has adversely affected the implementation of the decentralization policy reforms. Most stakeholders in this process (non-governmental organizations and donors) perceive each other not as partners but as competitors in their re-

spective endeavors. All of them would like to achieve a noticeable impact at a stroke in the communities they work in.

Even more critical is the fact that people at local level have only limited knowledge about the decentralization policy reforms, which are, ironically, justified and rationalized in their name. The people at this level lack understanding of what decentralization actually means, and of the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of different levels of government and citizens' entitlement to information. Poverty remains a widespread and deeply entrenched phenomenon. Thus life for a typical rural household is one desperate search for a job, resources to get children into school, getting proper medical care and means to meet a host of other needs.

Finally, the reforms have created a considerable imbalance within the local power structures. The reason for this is the grafting of the position of councilor onto what was essentially perceived as a stable power hierarchy. Councilors are in conflict with chiefs and Members of Parliament (MPs). The conflict between councilors and chiefs is largely a manifestation of the tension between traditional and democratic forms of leadership. Chiefs perceive councilors as an unnecessary intrusion into their sacred domain of power, influence, and authority. The conflict between councilors and MPs borders on rivalry for the latter's candidacy in subsequent general elections.

Therefore, the major conclusion of this study is that the efforts of implementing decentralization policy projects should be looked at as being political in their nature and not merely as technical initiatives. The introduction of institutional innovations for increasing popular

participation is in itself not sufficient to secure a process of public policy formation. It does not even automatically lead to an implementation that serves the needs of the disadvantaged sections of the population. This is particularly the case because any institutional realignment arising from reforms of this kind entails gains and losses, which often have significant political implications for the incumbent regimes. The role of local government cannot be entirely reduced to a mode of delivering service, and the process of decentralization cannot be treated as a technocratic process of governance reforms only. Reforms of this nature should thus be understood as inherently conflicting.

This study thus demonstrates that a newly decentralized administrative structure is never introduced in a power vacuum at local level, which means that decentralization policy reforms do not necessarily create a distinct layer of power but that they are instead assimilated within the prevailing local power structures and hierarchies. In this case, the reforms become a means for the actors to either strengthen or reestablish their positions of power often at the expense of social mobilization and poverty reduction at the local levels. Understanding the implications of decentralization policy reforms therefore requires a detailed understanding of the actors being created, supported, and empowered in the resulting political landscape and their relationship to both the central state and the local population. A balanced perspective concerning the impact of decentralization instead of either uncritically celebrating or writing off the reforms is thus necessary. ■

Blessings Chinsinga

The author did his PhD at ZEF.



Poverty remains a widespread phenomenon in West Africa.



Most losses and fatalities due to the tsunami occurred in the 100 m zone from the sea.



## More than a year after: The impacts of the tsunami in Sri Lanka

On 26 December 2004, the tsunami hit many coastal areas of Sri Lanka. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), at least one million people were directly affected, and about 550,000 people were displaced. A survey of households has been conducted to gain a better understanding of the various vulnerabilities of different social groups hit by the tsunami in Sri Lanka. The survey is part of a research project led by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) in Bonn in cooperation with the University of Colombo, the University of Ruhuna, Eastern University in Sri Lanka and the Center for Development Research (ZEF). The project is financially supported by the Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW) of the UN Secretariat for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) and UNU-EHS.

To be able to design appropriate prevention, assistance, recovery, and resettlement policies, it is necessary to have more detailed information on the impact of the tsunami. The question of why some households choose to return to high-hazard zones while others relocate in lower-hazard areas can only be answered if we know more about the current vulnerabilities of the different social groups and sectors within the coastal communities. Therefore, one of the issues this joint effort by UNU-EHS and ZEF has taken a closer look at is analyzing the determinants and effects of displacement at the household level.

The survey was conducted in September 2005, about eight months after the tsunami had occurred. It took place in selected districts of the cities of Galle, in the South of Sri Lanka, and Batticaloa, a city on the East coast in the Tamil area.

