



Review of Drylands Coordination Group

Organisational Review
Drylands Coordination Group (DCG)

Norad
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

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Organisational Review of Drylands Coordination Group (NCG)

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NORDIC CONSULTING GROUP **NCG**
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ACRONYMS

CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
DCG	Drylands Coordination Group
DF	The Development Fund
FAO	UN Food and Agricultural Organisation
GoN	Government of Norway
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

SUMMARY

The Drylands Coordination Group (DCG) is an NGO-driven network 100% funded by the Government of Norway through Norad's budget allocation for NGOs, as well as through Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). DCG is an initiative coming out of the former Sahel-Sudan-Ethiopia Programme (SSE-Programme). The Norwegian NGOs involved are ADRA Norway (ADRA), Care Norway (Care), the Development Fund (DF), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). Noragric has entered into a 3-years agreement with DCG, providing technical support to both DCG Norway and the national DCGs. The network operates in Mali, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan and national coordinators function as the secretariats for its member organisations. The annual contribution from Norad for 2006 is NOK 5,8 mill.

The overall goal of the network is to contribute to improved food security for vulnerable households and communities in the drylands of Africa, with focus on capacity building through exchange of practical experience and appropriate knowledge through action research, policy studies, advocacy and policy work. In addition, DCG's work is targeted towards The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The Review takes place at a stage where the new strategy for 2007-2011, developed through a participatory approach starting in 2005, is in process of being adopted by the various members throughout the network. The strategy process has so to some extent been a test for the network's capacity and competence in acting as a coordinated network. Moreover, the implementation of the new strategy will be a test on the network's institutional capacity at all levels.

Measuring results through interviews and document review is challenging, due to the timeframe for the Review. However, with reference to the ToR, the Consultant has put an emphasis on developing a base for a more in-depth review in the four countries involved within a year.

The DCG networks at country level work under different framework conditions as political, socio-economic and institutional conditions differ in the four countries. The framework conditions limit but also open up for the implementation of the DCG programme and projects. It seems that DCG Ethiopia is the most successful when it comes to results and achievements, as far it is possible to measure outcomes and impact. The task given to DF to act as a strategic partner and NGO chef de file for the Norwegian Embassy in Addis Ababa in the following up and implementation of the UNCCD will give DCG Ethiopia new experiences which probably will benefit the DCG network. DCG Ethiopia and DCG Mali are considered as the most efficient secretariats in coordinating activities and in terms of framework conditions. Eritrea is affected by the no-war-no-peace situation, but DCG Eritrea is still able to maintain the network. Sudan is in a post-conflict situation, after signing the Peace Accord in 2005. The ongoing reconstruction in building sustainable national government institutions and civil society is challenging. The capacity to absorb donor-initiated interventions is challenging. This requires patience from the partners and obviously, the process of mainstreaming initiatives such as DCG takes time.

The major conclusions are positive in terms of the network's relevance and how the network is administered and coordinated by DCG Norway. The institutional capacity has been strengthened during the strategy process. It is the Consultant's opinion that it is premature to come up with recommendations on changes in the present network model. However, it has

been identified that there are needs to improve the capacity and competence building at national levels, and also to improve the practical implementation of research results. Strengthening of DCG's competence in designing action research projects is also required. DCG coordinators at national level have expressed that more resources from the Norwegian member NGOs would have benefited the processes in which they are involved. Based on this finding, the conclusion is that the use of the network's resources within the present model can be more optimal for reaching the objectives of the network. The Norwegian members should discuss how they could improve and strengthen the contributions in order to meet the needs of national DCG members. This could be done by a stronger involvement by the Norwegian NGOs in the respective countries where closer links between DCG activities and the NGOs' country programmes could be established.

To secure financial sustainability DCG should explore how the network could operate on a more commercial basis as the professional profile is improving. As a partner and actor vis-à-vis national authorities, DCG provides expertise required in building up necessary competence in the government and private sectors. DCG could look into how the network could take advantage of its professional capacity and operate as consultants for private and governmental institutions.

Communication and sharing of information meet some logistical problems, but the network's capacity in doing this has improved. There are various examples where activities have been successful and thus replicated. Examples are the Ecofarm concept, being innovated in Mali and in process of being replicated in Ethiopia and Sudan. Relating to advocacy and policy work, there are also examples of cases where DCG can document influence on national policies related to food security and natural resource management. Improvement of the population's awareness of drylands issues is considered as taking place.

Noragric's contribution towards the network is regarded as a fundamental part of DCG's activities. However, Noragric should within the present agreement, be used more strategically by DCG members. In addition, Noragric should be more proactive to optimise the utilisation of the expertise and competence available. The drylands areas dealt with are conflict ridden and require competence on thematic conflict issues. To complement the work provided by Noragric, DCG should actively seek cooperation with research institutions working within political and social sciences related to conflict and conflict mitigation, institutions preferably based in the drylands region, but Norwegian and international research groups could also be consulted.

Geographical expansion of DCG is an issue brought up by DCG members. To strengthen the links to research institutions, some DCG members have suggested inclusion of Kenya, since international and regional institutions working on drylands issues are based in Nairobi. DCG Mali, as the only French-speaking member of DCG, has a language problem in fully utilising the network's competence. Inclusion of member organisations from Niger, cooperating with Norwegian DCG members, has been suggested, in order to improve the contributions for French-speaking areas. Geographical expansion to Kenya and Mali requires further considerations by the partners involved and should be discussed when the new strategy has been fully incorporated and implemented during the ongoing annual cycle.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Review of the Drylands Coordination Group (DCG) takes place after 9 years in operation. DCG is an initiative coming out of the former Sahel-Sudan-Ethiopia Programme (SSE-Programme)¹. The present network is an NGO-driven forum with a decentralised and participatory approach. It is also a multi-stakeholder forum and facilitates research activities targeting both policy formulation and development interventions at household and community level. The network operates in Mali, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan and national coordinators function as the secretariats and focal points for its member organisations. Both NGOs, research and governmental organisations are members in the network. Due to different national framework conditions in which DCG operates, the counterparts in the 4 countries differ in many aspects that will be looked into.

DCG has become increasingly decentralised and advocacy, lobbying, sharing of information, capacity and competence building within the network are key activities in the network. DCG's overall goal is to contribute to improved food security for vulnerable households and communities in the drylands of Africa through policy work and research interventions.

DCG is established as a network and its platform of action is the drylands issues and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).² DCG is the only Norwegian network working on the UNCCD and represents a unique initiative 100% funded by the Government of Norway (GoN) through Norad and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

The purpose of the Review is to assess the institutional capacity of DCG Norway to contribute to attaining the objectives of the DCG network. Further, the ToR requests an assessment of whether the present model of organisation provides the best possible environment to fully mobilise the potentials of the members with regard to engagement in drylands development. The Review will provide recommendations on possible changes in the operations and institutional structure of DCG Norway and the network as such. The network's strategic framework (DCG Strategy 2007-2011) was developed through a participatory approach (Strategic Framework 2007-2011). The strategy process included a seminar in Khartoum in April 2006 with participation from all national coordinators, as well as members of all the DCG boards and Noragric.

The DCG Board in Norway consists of representatives from the 5 Norwegian member organisations, which are ADRA Norway, Care Norway, the Development Fund (DF), Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). Noragric, Department for International Environment and Development Studies at the University of Life Sciences (UMB), provides technical support to both DCG Norway and the national DCGs, a

¹ The SSE-Programme was initiated in 1985 as a mechanism for channelling Norwegian assistance to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa affected by severe drought, poverty and land degradation. The SSE programme was evaluated in 1992, and led to change in the network model. (Evaluation Report 2.92, Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

² The focus for this Review is not including an assessment of the international process under the UNCCD, but it should be mentioned that critical voices are addressing the work done by the UNCCD's Secretariat. See for instance Toulmin, Camilla, IIED (2006): *If you want to get a job done, you need the right tools – Next steps for the UN Convention to Combat Desertification*.

cooperation that is regulated through a 3 years contract.

The Review of DCG takes place at a stage where the new strategy still is in process of being adopted by the different secretariats and member organisations at country level.