About 178 of the 500 households (35%) interviewed in Galle used to live within the 100 m perimeter of the shore. The other 321 households (65%) were located further away from the sea. Since people living within the 100 m zone were particularly negatively affected by the tsunami, the Government prohibited new development within this 100 m zone in the South and within a 200 m buffer zone in the East. Indeed, major losses and fatalities due to the tsunami had been observed in the 100 m zone from the sea. The questionnaire corroborated this fact. Asked about their opinion whether establishing a 100 m zone was appropriate, close to 80% of the respondents agreed it was. Interestingly, even the majority of households who mentioned fishing as a main source of income maintained that the establishment of a 100 m zone would be appropriate. About half of these households were living within and the other half outside the 100 m zone.

The household survey among 500 interviewees revealed that 13% of these households were currently living in temporary housings from where they were planning to move in the near future. Only 2% had found a new permanent residence. The majority of the households interviewed (85%), however, had returned to the place where they lived before the tsunami occurred. Almost 75% of the households were even still occupying the same houses as before the disaster, although quite a few households remarked that their houses had been severely damaged. However, of the 390 households that had returned to the tsunami-struck area, almost 11% indicated that they were planning to move to another area in the near future. Most of them intended to move to another city close by, and

another 22% said that they did not know what to do. A total of 207 households (41% of the full sample) intended to stay in the area.

With respect to physical injuries, about 83% of the households indicated that they had suffered only minor injuries or none at all, 8% of the respondents reported serious injuries and hospitalization, while close to 9% of the respondents had lost or were still missing family members. Regarding the income situation prior to and after the tsunami, almost 15% of the households indicated that they now had more income available in comparison to the situation before. Around 20% of the households had the same amount, and the remaining 65% had less income available. Remarkably, most of the households with a higher income were also those who had returned to the tsunami area, and only a few of them had decided to move away in the near future.

Further research is required to help to understand why people decide to stay despite the insecurity they face in disaster-prone areas. Clarity will be given on some interesting questions like whether the richer people are moving because they can afford to move while poor people will stay behind. Or will the richer households stay because they would have too much to give up? To what degree does land ownership determine the ability and the interest to relocate to other places of living? ■

By Jörn Birkmann, Ulrike Grote, Stefanie Engel, Juan Carlos de Villagran

Jörn Birkmann and Juan Carlos de Villagran coordinate the project at UNU-EHS. Ulrike Grote and Stefanie Engel are Senior Researchers at ZEF.

# Integrated land-use-change modeling to support land management decisions for the Central Coast of Vietnam

Change in land cover is one of the most profound human-induced alterations of the Earth's system. Land conversion for farming or other productive utility serves our well-being, but also causes changes in ecosystem functions and services on which we depend. In fact, environmental change often leads to environmental damages which are very difficult to reverse. Research on land-use change aims to support insightful management of land resources in order to avoid irreversible mistakes.

Simulation models of land-use change in space and time capture people's interactions with the land-use system to explore its future possible development. By mimicking the causal mechanisms and feedback loops of land-use changes, these models can be a learning tool in understanding the dynamics and driving forces of the land-use system and show how landholders' choices would affect the direction the future takes. Policy decisions on land use and management would thus be based on a proper balance between the ecosystem products and services in sustaining human livelihoods and protecting the environment. Thus, land-use change models can inform policy-setting and decision-making processes on the use and management of land resources.

However, modeling of land-use change involves addressing the complex nature of both its human drivers and natural constraints. Land-use change emerges from the interactions among various components of the coupled human-landscape system, which then feeds back to influence the subsequent development of those interactions. Changes in land allocation occur at the level of land plots by households, thus resulting from decisions



Changes in land allocation primarily occur at the household level.