2 APPROACH

2.1 The Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference (ToR) requests a Review of the overall institutional capacity of DCG Norway in contributing towards the objectives of the DCG network. This includes an assessment of DCG Norway's ability to provide technical support to the member organisations, its ability to secure the quality of the analytical work carried out by consultants and the relevance of the information generated. It is requested an assessment of how the work programme reflects the interest and need of the DCG members and the members' possible influence on the programme formulation process. Whether some member organisations' involvement are more productive than others, is also an issue to be investigated. The TOR includes in summary an assessment of the network's ways of working, which implies a focus on the processes through which something is done (approach), rather than just on the output or outcome. See the attached ToR, Annex I. Questions raised are:

- Whether the present model of organisation/network provides the best possible environment to fully mobilise the potentials of the members' engagement in drylands development
- The interest and possibilities of the member organisations to engage themselves more directly in food security in drylands as opposed to delegating the subject to a secretariat
- The impact of DCG's activities for sharing practical experience both between the member organisations in Norway, between Norway and Africa and with research and policy making institutions internationally (based on self assessment)
- Flow of information between the Norwegian members regarding information generated in the programme as well as general knowledge about drylands development
- Flow of information generated in the programme between the members in the four partner countries as well as between the countries and to other international agencies dealing within drylands development.

In addition the Review will include information about how the partners consider the benefit of research, and identify opportunities to promote application of findings and experiences made.

2.2 Methodology

In addition to review the key documents such as the annual applications, annual reports, evaluation reports and several strategy documents, some research reports have also been looked into.

Altogether, 33 respondents have been interviewed. The respondents include the present and former DCG Norway Coordinators, the DCG Information Officer, the DCG Board Members in Norway, the heads of the Norwegian member NGOs' international departments, some selected programme coordinators, DCG national Coordinators, some selected national board members, and the Chair of the national board in the four member countries (interviewed on telephone). The 5 members of the Noragric research group have been consulted through a

joint meeting, telephone interviews and written inputs.

The Review of DCG is carried out in a two weeks period from November 30 to December 15 2006, which limits the review process and represents some limitations of the data analysis in relation to the questions raised in the ToR. The document review has given interesting background information and insight into how the network operates. The interviews with key persons in the DCG network provided views, ideas and fruitful discussions for the analysis of the various aspects questioned in the ToR. However, it has not been possible within the timeframe to provide a quality assurance of the interview data collected. The content of the respondents' considerations on how the DCG network functions and the various aspects questioned are limited to their own subjective views.

The national DCG coordinators have to some degree complemented the Norwegian member organisations and the Coordinator/the secretariat of DCG Norway. The questions raised in the ToR will require checking of the findings against other respondents at national level as well as field observations.

Taking this into account, the Review opened up for a situational analysis of the network at a time when the new DCG strategy is in process of being internalised and implemented by its members. It is probably too early to identify possible challenges arising in the implementation of the new strategic approach. The Review is therefore more a barometer for the current status of the network after a strategy process that required dedication and participation by all its members.

It is questioned whether the present model of organisation provides the best possible environment to fully mobilise the potentials of the members with regard to engagement in drylands development. The timeframe for the Review has put some constraints on what has been possible to conclude in this matter. An assessment of the model including clear recommendations on possible changes acceptable for the DCG network and its member organisations at national level requires additional studies at field level. The methodological constraint poses limitations on the Review's conclusions and recommendations. Another aspect of importance is that the network is in the process of incorporating and implementing the new strategy. It is believed that it is too early to consider how the new approach will have implications for the network model. Therefore, as requested in the ToR, an extended review, but at a later stage, is recommended.

3 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

DCG's newly developed strategic framework (DCG Strategy 2007-2011) defines values and working principles, target groups, goal, objectives, thematic focus and approaches. DCG's overall goal is to contribute to improved food security for vulnerable households and communities in the drylands of Africa.

DCG's Objectives and Approaches:

Strategic Objectives	Address core challenges related to the increased pressure on natural resources which leads to food insecurity in the drylands; Contribute to strengthening access to natural resources for vulnerable households	<u>Approaches</u> Action Research Policy Studies Advocacy and Policy Work Capacity Building	<u>Actors</u> DCG Norway DCG Coordinator DCG Country Level Noragric DCG Network
Organisational /Operational Objectives	Enhance the capacity and competence of member organisations, networks and other stakeholders to address the challenges related to increased pressure on natural resources in the drylands.		

DCG Norway through the Secretariat and the Board, is supposed to be responsible for delivering the necessary input to its members in attaining the objectives of the network by facilitating its members' ability to provide technical support, share of information (capacity building), ensure involvement in processes such as advocacy, lobbying and policy work, and initiate action research and policy studies. The Norwegian member organisations are expected to ensure *synergy* into the network. The individual Norwegian NGO is expected to achieve better results through the participation in the network as compared to implementing similar activities on an individual base outside the network. In measuring the institutional capacity of the DCG network one has to look into the network activities, deliveries and see if the achievements are in line with the objectives defined.

The Strategy Process. During the last year DCG has been through a strategy process involving all coordinators and member organisations, as well as Noragric. The elaboration of a new strategy was initiated by DCG Norway as a response to the recognition that there was a need to put in place a more explicit joint policy oriented platform for all member organisations throughout the DCG network. The strategy process initiated in Norway in June 2005 included a workshop in Khartoum, April 2006, bringing all coordinators together for a week, including the DCG Norway Coordinator, the Chair of the Board of DCG Norway, one researcher from Noragric and representatives from the 4 national and the Norwegian DCG Boards. The strategy was developed in a participatory process, discussing the network's basic

values, terminology and approaches. ³ The outcome of the process has been a more clear definition of what the DCG is, a joint platform, explicit objectives, and a more specified “plan of action” through the defined approaches.

The DCG’s approach is also targeted national policies and plans relating to poverty reduction, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and crosscutting issues such as gender. ⁴

In short, the major changes from the previous strategy relating to DCG’s global objective have been the new emphasis on the “increased pressure” on natural resources as well as addressing causes and consequences of increased pressure in the drylands. The new strategy also implies a move from focusing on natural resource management to focusing on food security, and also a change from “knowledge dissemination” towards “knowledge management approach”. The research approach is moving from “applied research” to “action research”. DCG has also expressed that they would strengthen the network’s *visibility* through its *results*.

In general, the strategy process itself seems to have strengthened the network as an institution, and also strengthened the institutional capacity of the network. The strategy process has likely increased the partners’ ownership of the network and also provided competence building.

3.1 Ethiopia

DCG’s activities in Ethiopia are regarded as successful in terms of involvement and professional capacity. Some respondents point to the prevalence of relatively high level of education and well functioning academic institutions. The civil society and NGOs are well educated in the fields of food security, natural resource management and policy work related to UNCCD. The member organisations are familiar with international donor cooperation and international stakeholders. The framework conditions for successful results of DCG are therefore relatively optimal in Ethiopia. The DCG partners in Ethiopia are consisting of NGOs, governmental and research institutions. The Norwegian DCG members, except Care Norway, are working in Ethiopia, which provide a strong base for the network’s institutional strength. One aspect brought up is the many tasks the DCG Coordinator and board members are involved in. The persons involved have to cover a variety of tasks in the member organisations they represent. The secretariat is equipped with professional competence, but its capacity is currently stretched. Improved efforts to apply research were among the identified challenges for DCG Ethiopia.

The Norwegian Embassy has requested DCG to act as a strategic partner in the following up and implementation of the UNCCD as the Norwegian Embassy is having the task as *chef de file* for the implementation of the Convention in Ethiopia. On behalf of DCG, DF is requested

³ The process included the following steps: stakeholder analysis (board of DCG Norway), SWOT analysis (Board in Norway, Noragric and all national coordinators); national strategic discussion at national levels in all 4 countries (facilitated by DCG Norway/Noragric) and written feedback on strategic questions prepared to Norwegian member organisations. The process included a workshop in Khartoum in April 2006, continued beyond this meeting, and was finalised when all participants had accepted the final draft of the strategy.

⁴ It would have been interesting to look into DCG’s gender approach in a separate review, since it has not been time available for dealing with gender analysis in this Review.

to work as NGO chef de file. This partnership is in the process of being formalised and the DF is establishing an office in Addis Ababa. The request from Norwegian authorities is indicating that DF, as part of DCG, is regarded as a competent organisation well equipped to do work not only limited to national NGOs and research institutions, but viewed as a professional international advocacy group. A kind of synergy for the DCG system would be expected, although becoming a separate job and function for the DF.

Ethiopian members describe the DCG as successful, but suggest that the network should be extended to include more inputs from the Norwegian NGOs and more Norwegian funds. The 5th of December 2006, DCG Ethiopia had an expansion workshop, indicating that seen from the coordinator's level the network has capacity to expand. It is believed by the Ethiopians that through increased members, DCG would possibly make an even stronger impact, strengthen the institutional capacity, and also function as a model for the other DCG member countries. Geographical expansion inside Ethiopia was also brought up as a need in order to extend the network's activities into areas dominated by pastoralists as an important but marginal segment of the Ethiopian society.⁵

3.2 Eritrea

The DCG programme in Eritrea has been seriously affected by the present no-war-no-peace situation. The new coordinator for DCG Eritrea left the country after a short period in function and presently the coordinator role is taken care of by the board chair (who is the former DCG coordinator), but without any remuneration. In spite of the difficult situation, DCG as a forum can still function as a network. According to the respondents DCG Eritrea has potentials as a network in contributing to awareness raising and capacity building through the cooperation with research institutions, civil society and NGOs. The work programme for 2007 will possibly be implemented and the members will function in their capacities and continue the activities already initiated.

The DCG Eritrea proposes to use 2007 as a year for reconstitution and re-evaluation of its activities. It will aim to strengthen its profile as well as network in line with the new strategy to improve its outreach. DCG Eritrea has 7 members and of the Norwegian organizations in the country only NCA is left.⁶ DF and NPA are not officially registered in the country and are therefore no longer represented in the DCG Eritrea membership. In addition to NCA, the DCG member organisations are Eritrea National Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) represented by the Research Department and Focal Point for CCD, MoA Northern Red Sea Zone and MoA Gash Barka Region, the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW), University of Asmara and Association of Eritreans in Agricultural Sciences (AEAS). The College of Agriculture of the University of Asmara, which was a member, has been relocated to another new college: the Hamelmalo College of Agriculture. Due to the strong institutional presence of the AEAS DCG has an important role to play, and is seen as a useful forum for its participants under the present circumstances, according to the DCG Eritrea respondents.

⁵ The decentralisation process initiated by the Ethiopian government could have been addressed here, but it is outside the Review's focus.

⁶ Care Norway is also present, but has so far not been partner in DCG Eritrea.

It is obvious that DCG Eritrea has an important role to play under the present circumstances, as the civil society is confronted severe regulations. DCG Eritrea has to balance its approach and try to implement the planned activities. The network's further achievements will depend on the political situation in Eritrea.

3.3 Mali

The DCG members in Norway regard DCG Mali as relatively well functioning at a general level and in terms of running the network at the national coordinator's level. This is documented in reports and in the interviews with the various DCG representatives and network members. The civil society in Mali is relatively open and among the 29 member organisations, there are governmental and research institutions.

The Coordinator in Mali is satisfied with the new strategy, and in the long run it is expected that DCG will become more influential, also on policy formulation. According to the national coordinator all member organisations have a positive attitude to the new strategy, and estimates that the adaptation process to the new strategic framework will take one to two years. The coordinator assessed the communication between DCG Mali and DCG Norway as good. All respondents relating to DCG Mali mention language as a problem since Mali is the only French speaking member country, as the majority of documents are in English and capacity and resources for translation are limited.

Regarding results of DCG's work in Mali, the former coordinator of DCG Mali was of the opinion that the contribution at national level so far was more precise knowledge and awareness of drylands issues among the targeted population. A major challenge seen from DCG Mali is to strengthen the influence at national policy level and on decision-making processes. It was explained that being a forum and not a legal entity, caused a problem. It was recommended that in order to increase DCG's influence, one of the member organisations should act as a legal entity on behalf of the network and raise individual thematic issues confronting government authorities.⁷ However, another DCG Mali representative expressed the opposite view. It is also the Consultant's opinion that the possible influence on national policy level is larger for the network than compared to what would be possible for individual NGOs.

The research activities are considered as useful and regarded as a fundamental and integrated part of the network's activities. DCG Mali, Noragric and the Norwegian NGOs have mentioned examples on successful implementation at farm level. One example is the Ecofarm concept, which also is in process of being implemented in Ethiopia.

According to respondents, DCG Mali has the capacity to analyse and evaluate the input from consultants. To improve the research activities, more long term planning should be facilitated, which also would require more long term financing. However, according to DCG Norway, DCG Mali has a problem in incorporating the new strategy when it comes to initiation of policy and advocacy related projects.

The annual planning procedures and formulation of activities are involving all members. The

⁷ It has not been time to elaborate this issue with the respondent, but according to the interview, legal entities are expected to have more influence than a network, which by definition is not a legal entity.

increased focus on food security has been adopted by the members and is integrated in the annual programme, according to the DCG Mali respondents. One concern in DCG Mali

the need for more technical support within food security and drylands issues provided through the network. It was expressed that especially the Norwegian NGO members should provide more input, without going deeply into how this could be facilitated.

DCG respondents described the sharing of information at workshops and regular meetings where research results are being discussed and explained, as well functioning. Following up with civil society and farmer communities takes place, but application of research results through extension services requires technical capacity, financial resources, is time consuming and requires patience, according to respondents. However, building up competence and use of innovative technologies among the end users were expressed as ambitions that to a larger extent than earlier would be a target for DCG.

Some respondents have argued that an expansion of DCG Mali to include member organisations in Niger would be an advantage, both for the French-speaking organisations and for the Norwegian NGOs involved. Whether this would improve the French-speaking network members' capacity has not been significantly discussed, but would require a thorough discussion within DCG. Importantly, geographical expansion was not brought up as an issue during the workshop in Khartoum, where key aspects of the network were analysed. The Consultant is also of the opinion that geographical expansion to Niger is premature. Presently DCG will have to mobilise its resources towards the implementation of the new strategy. When this initiating process is consolidated, inclusion of other French-speaking members could be reconsidered.

The analysis of the interviews and documents lead to a conclusion that DCG Mali is substantially contributing to the DCG network both in terms of innovative research on food security and drylands interventions, dissemination of knowledge, capacity building and awareness raising. Links with civil society and authorities are made, and in spite of the identified language problem, communication is improving. The challenge ahead is addressed the incorporation of the new strategy and the need for more technical support in designing action research concepts.

3.4 Sudan

The Sudanese context differs much compared to the other countries in respect to political and institutional framework conditions. After the Peace Agreement in 2005, the rehabilitation of the country has started and a shift from emergency approach towards development interventions is taking place. The establishment of a separate DCG in Sudan took place in 2004 after being a part of DCG Ethiopia for some years. The member organisations are from South Sudan and North Sudan and the secretariat is based in Khartoum. The members are ADRA Sudan, ADRA South Sudan, Care North Sudan, NCA South Sudan, NCA Sudan and NPA South Sudan.

DCG Sudan is quite new in the sense that it takes time to build up the national coordination unit for DCG as well as mobilising member organisations to work on drylands issues. As pointed to by some of the respondents it is difficult to mobilise the network due to the North Sudan's limited experiences in cooperating with international western donors, compared to the South where international NGOs have been present during the civil war. It has been expressed that building capacity takes time, and that it is difficult to provide necessary

competence into the planning and application process, underlining that national and international expertise is expensive due to the high demand for qualified and educated people. However, it has been emphasised that in a long-term perspective, it will be possible to achieve more visible results of DCG activities.

At national level, one identified ambition for the network is to act as a partner for the authorities in building up national institutions working on drylands issues and implement the National Action Programme for the implementation of UNCCD. Workshops targeted government officials in Ministry of Agriculture and parliamentarians have contributed towards increased awareness on drylands issues and UNCCD, according to the Sudanese respondents.

The DCG Coordinator in Sudan mentioned technical problems with communication and information as a major constraint for the network. This included problems with sharing information within the network, but also in communication within DCG Sudan and with other external partners. However, seen from DCG Sudan, competence building, training and training of trainers were seen as the most important areas for improvements. The geographical area included in the network is huge and poses a challenge for the members to arrange joint meetings, as means of transport are relatively poor. At present stage, the national coordinator mentioned that DCG Sudan's long-term ambition is to cover members from a larger geographical area, with reference to the ongoing conflict in Darfur.

Sudan is in a post-conflict process building up all basic infrastructure as well as basic social institutions. In addition to build up competence and capacity on food security and drylands issues, DCG Sudan could be seen as a means to improve the cooperation between civil society actors involving members from both South and North Sudan in a reconciliation process as well as improving the linkages between the civil society and national authorities. The DCG Sudan's institutional capacity is being built up in a vulnerable environment in which DCG's achievements will depend on a continuing successful reconciliation process. In conclusion, it is considered that the process of mainstreaming initiatives such as DCG, require priority on capacity and competence building, advocacy and policy work. In a medium-term perspective it is obvious that DCG has a role to play in cooperation with civil society actors, research institutions and with national authorities in Sudan.