The study was conducted in the Central Coast Area of Vietnam.

made by individual human actors situated in diverse socio-ecological conditions. Accumulations of these short-term changes over time and the sum of these localized changes generate emergent, larger-scale patterns of land-use changes and economic development. On the other hand, changes on the macro level such as infra-structural or policy interventions affect the behavior of the individuals that produce changes at micro level. These non-linear transformative processes cannot be adequately captured using conventional modeling approaches such as statistical models. Recent progress in the application of multi-agent systems in land-use change simulation models has led to a radical change in the modeling of landscape dynamics. In this agent-based approach, the coupled human-environment system is described as an internal structure with its interactive mechanisms in which autonomous agents play their specific roles. The agents thus represent separate loci of control in the system. In this decentralized system, available models of different social and ecological processes are incorporated into the object structure. These decentralized models capture the micro interactions and consequent landscape changes, providing a means to model complex land-use change processes that was not available up to now.

A spatially explicit multi-agent model has been developed at ZEF to simulate land-use change and the interrelated socio-economic dynamics on the community/catchment scale. The human community is represented by het-

erogeneous decision-making entities (actors or agents) that integrate household, environmental and policy information into land-use decisions. The natural landscape was modeled as landscape agents, i.e., land units that host natural processes and change their nature in response to local conditions exerting influence on each unit of land and its immediate neighborhood. Major ecological models, e.g. biomass productivity and vegetation succession models, have been integrated into the structure of the landscape agents. A multi-agent based protocol coordinates the flexible interactions among human and landscape agents, and monitors consequent land-use changes and the associated socio-economic changes. The model as it currently operates is used as a virtual computational laboratory and systematically generates land-use change scenarios and their associated socio-economic impacts resulting from land-use policy interventions. The model was applied in an upland watershed in Central Coast Vietnam, offering scenarios of land-use changes under different policy options regarding forest protection zoning, agrochemical subsidies and agricultural extension. The results have provided a scientific basis to evaluate the consequences of such policy interventions. Efforts to fine-tune the model structure and its validation in different geographical environments are underway. ■

Quang Bao Le and Paul L.G. Vlek

Quang Bao Le is a Senior Researcher and Paul Vlek a Director at ZEF.

## Who forms local institutions?

Levels of household participation in India's Joint Forest Management program

The past two decades have shown a worldwide trend towards participatory approaches in natural resource management. India has been at the forefront for more than a decade with its Joint Forest Management (JFM) program. A primary aim of participatory approaches like JFM lies in providing the most vulnerable segments of rural society with the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes on forest use and management. But who really attends the meetings where crucial decisions on formulation and enforcement of management rules are taken? And, more importantly, who can influence the decisions taken?

In a study funded by DAAD (the German Academic Exchange Service) and the Robert Bosch Foundation, ZEF examined who really participated in various levels of participatory management. Community and household surveys were conducted in 55 communities in the state of Andhra Pradesh. 463 households (82% of those interviewed) were found to have attended the most recent meeting on forest management plans. Among these, only around 41% had expressed their opinions in the meetings, and merely 18% felt that they had influenced the decisions taken.

An econometric study was conducted to analyze the factors driving participation. The most striking finding is that community elites continue to dominate actual decision-making processes. The results indicate that richer and more educated people in the community are still significantly more likely to influence the decisions to be taken. The same holds for male-headed households and households belonging to larger caste groups. Moreover, it was found that where the Forest Department's attitude (FD) is dominant,

households tend to feel left out from the decision-making process regardless of their socioeconomic characteristics.

The dominance of richer and more educated segments of the community in the decision-making process is apparent, although JFM has been relatively successful in achieving formal representation of marginalized groups in executive committees and in encouraging the attendance of meetings. Results indicate that being land-poor, from a lower caste or female-headed increases the likelihood of a household being selected into the executive forest management committee (MC). Education is, however, positively correlated with MC membership.

The expected ability of a household to influence decision-making is a crucial determinant of the household's decision on whether to attend the meeting. In this sense, the above results imply that poorer and less educated households are discouraged from attending. This is offset, however, by the fact that marginalized households have more of a stake in the forest and less outside options. A dominant attitude of the FD also discourages meeting attendance directly as it reduces households' expected benefits from JFM.

The results imply that achieving true participation in the context of traditional hierarchies and elite capture is a difficult task. The positive effect of education on the ability to influence decisions points to strong synergies between general policies aimed at improving access to education for poor and marginalized groups and assuring true participation of these groups in programs like JFM. ■ Bhagirath Behera and Stefanie Engel

Bhagirath Behera is a Junior Researcher, Stefanie Engel a Senior Researcher at ZEF.



Female-headed households are often selected into executive forest management committees.

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## Viewpoint

### “Environment is at the center of fighting poverty”

Interview with Prof. Dr. Klaus Toepfer, former Chair of ZEF's International Advisory Board, on the occasion of his speech on “Land Degradation and the UN Millennium Development Goals” held in Bonn on October 8 2005.

**Mr. Toepfer, are we on track and, especially, on the right track to achieve our global targets set by the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)?**

A global look at the forecasts for the world's population's growth, the development of the Gross Domestic Product and the Gross National Income of individual regions shows us that we are lagging far behind the goals and targets set by the UN Development Summit in 2000 as its eight MDGs.

**What are the main obstacles to achieving the MDGs in your opinion?**

Besides the question of funding, there are commonly less known issues that urgently need to be tackled if we want to achieve the MDGs. These are human capital, the globally changing pattern of consumption and production as well as the role of ecosystem services.

One growing problem is the brain drain from developing countries to the developed world. The number of students from developing countries not returning to their home countries after completing their studies in industrialized states is growing at an alarming rate. Therefore, investing in building human capacity and giving incentives to keep people in the developing world is of major importance to realizing the MDGs and to sustainable global development.

Changing patterns of consumption and production, especially those caused by the rapidly growing Asian economies of India and China, pose another challenge to a globally equal and sustainable development.

The role and the value of ecosystem services are still underestimated and most of its goods and services have little or no market value despite their importance in the economic lives of communities, nations, and the globe.

**But isn't it necessary to demonstrate the economic value of ecosystem services to actually convince policy and decision makers of their importance?**

Well, recent research indicates that investing in nature can provide an excellent rate of return and help to meet the internationally agreed development goals.

Such economic arguments are also underscored in the recently published Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and its spin-off reports. Compiled by 1,300 scientists and experts from 95 countries, it has begun to put numbers on the value of individual ecosystems and the services they provide. According to the assessment, some 60% of the planet's ecosystem services are currently being degraded by human activities.

**If the environment and its ecosystem services are such crucial factors, why don't they play a more important role in the public debate on development?**

One of the interim reports of the UN Millennium Project, requested by the Secretary-General to inform the September review in New York in 2005, states: “A considerable body of scientific data points to environmental degradation – the erosion of genetic diversity, the loss of species, the degradation of ecosystems, and the decline of ecosystem services – as a direct cause of many of the most pressing issues we face today including poverty, declining human health, hunger, undrinkable water, emerging diseases, rural-urban migration and civil strife.”

Also, pro-poor growth strategies begin with investing in environment and natural capital, since one of the primary aims is to see how pro-poor markets can be created that generate income for those in desperate need while conserving the life support systems upon which they and the rest of the world depend. Anything less will undermine our attempts to defeat poverty and deliver sustainable development and will short-change current and future generations.

**Although soil degradation is one of the most alarming current environmental developments and challenges, it hardly seems to**

**be taken notice of by others except by scientists. Why is this and how can we raise awareness of this issue?**

Yes, soil does seem to be one of the most neglected natural resources, and its quality is one of the “forgotten topics” in the debate on sustainable development. Its environmental service function isn't even mentioned explicitly in the MDGs. Nevertheless, soil resources are being directly endangered by the impact of human activities such as urbanization and industrialization, causing degradation and erosion. Soils with rainforests are particularly threatened.