3.5 Noragric's Role

The role of Noragric (Department of International Environment and Development Studies at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB)) has been changed during the years of DCG's existence. From being the focal coordinating unit for the SSE-Programme in the 1980s, and hosted the DCG secretariat from 1998 to 2005, Noragric has now a formal 3-years agreement (2005-2007) with DCG Norway. Based on the role defined in the agreement, the researchers develop annual plans in collaboration with DCG, and the DCG members use the researchers upon request.

Following the agreement, *“Noragric aims to contribute towards equitable development, sustained well-being of women and men, and sound environmental practices through collaborative activities that generate and exchange knowledge and provide education in the area of agricultural development, livelihood security and natural resource management.”*

Four researchers are working at Noragric, UMB, and one works at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo as well as Noragric as associate professor. They have

responsibility for one country each, and two are sharing the responsibility for Sudan. Their role has been technical backstopping and advisory work in the DCG network at all levels.

The researchers regard the DCG model as good and motivating and providing synergy for their own academic institutions. The link to DCG strengthen their work in various ways and give them opportunities to go more deeply into the research on drylands issues in the respective countries. The researchers are contributing substantially towards the DCG overall goal with their competence and technical skills in drylands issues. They provide technical advices and quality assurance throughout the network and complement DCG's competence on sustainable natural resource management and food security. In reaching DCG's goals, the innovative research that is required constitutes a pillar in the network, and the technical backstopping provided by Noragric is therefore a key issue for the future development of the network.

Noragric's role in the network is regarded as functioning well, but is for time being not optimal and fully exploited as intended and defined in the agreement. (This is both expressed by the researchers themselves and by other DCG respondents.) Noragric could to their own opinion be used more strategically, both in terms of strengthening the level of strategic discussions in the DCG Norway Board, within the network and at country level. Noragric has capacity to be involved in the planning and programming at an earlier stage, which according to them, would provide useful competence building for the member organisations at country level. The discussions going on in the network could probably take more advantage of the competence represented in the research group. According to some respondents, the suggested improved strategic role is already opened up for within the agreement between DCG and Noragric. It is further pointed to that Noragric's budget allocations have not been fully utilised the last 2 years and that allocation of time seems to be the challenge.

It has been discussed whether Noragric could participate as an observer in the Board meetings. Currently, they do not get the Minutes from the Board Meetings, which easily could be distributed (or parts of the Minutes could be shared with the research group). A closer link between DCG Norway and Noragric is identified as a means to improve the network's capacity and competence. Most of the issues discussed with Noragric could be done within the present agreement and budget frame.

The researchers' emphasis on a more optimal and strategic use of their competence within the cooperation should be followed up by the DCG Norway secretariat. The researchers were concerned that the new strategy required competence building and training of trainers to improve the links between DCG members and local people and primary stakeholders, not only with NGOs.

The new strategy requires competence on how to link research and social action, and to design action research projects, a competence which many local DCG members not necessarily have. This is one example where Noragric could be more optimally used. Stronger coordination of the research component and competence building in action research throughout the network seem to be required. However, it will be important that strengthening the competence on action research is initiated at national level to avoid that the activities are driven from Norway. This is expected to require more human resources or a change in the national DCGs' priorities.

3.6 DCG and Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MFA has through the years financed the former SSE-Programme. Due to the change in division of responsibilities between MFA and Norad, Norad took over as responsible for the management and financing of DCG. However, MFA has provided earmarked funds since 2004 for DCG's information activities related to UNCCD. DCG has participated in the official Norwegian delegations to UNCCD conferences since 1996. Through this participation DCG has been used as a tool for the Norwegian authorities as an advisory group as well as an advocacy network. MFA's current consideration of DCG is positive in terms of capacity and competence, and underlines the professional role and the impressive international network in which DCG participates. The Ministry regards DCG as a model for replication within other policy areas. MFA expressed a need for including the funds for information work in the frame agreement with Norad to simplify the administrative procedures.

As mentioned, the DCG has been requested by the Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia to contribute to the work related to the Embassy's role as chef de file for the implementation of UNCCD. The board of DCG Norway has delegated as a task to DF to act as NGO chef de file on behalf of DCG. DCG Ethiopia will provide support towards this end. The request in itself is a clear recognition of DCG and DF. The cooperation between the Embassy and DF is in the process of being formalised. The role as NGO chef de file will possibly open up for new opportunities for DCG and improve its advocacy role, but it might also put new pressure on the DCG Ethiopia in terms of time and capacity to run the network. In sum, the activities linked to DCG are expected to be motivating for the network and strengthen the institutional capacity.

4 THE NETWORK MODEL

The Terms of Reference raises question about the *institutional capacity* of DCG. The relevance of the network's activities, DCG's abilities and capacities in communication between its members, sharing of information, competence building, application of research and initiation of action research and policy studies. In addition, an assessment of whether the present model of organisation is providing the best possible environment to fully mobilise the potentials of the members with regards to engagement in drylands development is requested.

Considering the network model, it is important to keep in mind a focus on the four national governments, which represent different approaches in implementing national policies, strategies and plans on natural resource management and drylands issues. The national governments have mobilised variable amount of resources toward the policy areas in which DCG operates as a network. As a result, the national DCG approaches in the countries are different. The 4 national DCG secretariats are acting in different phases, depending on how far the governments are in developing and implementing national plans. Another variable is the period of time the DCG network has been present in the country. The network model is flexible and is adjusted to the national contexts, which is seen as a benefit. Another aspect of the model is that it opens up for flexibility relating to the Norwegian NGOs' presence in the country, since presence of all 5 NGOs is not a requirement for establishing the national DCG secretariat. Following budget frame is indicating the size of the network's running costs:

Figure 1 – DCG Budget 2004 – 2007 – Donor Contribution (amounts in NOK 1 000)

	Norad Frame Agreement	MFA Information Project	MFA UNCCD Chefe de File Ethiopia	Total Annual Budget
2004	5 000	540		5 540
2005	5 800	680		6 480
2006	5 800	-	-	5 800
2007	6 800	700	985	8 485
2008	6 800	-	-	6 800
2009	6 800	-	-	6 800
2010	6 800	-	-	6 800
2011	6 800	-	-	6 800

In analysing the institutional capacity it is quite important to underline that the newly adopted strategy is in the first year of implementation. It is possible that within a year DCG will have identified more adequate experiences related to necessary changes in the network model.

4.1 Relevance

The data collected forms a base for considering the relevance of DCG. Most of all it is interesting to see how the 5 Norwegian mother organisations of different kinds and with different individual mandates, have created a network in 4 partner countries with member organisations within the scope of raising awareness on specific challenges in drylands areas. DCG as operated by its members is considered in general as being a fruitful and creative network, mobilising dedicated human resources of various professional and technical skills. Although difficult to measure the outcomes, the network is by the donors such as Norad and MFA, defined as a unique network within the field of combating desertification, food security and drylands issues. Without any observed activities on the ground, but through data collection on activities and processes in which DCG are involved, this Review's overall consideration of the network is positive. In considering DCG's *relevance*, it is obvious that the idea behind, the focus for its activities and the defined objectives are coherent and so far DCG has a role to play as an international network. However, the impact on improved food security for the drylands populations is not considered due to methodological reasons.

4.2 Competence

The DCG model is in its efforts to provide linkages between research and civil society representing an ambitious approach. Some respondents have expressed that DCG must not be transformed into an NGO like "DCG International", underlining that it is important to avoid donor dependency. The Norwegian NGO representatives emphasise the network as the strength, and argue that whereby NGOs tend to become bureaucratic organisations, networks should keep up the process-oriented mode of operation and avoid bureaucratic institutionalising.

What seems to be the picture of the network comparing the four national contexts is the variation of how the network has been able to mobilise resources within civil society, research and government institutions. The framework conditions such as civil and political unrest, put limitations on the network's performance, and building competence is seen by the DCG members as a necessity to transform the network into a forceful actor challenging the authorities on drylands issues. The political conflict within the nations and also between the nations where DCG is present, require a sensitive and balanced approach by DCG. The conflicts limit mobilisation of resources into the network, at the same time the political conflicts limits the full utilisation of the competence in reaching DCG's objectives.⁸

The newly developed strategy has a more decentralised approach than before, a process that has been going on for some time. The challenge for the decentralised approach is the necessary competence required. In this connection it seems that DCG is in process of becoming a strong network, where DCG members define competence building as something vital and which represents a challenge they are working hard to provide. In this matter, the new strategy represent some new challenges, especially in relation to the concept of action research, as already mentioned.

⁸ Various studies on conflicts in Africa underline the importance of local capacity and competence, also in resolving or mitigating resource-based conflicts. See for instance Scarcity and Surfeit: The Ecology of Africa's Conflicts, Lind, J. and Sturman, K. (Eds).

One observation described by some respondents is the different way to understand and regard the food security problem. DCG Mali regards food security as a technical problem compared to the DCG Ethiopia and Sudan, which see the food security problem more as a result of political conditions. Due to political conditions DCG has to adapt to the different local conditions in a way that provide room for its activities and avoid controversies. This balance is necessary for the network to reach its objectives. It seems that DCG is able to build up competence and become a sensitive actor within the relatively conflict ridden region. However, DCG would probably take advantage of linking up with research institutions working on social and political conflicts.

The communication within the network is perceived as a problem for some of the DCG members. The weaknesses are both explained in terms of technology and language. Simultaneously, being brought up during the interviews in various connections, is the time allocated for the DCG work, which is felt as limiting the use of the available competence. Many of the respondents argue that the communication is good, that the intention of the work is clearly understood and that the problems mostly are due to logistics.

Sharing of information is regarded as means and as an outcome of the network, and takes place throughout the network. The quality of the new knowledge transferred through information on food security and policy related issues is only possible to assess when the results of the knowledge is known. It is to some degree possible to say that improved knowledge has led to increased awareness on drylands issues among segments of the population, improved influence on national policy formulation, improved practices among farmers and improved implementation of national plans. But as earlier mentioned, the 4 DCG countries represent different framework conditions and therefore the achievements differ in various aspects. What seems to be DCG's strength is how the network has been able to mobilise resources in terms of dedicated member organisations within the NGO community, research and governmental institutions under quite different framework conditions to work towards the DCG's objectives.⁹

Some of the selected research reports reviewed have addressed weaknesses in competence building and transfer of technology, and recommendations on how to improve are identified in the reports.¹⁰ The reports represent valuable documentation in considering how the DCG network contributes to new knowledge shared with local communities. However, it is not documented how the recommendations are followed up. One example illustrating competence building and innovative and applied research is the Ecofarm concept, invented by ICRISAT Niger and further developed in Mali through cooperation between DCG Mali, Care Mali, Amapros, Kilabo (national NGOs), Noragric and ICRAF. The Ecofarm concept is in process of being replicated both in Ethiopia and Sudan, and provides as an indicator on competence building at community level and an example of competence building through the network.

⁹ Different framework conditions should be understood as different political, economic and cultural conditions, different rural populations, different ecological niches.

¹⁰ See for instance "Natural Resource management in the Dinga Hills – A Baseline Study from Budi County, South Sudan" (DCG, 2005); "Female-Headed Households and Livelihood Intervention in Four Selected Weredas in Tigray, Ethiopia", (DCG, 2006); "Exploring Ecological and Socio-Economic Issues for the Improvement of Area Enclosure Management – A Case from Ethiopia", (DCG, 2005)

Another aspect being addressed in relation to the new strategy is the relatively weak competence in designing action research projects. Building this competence is a process that takes time, but should be stronger coordinated at DCG national level.

Monitoring and evaluation. The monitoring and evaluation is being addressed as necessary tools to improve DCG's capacity and competence. DCG has identified the need to strengthen the documentation of network's results, as expressed in the new strategy. Presently the Action Plan and the Guidelines for Proposals are used as the monitoring and evaluation tools. DCG is working on improvements in the documentation of its results and will establish a more systematic tool for this during this year. DCG has already started publishing *Promising Practices booklets* as part of the documentation of results planned to be increasingly used both in information and dissemination activities. To strengthen institutional capacity the monitoring and evaluation procedures will have to further be developed, a process that has already started.

Transfer of knowledge within DCG Norway. It has been requested whether the Norwegian member NGOs are taking advantage of the cooperation through the DCG network and whether there is a transfer of knowledge between the 5 Norwegian NGOs. The Norwegian NGOs' investments in DCG differ and depend on the mandate of the individual NGO as well as on the size of their respective sector programmes at country level. DF has a mandate that is more coherent with the DCG mandate than what is the case for the 4 other NGOs. We have a clear impression that some organisations like the DF were able to internalise their experiences from the DCG whereas others were less able to do so. This is because DF is more specialised in drylands issues. ADRA Norway, NCA, NPA and Care Norway have broader mandates and also a broader geographical approach. The Norwegian NGO respondents have expressed that to some degree, at head quarters' level, the knowledge shared within the NGOs could have been more efficient. However, there is no doubt that the DCG concept leads to greater cooperation between the organisations involved. Seen from the NGOs' country offices, it is obvious that the transfer of knowledge between them is taking place. DCG Ethiopia and DCG Mali have been used to illustrate examples. Both in terms of competence and knowledge, the NGOs themselves consider that the network cooperation provides an explicit synergy and that DCG represents an interesting experience and *model of coordination*, but mainly at country level.

External cooperation. DCG Norway and the 4 national DCG secretariats have extensive cooperation with national institutions within research and civil society as well as with national and local authorities. Some of the DCG secretariats underlined a closer cooperation with international policy and research organisations as essential. FAO and UNDP among others were mentioned. Other respondents have pointed to the importance of proactive research institutions as vital for the DCG in attaining its goals.

DCG Norway was instrumental in establishing the European networking initiative on Desertification/UNCCD, eniD, in 2001, a group of European NGOs involved in the implementation of the UNCCD.¹¹ The initiative seeks to improve the co-operation between

¹¹ This working group counts six organisations and networks, which are operational in the field of sustainable development in drylands. EniD is dedicated to the implementation of the UNCCD in general and to the participatory approach of the convention in particular; considering both as essential steps on the way to sustainable development. EniD understands its initiative as a specific contribution to efforts that a larger

civil society organisations (CSOs) at the European level in order to provide for more support to partners from civil society in affected countries, particularly in view of their active involvement in the decision making, implementing and assessment processes of the UNCCD.

In sum, it is possible to conclude that transfer of technology and competence building take place through a variety of activities between the DCG partners at all levels. The challenges are nevertheless felt in the field at member organisations' level where needs in terms of technical and financial resources are identified and expressed.

4.3 Use and Application of Research

DCG is trying to bridge the gap between research and action within drylands issues. A general problem within the NGO society in Norway as well as internationally, is the weak linkages between research institutions and the civil society actors. The traditions in applying research results into programming are relatively weak and represent a challenge, not only for networks such as DCG. The recently finalised DCG strategy process focused on how the DCG members to a larger degree could utilise and apply the research component in the activities. This led to a more clear definition of the research activities and the *action research* concept has been emphasised in the new strategy and defined as an approach. All research initiatives are now defined as action research, which in practice means that the research activities are including social actions. Through participation of men and women joint analysis, experimentation and application on the ground are to take place in securing linkages to practical utilisation and following up plans.

During its existence DCG have experienced that many targeted research interventions have been applied at various levels: Ecofarm, Mali; Female-Headed Households and Livelihood Intervention in Tigray, Ethiopia; Rainwater Harvesting, Ethiopia; Sedentarisation of Nomadic People, Northern Sudan. The initiation of research projects from the secretariats at country level requires competence in formulation of research projects and competence in identification of research needs. In discussions with DCG members, it has been confirmed that it is too early to measure results and outcome of the implementation of the new strategy. Nevertheless, the recent annual application process has proved that the 4 DCG national secretariats' mode of work and institutionalising the strategy differ in terms of internalising the new approach (see for instance "Consideration of project proposals 2007" submitted by the DCG Working Group to the DCG Norway Board, autumn 2006). Some of the national DCGs have been more actively developing new projects within the new approach, which emphasises food security, action research and policy work.