But just how important our natural capital and soil can be is demonstrated with the example of the tropical mangroves, constituting a kind of coastal defense against the tsunami floods in December 2004. It appeared that the regions with mangroves were less damaged.

Thus, nature's capital should be right up with human and financial capital. In the end, significant targeted investments in ecosystems services and nature's capital including the restoration and rehabilitation of damaged and degraded wetlands, forests, mangroves, coral reefs and the like will give us return and will go a long way towards meeting the eight Goals.

**So, what are your main recommendations for scientists and policy makers?**

The big challenge for the current policy and decision makers is to not only implement the individual UN Conventions such as the ones on Biodiversity and Desertification, but also to interlink the issues they deal with. Therefore, intensive cooperation between science and political decision-making is necessary. Such cooperation is being implemented by research institutes, such as in the projects of ZEF. Ultimately, the common goal is to contribute to the poverty reduction strategies. ■

The interview was conducted by Alma van der Veen.

## Politics of local networks in Afghan provinces

In cooperation with the Institute for Development and Peace (INEP) and funded by the German Foundation for Peace Research, ZEF is conducting a project on "State Failure and Local Governance in Afghanistan and Somaliland/Somalia" in which a joint research team is analyzing processes of political transformation and consolidation at local level.

Politics in Afghanistan are strongly influenced by informal networks that have an impact on state and non-state structures. It is a major objective of the field research within the project to learn more about networks and interrelations between decision makers in the local arena. Institutional constraints that shape the behavior of these key actors are to be examined as well. The most important political players were identified by interviews with the local population.

Field research in Afghanistan concentrating on the provinces of Paktia and Kunduz was carried out in autumn 2005. Whereas Paktia's population, consisting mainly of Pashtuns, can broadly be considered as ethnically homogeneous, the Kunduz province is characterized by ethnic heterogeneity. The presence of "warlords" is a further distinctive feature. While there is no such power factor in Paktia, warlords do play a crucial role in the politics in Kunduz. Initial results of research in the lat-

ter province are sketched in the following. The perception of influential people in the Kunduz province is locally oriented and delineated along district boundaries. There seems to be no acknowledged leader for the whole province as no trans-district key person was referred to in the interviews. However, an additional mapping of networks among warlords in the region has shown that persons exerting influence beyond district boundaries do exist. Moreover, many of the (ex-) commanders with an impact on politics in single villages are closely connected or have client relations to the small number of figures of trans-district relevance. These actors will either form alliances or they will compete, which can escalate in violent conflicts. Another area of research interest is local institutions and the rules of the game in society, both of which shape governance structures at local level. This approach explicitly encompasses formal as well as informal institutions. Yet in Afghanistan, this distinction is impractical, since state institutions are barely existent in rural areas. For this reason, people apply traditionally legitimated mechanisms of con-



Politics in Afghanistan are strongly influenced by informal networks.

flict regulation in everyday life. Initial results of the study have revealed large local differences in small territories, expressing themselves in recourse on different legal systems, but also in the selection of village chiefs and their levels of influence. ■

The members of the project team are Conrad Schetter and Ulf Terlinden (ZEF), and Tobias Debiel and Rainer Glassner (INEP).

### At a glance

■ ■ ■ ZEF successfully concluded its 7th Advisory Board meeting on October 7 and 8 2005. The Board expressed a vote of thanks to two departing Board members, Prof. M.S. Swaminathan and Prof. K. Toepfer, who both have had a great and positive impact on ZEF over the past seven years. The Board also welcomed two new members, the new Chair Prof. H. van Ginkel, Under-Secretary General of the UN and Rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan, and Prof. G. Schlee, Director at the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany.

■ ■ ■ Prof. Dr. Paul Vlek, Director at ZEF, was reappointed by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as a member of its National Committee on Global Change Research (NKGCF), which was founded in 1996. Prof. Vlek was also appointed by Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul, Minister for Development Cooperation, as a new member of the Scientific Advisory Council of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) for a period of six years.