The concern related to the increasingly politicised contexts in which DCG works raises the issue whether the research component to a larger degree should be focused on social and political conflicts. The new strategy opens up for increased focus on conflict oriented research, which could imply improved capacity for the DCG network. It is the Consultant's opinion that inclusion of more conflict oriented research, involving political and social scientists, would strengthen the DCG network. A stronger focus on the political aspects of drylands issues will for some of the Norwegian NGOs lead to stronger motivation and

community of like-minded actors from national, regional and international backgrounds are committed to.

involvement in DCG ¹². To mention one resource group that particularly works within the same field as DCG is International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), London, which aims at promoting sustainable patterns of global development through collaborative research, policy studies, networking, and knowledge dissemination.

4.4 Institutional capacity of the DCG network

In analysing the major documents and the interview data provided the DCG network's professional capacity appears as focussed. DCG has been able to work dedicated towards its goal and mobilised resources at national levels through the national coordinators and the respective member organisations. The annual reports from 2003, 2004 and 2005 document results achieved, weaknesses and challenges. In the documents related to the strategy process in which all national coordinators participated and contributed, the network is intending to increase its *visibility*, which has been emphasised as a target in the new strategy and annual plan for 2007. Similarly, the links to the national processes related to UNCCD and national plans, the network has managed to strengthened its role as advocacy group vis-à-vis national authorities.

Monitoring and evaluation has been an issue brought up at several occasions and in various key documents. To improve the institutional capacity, it will be of importance to learn from experiences. Since the DCG network is emphasising monitoring and evaluation, it is the Consultant's opinion that this should be a key priority in the coming years.

Financial Sustainability. Financial issues have to a limited degree been brought up through the interviews, mainly since it has not been stressed as an important question in the ToR. It is documented that there is a need among member organisations for more funding from Norad. However, in the meeting with Norad November 28 2006, the Consultant was challenged by Norad to come up with creative ideas relating to the network model.

There is a danger that the DCG network can become an independent NGO in itself rather than a network of likeminded organisations. This is particularly so as regards financing. Recipient organisations can regard the DCG as an NGO with secure sources of funding rather than a network of individual organisations taking independent initiatives. (However, in the case of Eritrea the DCG umbrella is a very useful tool vis-à-vis the Government of Eritrea, which prefers to deal with network organisations rather than individual NGOs).

It is the Consultant's opinion that DCG should seek funding outside the Norwegian donors in order to become more financial sustainable. It has not been discussed whether the DCG network should change its approach in terms of finance and operate on a more commercial basis. It is the Consultant's opinion that this matter should be brought up as the network's professional profile is improving. As a partner and actor vis-à-vis national authorities, DCG provides expertise required in building up necessary competence in the government and private sectors. DCG could look into how the network could take advantage of its professional capacity and operate as consultants for private and governmental institutions.

¹² This is expressed by some of the respondents during the interviews with the Consultant.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY OF THE DCG NETWORK

DCG Objectives	Expected Outputs	Consultant's Comments
Address core challenges related to the increased pressure on natural resources which leads to food insecurity in the drylands;	Influenced policy, awareness and enhanced knowledge at grass roots level and improved capacity among member organisations.	<p>Institutional capacity strengthened through recent strategy process; Assessment of network model require more/different data; DCG Norway Coordinator's capacity ¹³: functioning well, but finance officer's capacity stretched.</p> <p>DCG Norway Board: dedicated, qualified persons. Capacity utilised. Stretched?</p> <p>Strengthen Monitoring/Evaluation needed</p>
Contribute to strengthening access to natural resources for vulnerable households	Coordination of members' activities. Members implementing programme	<p>DCG Coord. Country level: capacity relatively stretched. Need to prioritise DCG job. Should Board members get remuneration, or against DCG principle?</p> <p>Capacity Building needed. Implementing capacity varies</p>
Enhance the capacity and competence of member organisations, networks and other stakeholders to address the challenges related to increased pressure on natural resources in the drylands.	Strategy for capacity and competence building	<p>Optimal output depends on political and institutional framework conditions, but also on the various involvements from the Norwegian "mother" NGOs at country level.</p> <p>Norwegian NGO members could be used more in building up capacity and competence within DCG network. Improved synergy possible.</p> <p>Noragric could be more proactive; Noragric should be used more strategically in implementing DCG approaches, which require a discussion between the partners; Improve coordination of research nat.level.</p> <p>DCG should establish links to proactive research institutions within social & political sciences, both in action research, policy studies and capacity building, i.e. IIED, + Norwegian and international</p> <p>End of 2007: discuss expansion of the network to include Kenya should be looked into by DCG Board. Kenya represents research institutions that could provide important research capacity. Whether links to research institutions require DCG coordinator and/or Norwegian NGOs present in Kenya should be discussed. Expansion of DCG to Niger?</p>

¹³ The DCG Norway Coordinator includes the Coordinator and her staff.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The Network Model

Since the new strategy is in the first year of being implemented, it is considered as premature to analyse the implications for possible changes in the present network model. It has been possible to state that there is a common recognition of the new strategy as consolidating the network and that the process of developing the strategy itself has strengthened the network.

DCG Norway

1. The DCG Norway has a well functioning secretariat both in terms of communication and sharing of information, policy influence, advocacy, awareness raising, and application of research results. The present model of organisation through the secretariat in Norway seems to facilitate the implementation of the network's objectives. Conclusion on the entire DCG model would require data collection at DCG national and field levels.
2. The DCG Norway has succeeded in mobilising highly qualified and dedicated key personnel in the respective Norwegian member organisations to be representatives in the DCG Board. There is close cooperation between the board members in the 5 Norwegian NGOs. However, the involvement of the Norwegian NGOs in DCG differs in terms of investment and linkages between the DCG activities at country level and the Norwegian NGOs country programmes. Transfer of knowledge between the Norwegian NGO members takes place, but mainly at country level. There is a growing consciousness in the Norwegian NGOs' head quarters that they may benefit more through the participation in DCG. This may be explained by the role DCG Norway has vis-a-vis Norwegian authorities in relation to the following up of UNCCD, as well as a conscious awareness that the network as such is a genuine model at international level. As member of eniD, DCG is frequently used by the European Union in commenting upon UNCCD issues, the network's performance is stimulated as an international actor in this context.
3. The respondents in the national DCGs consider the secretariat in Norway as strengthened in terms of increased capacity (from 1 to 3 persons). Seen from the DCG Norway's point of view, this is not the case. The capacity for the accountant is stretched as she works in a 50% position doing the work that was formerly done by the financial office at Noragric. In the present Norad application, DCG has applied for a full time position for the accountant.

DCG Country level

4. The implementation of DCG network activities at national level differs between the four countries. There are some general structural bottlenecks identified due to social and political unrest at national level, while the network's internal environment is considered as favourable.

5. The DCG network major challenge is to utilise its potentials. One of the weaknesses identified is the variable human resource base at national level. Especially political conditions in Eritrea and Sudan have caused these problems. Increased mobility of human resources within the network to improve the use of its resources and expertise would strengthen the capacity at national level. Several solutions will be recommended towards this end.

6. DCG Ethiopia

DCG Ethiopia is functioning well. The Ethiopian research institutes and universities are highly competent academic institutions, the national NGOs are experienced in international development cooperation, and the board members and the coordinator have long experience in cooperation with Norwegian NGOs. Among the member organisations are government institutions, which is positive in terms of influencing policy formulation.

DCG Ethiopia is currently opening for an expansion of the network, and they have invited relevant partner organisations to apply for membership. The potential members will probably contribute to strengthening DCG Ethiopia's work, especially when it comes to their policy related work and their work with pastoralist issues.

The task delegated to DF to act as NGO chef de file on behalf of DCG, will become a new level of performance for DCG and will contribute to increased influence for DCG in Ethiopia but also in general. DCG will probably gain new experiences and may open up new opportunities for the network.

7. DCG Eritrea

The DCG Eritrea is suffering from the political situation in the country. The civil society is seriously affected by the situation and national and international NGOs are having problems due to strict regulations. The advantage of the DCG is its status as a forum, and has so far been able to continue its activities as other NGOs have been forced to close down programme operations.

However, for the time being there are no DCG coordinator, but the former coordinator has stepped in as chairman of the board and is trying to keep the network running. DCG Eritrea is in a state of limbo, but will try to implement the planned programme throughout 2007. Whereas no new activities will be initiated in 2007, it is believed by the DCG members that it is important to try to keep the network running since its activities are regarded as relevant in terms of competence and capacity, and has the potentials to develop further. In addition, it would be a demanding task to re-establish the network later if it had been terminated due to the current problems. Unless the political conflict increases, other members will support the network activities. The secretariat has been able to develop a programme. It is expected that the programme can be implemented in 2008.

8. DCG Mali

DCG Mali with its 29 members is viewed as a well functioning secretariat in terms of the implementation of the annual programme, coordination and linking research activities to the operational level. However, French as the national language causes problems for DCG Mali in utilising the entire network's potentials when it comes to sharing of information and communication. The expansion of member organisations that took place, opened up

for several new NGO members, which to some degree has stretched the secretariat's capacity. There is an identified need to improve the network's deliveries of technical support, especially within drylands issues. The experience with research activities and the application of research results are defined as good. According to the coordinator, the challenge for DCG Mali is to improve the influence on policy formulation. Expansion of DCG Mali to include member organisations from Niger has been questioned as a means to strengthen the French-speaking part of the network and to motivate Norwegian NGOs in further involvement.

9. DCG Sudan

As a former part of DCG Ethiopia, DCG Sudan is new and in the process of building up the secretariat and the national network including members from the south and the north. DCG works closely with government institutions. Logistics is a problem for the network due to very weak infrastructure after the civil war, especially in the south. This affects the information flow and communication with the network. However, the approach by the board and the secretariat is optimistic. In future the members are supposed to increase. The NGOs in Northern Sudan have limited experience with international development cooperation, and people from the north are inexperienced with English speaking partners. In spite of this, DCG has managed to mobilise members and persons that have experience and qualifications. DCG Sudan sees its role as important in building up an environment for targeted interventions and policy formulation as Sudan has very weak institutions for working on drylands issues. Workshops targeting government officials and parliamentarians have contributed towards increased awareness on drylands issues and UNCCD. The research activities are regarded as an essential part of the network. DCG Sudan has an explicit need for more inputs from the DCG network in most of its operations, including competence building and training of trainers. Some respondents have identified increased funding as a general need, without specifying the purpose.

10. Relevance

The data collected documents with regard to research activities and policy work that DCG's performance is relevant and operates in accordance with its objectives to improve the food security in the drylands and contribute to strengthening access to natural resources for vulnerable households. It is documented that DCG has managed to enhance the capacity and competence of member organisations and other stakeholders to address the challenges related to increased pressure on natural resources in the drylands. However, based on the available data collected it is difficult to measure the impact on improvements in food security and strengthening of the access to natural resources.

11. Capacity Building and Provision of Technical Support

Technical support within food security and drylands issues from Norwegian NGOs (delivered both from head quarters in Norway and the respective countries) has been identified as a need. DCG members, in the process of building up competence, see a gap in the network's ability to provide technical support. Mobilisation of more technical advisers into the network, both through the agreement with Noragric and other research and expert groups was brought up as an opportunity to bridge the gap.

12. Application of Research

DCG members underline to varying degree the importance to enhance the application of research and following up research results, as linkages between research and action is emphasised in the new strategy. There are several examples on how research results have led to improved use of technologies and innovative approaches. The challenge is to enhance the competence in linking research and action, and how the network could provide “the glue” in improving the linkages in using more proactive research institutions in the partner countries.

The cooperation with Noragric contributes towards the network’s goal through its research competence. Noragric has expressed that they are motivated to increase their involvement and especially utilise their capacity with a more strategic approach. Noragric’s competence should be more fully utilised and based on their own suggestion be involved at an early stage in the initiation of project proposals, however, avoiding a top-down approach.

Several respondents have mentioned the need to extend the cooperation with research institutions that deal with social and political conflicts and conflict resolutions as well as land rights issues. The ongoing conflicts in the drylands areas in which DCG is involved require linkages to research institutions dealing with social and political sciences and international legal issues.

13. Geographical expansion

Geographical expansion of DCG has been discussed in light of DCG member organisations’ identified needs. Care Norway, which has a major cooperation with Mali, sees a possibility to include member organisations in Niger in DCG Mali without establishing a separate secretariat in Niger. It is argued that this would strengthen the French-speaking part of DCG, at the same time provide synergy for the NGOs involved both in Mali and Niger. Presently, this is considered as premature. DCG is in the first year of implementating the new strategy and DCG should concentrate on other key issues before discussing this geographical expansion.

Based on the identified need to link up with more dynamic research institutions in improving the research capacity of the network, expanding DCG to Kenya in the network is suggested by some key respondents. National and international research institutions in Kenya are considered as important partners within food security and drylands issues, and could have a positive effect on the entire network. However, it is a step that would require a thorough consideration of costs and benefits. Before discussing an inclusion of Kenya as a DCG member, DCG should actively seek cooperation with the key institutions based in Nairobi working on drylands issues.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the recommendations may be premature due to the limited time for quality assurance of the respondents' input and limited timeframe time for a second round discussing the findings before presenting the report.

1. The DCG Norway Board

The work performed by the board members has a high quality, is time consuming, and the board members are dedicated towards the DCG goal and objectives. DCG Norway has an ambitious agenda to perform. Based on this DCG Norway should discuss following issues:

Are the board members' resources allocated efficiently? Are there other ways of delegating activities? Should the board members be used more strategically and leave running tasks to other persons in the Norwegian NGOs to add resources to the Secretariat? Should researchers be linked up to the board and used in strategic discussions and be invited to be present at the board meetings as observers? Would this facilitate the network's communication with researchers? Should researchers be involved at an earlier stage in the project proposal process and programming?

2. Strengthening the National Secretariats and National Boards

The 4 national secretariats have different needs in the process of improving the network's capacity. The Board of DCG Norway should discuss how the national DCGs could strengthen the link up with local institutions with the objective to improve the national network at all levels. This could lead to a "plan of action" for the national DCGs.

The activity for the national DCG board members is time consuming and the board representatives have often full time jobs. It is sometimes difficult to give priority to DCG Board activity and represent a dilemma for the persons involved. In this situation a remuneration would stimulate and lead to higher priority of DCG work. Whether this is against the DCG's principles will have to be discussed.

3. Lessons Learnt, Capacity and Competence Building

As part of the monitoring and evaluation system that will be applied throughout the network, it is recommended that success stories are summarised and presented in an easily accessible format to secure DCG's use of the lessons learnt and replicate where possible. As already decided by the DCG Board, the lessons learnt should be systematically documented and be published in information sheets *Promising Practices*.

Technical support

In bridging the gap relating to the need for more technical support in the process of building up competence within the network DCG should invest more resources in terms of technical advisory resources. One alternative would be to involve researchers at an earlier phase in the project planning process and build competence on action research design. DCG should strengthen coordination of the research component at DCG national level.

4. Research

The research component should be strengthened through more systematic coordination of the activities. This should be a priority of the national DCG secretariats. A plan of action could be developed as a guide for the DCG members.

Due to the relatively high level of social and political conflict in the drylands areas DCG should actively seek arrangements with research institutions within these fields. The DCG network would benefit from stronger links to researchers involved in action oriented policy research, both in Norway and internationally. The most convenient model for cooperation with research institutions should be discussed. Arrangements could be done on an individual base through a MoU with some selected research institutions. An alternative would be individual contracts with research institutions and/or researchers. Preference should be given research institutions within the respective countries and in the region as for instance in Kenya (see below). Relevant policy and research institutions in Norway would be Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Chr. Michelsen's Institute (CMI), Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies, Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI) and the Universities' Centre for Environment and Development (SUM). Cooperation should be limited to researchers that are involved in applied research. One key institution working on drylands issues is the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London.

In addition to improve the network's capacity and competence in applying research results, policy studies at national levels should be carried out in identifying the most strategic areas for research. To avoid duplication research groups could on a regular base inform DCG about the research needs within the relevant policy area at country level in order to improve DCG's capacity to initiate research. This would provide value added into the network across the borders. The discussion related to the research component would have to include budget considerations.

6. Geographical Expansion

It is recommended that within a year DCG should discuss and consider a geographical expansion of the network. This is based on the assumption and argument that DCG needs to include some more dynamic research institutions in the countries of cooperation. This could be achieved through the inclusion of Kenya as a member. Kenya has competent national universities and research institutions as well as presence of international organisations and institutions such as UNEP, UNDP Drylands Development Centre, CGIAR institutes (ICRAF, ILRI) working on the same issues in the same countries. However, the discussion should take into account how cooperation with dynamic research institutions operating in the drylands areas could be strengthened. Maybe linkages can be made without any geographical expansion, which in turn has to be considered based on identified needs for possible partners in Kenya.