■ ■ ■ ZEF Doctoral Student Edilegnaw Wale from Ethiopia won this year's prize of the Friends of ZEF for the best doctoral thesis. Dr. Wale wrote his thesis on "The Economics of On-Farm Conservation of Crop Diversity in Ethiopia: Incentives, attribute preferences and opportunity costs of maintaining local varieties of crops".

■ ■ ■ Bhagirath Behera was awarded the prestigious 2006 "Global Development Medal for Outstanding Research on Development" on January 20 2006 in St. Petersburg, Russia. The Global Development Awards Competition is the world's largest international development research competition with nearly 700 submissions from about 100 countries. Bhagirath Behera received the second prize of USD 4,000 in the category "Institutions and Poverty Reduction" for his doctoral thesis entitled "Determinants of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources: The case of Joint Forest Management in India": With two winners already, Bhagirath Behera in 2006 and Adama Koneiga in 2005, and three nominations during the last few years, ZEF has become one of the most successful development institutions in this annual competition run by the Global Development Learning Network of the World Bank.

## Launching the European DesertNet – a Europe-wide competence network dealing with desertification

The world's drylands are home to about one million people, many of them living on the brink of survival. They often have to exploit the already scarce natural resources. This causes further degrading in the shape of desertification. Therefore, application-oriented research has the mandate to assist the dryland's poor taking care of the natural resources in a way that preserves these highly vulnerable ecosystems for the generations to come. The German Desert\*Net was founded in 2000 as a competence network of German scientific institutions that deal with all facets of research on desertification, land degradation, its reversal, and its control. The network - of which ZEF has been a member institute since its inception - has been quite successful in uniting the German institutions, organizing annual conferences, raising public awareness through activities, and providing scientific and logistic support for the UN Secretariat for Combating Desertification (UNCCD). The latter is located in Bonn, Germany.



2006 is the UN year of Desertification.

In 2005, Desert\*Net started an initiative to create a European DesertNet in order to integrate with similar networks and forces in other European countries. It aims especially at strengthening and uniting the desertification-oriented scientific community in the newly emerging European Research Area.

The initiative for a European DesertNet was launched officially at a meeting held at ZEF in May 2005, when representatives of the French Comité Scientifique Français de la Désertification (CSFD) and the Belgian Committee of Experts met with the speakers of the German Desert\*Net and signed a "Declaration for a European Network for Research on Desertification". This declaration calls for strengthening European research capacities in order to promote scientific cooperation, for



Application-oriented research has the mandate to assist the poor in taking care of their natural resources.

establishing linkages with research partners inside and outside of Europe, and for stimulating the application of research findings in the drylands through participatory processes, involving civil society. The network also strives to establish a mechanism for effective and successful policy advice and for raising public awareness. Furthermore, it aims to identify and analyze the pressing problems of drought, land degradation, and poverty, and intends to review state-of-the-art of European desertification-oriented scientific knowledge, identify success stories and best practices resulting from scientific research as well as existing gaps, and develop innovative basic research. The ultimate aim is to develop application- and stakeholder-oriented research and make it applicable in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas. This can be achieved much better in a transnational network. In September 2005, the Declaration of the European DesertNet was opened for signature. The initiative was presented during a side event held at the UNC-

CD Conference of the Parties (COP 7) that took place in Nairobi in October 2005. So far, 47 research institutes and 76 scientists from Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Spain, and Switzerland have signed the Declaration. The establishment of the European DesertNet is supported by the UNCCD and UNESCO. Members of the European DesertNet are preparing the network's first workshop which is due to take place in 2006, the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD).

The full declaration can be found at [http://www.desertnet.de/european\\_dn.htm](http://www.desertnet.de/european_dn.htm). The European DesertNet is open to all interested scientists. It can be contacted via its secretariat, at [board@desertnet.de](mailto:board@desertnet.de). If you are interested, join the European DesertNet now! ■

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