Based on the argument of strengthening the French-speaking part of DCG, DCG should discuss incorporation of member organisations in Niger, but at a later stage when the new strategy is being implemented at least for a year. Included in a possible discussion on geographical expansion of DCG should be a focus on requirements of additional administrative and financial resources. Whether the DCG Norway would have the capacity in managing a possible geographical expansion have to be brought into the discussion.

7. The DCG Model

In considering whether the present model of organisation provides the best possible environment to fully mobilise the potentials of the members with regard to engagement in drylands development it is recommended to extend this Review to include a more in-depth review of the DCG at country level. Such a review should be undertaken probably within a year and when more valid experiences on the implementation of the new strategy are available. Presently it is considered as premature to present any recommendations on eventual changes of the model without any data collection at national level, including observations and discussions. Based on the above it is not possible to recommend a change of present model.

The recommended review as a following up of this limited Review should focus on potentials and bottlenecks seen from the ground and assessed through field visits as to fully comply with this Review's ToR. A broader analysis of the DCG network's institutional capacity is recommended. The purpose of looking more deeply into the field level (secretariats and member organisations) and assess the linkages between the secretariat, the members and the field, should not only be limited to DCG's needs, but include donors. Due to the relatively positive overall considerations of the network met among DCG members, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Noragric, it is recommended that a following up of this Review take place with the objective to present the model more explicitly. The model as such is regarded as an interesting intervention and innovation within the Norwegian development cooperation and replication of the model in other fields of development cooperation is brought up.

The review should go more deeply into DCG's financial approach. The need for more Norad funding has been identified which questions the network's financial sustainability. As DCG's professional profile is improving, the network should consider operating on a more commercial base. The review should look into how the network could take advantage of its professional capacity and operate as consultants for private and governmental institutions on drylands issues.

A more indebt analysis of the network would require field visits and data collection at the national secretariat and grass roots levels in the 4 member countries. The Review Team should consist of an independent consultant, one member of the Norwegian DCG members, one representative from Norad and/or Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a local independent consultant with relevant experience in drylands issues and networking.

ANNEX I

Review of the Drylands Coordination Group (DCG)

Terms of Reference

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DCG was established in 1997 by Norsk Folkehjelp, Kirkens Nødhjelp, Utviklingsfondet, CARE Norge, ADRA Norge and Strømmestiftelsen¹⁴. DCG was established to carry forward experiences gained and cooperation structures developed from the former Sahel-Sudan-Ethiopia (SSE) programme funded 100 % by Norad.

DCG is a network, it draws upon numerous organisations, research institutions and persons when it comes to development cooperation.

The secretariat in Norway consists of persons trained at Noragric, and with educational background within development and resource management in Africa. In addition, DCG has a cooperation agreement with Noragric, where designated researchers provide technical backstopping and advice. The DCG groups in each country also have a broad base of researchers and consultants with whom they cooperate and consult with on a regular basis.

During the recent years, DCG has gone through a process of decentralisation. This means that much of the quality assurance is now done by the partners, compared to earlier when most of it was done from Norway. In order to ensure that the quality of the programme was improved, or at least maintained, national **coordinators** have been hired in all the four countries. Apart from coordinating all activities and being the focal point for the national DCG groups towards the outside world, the coordinators also have a role in the quality assurance of activities. The coordinators work fulltime with monitoring and coordinating the DCG activities of the respective member organisations, and oversee that the work is in line with the DCG strategy.

The national coordinators in each country are hosted by one of the member organisations

As for the administrative issues, DCG has a cooperation agreement with the Development Fund- its host organisation - on advice, support and quality assurance.

Strategic objectives

- Address core challenges related to the increased pressure on natural resources which leads to food insecurity in the drylands.

¹⁴ Strømmestiftelsen later withdrew from the network, when dryland issues and food security were no longer part of their priorities.

- DCG will particularly contribute to strengthening access to natural resources for vulnerable households

Organisational/operational objective

DCG will enhance the capacity and competence of member organisations, networks and other stakeholders to address the challenges related to increased pressure on natural resources in the drylands.

CONTENT AND PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The purpose of the review is to assess the institutional capacity of DCG Norway to contribute to attaining the objectives of the DCG network. This review will also provide recommendations on possible changes in the operations and institutional structure of DCG Norway and the network as such. The consultant can propose additional studies to be carried out if there are some critical issues that can not be addressed during this review.

SCOPE OF WORK

The consultant will assess the institutional *capacity* of the DCG-Norway, hereunder the ability to provide technical support to the member organisations (*competence*), secure the quality of the analytical work carried out by consultants and the *relevance* of the information generated (including information shared in workshops).

Assess to what extent the DCG – work programme reflects the interest and need of the DCG-members, hereunder possible influence from the members on the programme formulation process (annual application process). Are the organisations engaging themselves in different ways, and are some involvements more productive than others?

Assess whether the present model of organisation provides the best possible environment to fully mobilise the potentials of the members with regard to engagement in drylands development.

Assess the interest and possibilities of the member organisations to engage themselves more

directly in food security in drylands as opposed to delegating the subject to a secretariat.

Assess the priority given to food security in drylands by the organisations.

Furthermore assess the impact of DCG's activities for sharing practical experience both between the member organisations in Norway, between Norway and Africa and with research and policy making institutions internationally (here based on a self assessment).

Assess flow of information between the Norwegian members regarding information generated in the programme as well as general knowledge about drylands development.

Assess flow of information generated in the programme between members in the four partner countries as well as between the countries and to other international agencies dealing with dry-lands development.

The consultant shall provide information about how the partners consider the benefit of research, and see opportunities to promote application of findings and experiences made.

The assessment will be carried out by an independent research institution based on a selection of reports prepared by DCG. The consultant will interview member institutions in the DCG-network, hereunder head of the organisations, DCG board members and relevant desk officers. DCG members in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Mali will be interviewed by the consultant (by telephone).

IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

The assignment will be carried out by a consultant with a professional knowledge of the thematic issues addressed by DCG, the Norwegian NGO-sector and one or more of the countries that DCG is active in.

Relevant documents and reports will be made available to the consultant, including documents from the DCG members (annual reports, annual plans etc.). DCG will facilitate teleconferences with member institutions.

REPORTING

The report shall be based on the scope of assignment defined above. The report shall be written in English language, and have about 15 pages text. The consultant will produce a draft report to be submitted to Norad and DCG on the 08th December 2006. Norad and DCG will provide their comments to the draft report not later than Wednesday the 13th, and the final report shall be ready not later than Friday 15th December.

Norad, _____ November 2006

Finn Arne Moskvil

Director, Department for Civil Society Support

ANNEX II

List of People Interviewed

DCG Norway

Astrid Tveteraas, DCG Coordinator

Lauren Naville, Information Officer

Grete Benjaminsen, former DCG Coordinator

DCG Norway Board Members

Pia Reiersen, Chair

Jørn Stave, Development Fund

Elin Enge, Norwegian People's Aid

Moira Eknes, Care Norway

Hilde Skogedal, Norwegian Church Aid

Kari Øyen, Norwegian Church Aid

Member organisations, Norway

Svend Skjønsberg, Head, International Departments, Development Fund

Frederik Frederiksen, Programme Coordinator, Ethiopia, Development Fund

Steinar Sundvoll, Head, International Department, Care Norway

Jon Ålborg, Head of Section, International Department, Norwegian Church Aid

Pia Reiersen, Director, International Department, ADRA

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad

Jon Heikki Aas, Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Anne Marie Skjold, Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Inger Næss, Senior Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Noragric

Jens Aune, Associate Professor, Noragric

Kjersti Larsen, Associate Professor, Noragric/University of Oslo

Ingrid Nyborg, Associate Professor, Noragric

Trygve Berg, Associate Professor, Noragric

Shan Mugaratnam, Professor, Noragric

DCG Members

Mali

Patricia Kone, Coordinator, DCG Mali

Aliye Djiga, Former Coordinator, DCG Mali

Eritrea

Paul Roden, Former Coordinator, Eritrea (still acting as Coordinator)

Ellen Borchgrevink, Programme Coordinator, Development Fund, Eritrea

Ethiopia

Mulugeta Berhanu, Head, Environmental and Agricultural Development Department, REST, Mekelle, Tigray, Chair, DCG Ethiopia

Dawit Kebede, Board member, (NCA)

Abiye Alemu Ayele, Coordinator, DCG Ethiopia

Sudan

Fadul Beshir, Chair, DCG Sudan

Mutaz El Sadig, Coordinator, DCG Sudan

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