

NeTropica

Red Centroamericana para la Investigación y el Entrenamiento en Enfermedades Tropicales
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NetBoard Minutes

February 25, 2005, León, Nicaragua

Members present:

NeTropica Coordination: Esteban Chaves (Costa Rica), Teresa Frisan [standing in for Monica Thelestam - KI] (Sweden)

NeTBoard members*: Josefa Moran (El Salvador), Azael Saldaña (Panama), Libia Herrero [standing in for Rosario Achi] (Costa Rica), Silda Larios (Nicaragua-organisers), Annabelle Ferrera (Honduras), Olga Torres (Guatemala),

NeTropica Administration: Christina Tsagaraki (Costa Rica)

Nicaraguan Representative: Maria Rosario Palma (UNAN-Leon)

Invited Participant: Maria-Elena Peñaranda, Sustainable Sciences Institute (SSI), USA, Scientific Coordinator

**The NeTBoard members are selected among the NeTropica Grantees 2003 – 2005, one from each Central American country.*

Introduction:

- Esteban Chaves as the NeTropica Central America Coordinator opened the meeting; he stressed the importance of this meeting is to discuss the next proposal of NeTropica to Sida/ SAREC and that final decisions on certain aspects must be taken; the agenda had been circulated well in advance to all NeTropica Grantees for preparation of the Netboard members.
- Esteban Chaves introduced Teresa Frisan to the attendants of the meeting, as a person who works closely with Monica Thelestam at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden, who due to sickness could not attend the meeting; he introduced Libia Herrero as temporarily and after a decision of the Costa Rican Grantees, the person who will replace Rosario Achi; as basic reason for this change was presented her high position in the University of Costa Rica (UCR); UCR is the main candidate of becoming NeTropica's host and therefore Libia Herrero would be the indicated person to answer questions of the attendants; finally he introduced Maria-Elena Peñaranda as an observer in the meeting, representing SSI, an institution collaborating with NeTropica.

TOPICS DISCUSSED:

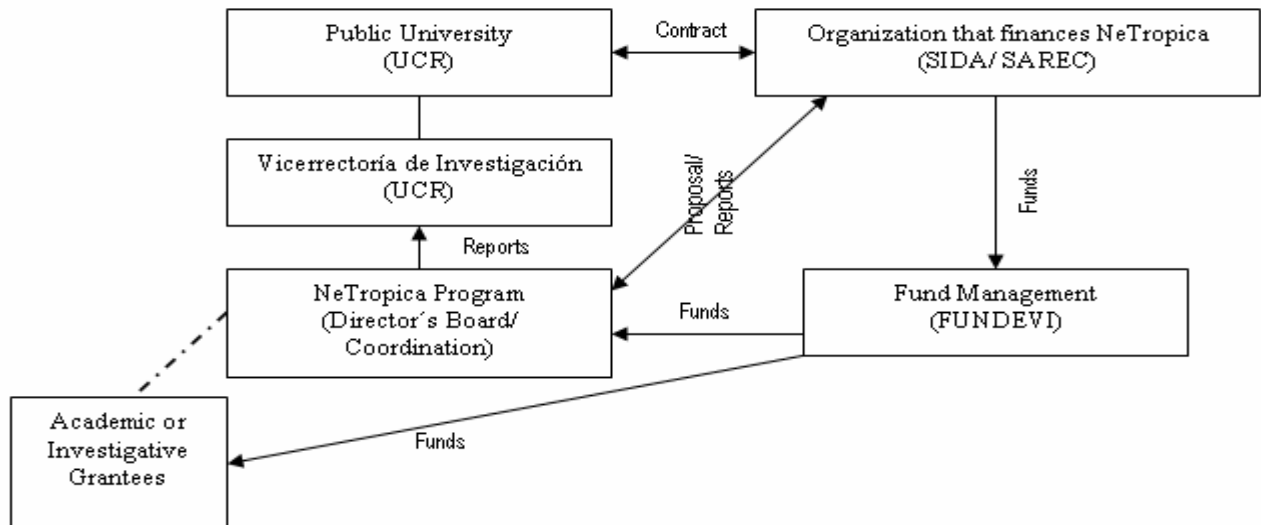
1. NeTropica Future Administration & Collaborative University:

Since the last meeting of the Netboard in El Salvador, 2003, the requirements of Sida/ SAREC to continue financing NeTropica has been known to NeTropica members. Esteban Chaves recapitulated them:

- Current situation is that Karolinska Institute (KI) signs as a counterpart of Sida/ SAREC and receives the main funds. Then KI signs with the private Foundation Pro Ciencia y Arte (FUNA) in Costa Rica a contract of the funds administration. Finally NeTropica is registered as a program within FUNA and handles the coordination of the whole program.
- According to Sida/ SAREC this is not longer possible to continue and the main requirements for any further success of NeTropica in applying for funds should be met:
 - Sida/ SAREC signs only bilateral programs (so no direct Swedish partner like KI can be involved)
 - Sida/ SAREC signs agreements with public institutions, such as Universities (FUNA as a private entity cannot participate directly)

Even though the current situation of NeTropica has proved successful due to the guidelines the fundamental structure of the proposal must change. Therefore the last NeTropica meeting ended with the encouragement of all partners to propose a solution to be discussed in this Netboard Meeting.

As a solution to that Esteban Chaves' proposal to the Netboard is the collaboration of NeTropica with the UCR under the following organigram:



In summary the organigram was explained as: Sida/ SAREC will be signing a contract with a Public University (UCR). This would provide an academic background to the proposal. NeTropica would be positioned as a project within the Vice-Rectorate (VR) of Investigation. Since NeTropica is a Regional program, this VR is the most adequate rather than any other subdivision. Funds of NeTropica would be handled through the Institution of UCR FUNDEVI (Fundación de la Universidad de Costa Rica para la Investigación), independently

from the university's administration. FUNDEVI has long experience in handling funds internationally with the back up of Universities.

Furthermore Esteban Chaves added that this proposal is a product of a written communication between the UCR and NeTropica, where NeTropica has presented all its aims, objectives and practical ways of functioning (such as the necessity of NeTropica to distribute different types of Grants in the Region) and the UCR has responded in an written way that it will agree. FUNDEVI as the Fund Management Institution (FMI) has offered to use part of its overhead (1% of the total 4%) to raise additional funds for NeTropica; also that is willing to help other FMI's of the region to practice handling funds, if they request so.

Finally concerning the relationship established since years of NeTropica and KI, Esteban Chaves stressed that it is within the common interest of the two institutions to maintain collaboration and new methods must be found¹. One possibility would be that a small part of the Sida/ SAREC grant to UCR/ NeTropica would be assigned for exchange of collaboration between the two institutions.

At this point Libia Herrero made a short presentation of UCR and FUNDEVI relation and the floor opened to questions. In summary Libia Herrero's presentation included:

- UCR is divided by 5 Vice-Rectories: three academic, (including the VR of Investigation where Libia Herrero is the Vice Rector), one municipal and one representative of the Government, usually of the Ministry of Science and Culture.
- In the board of FUNDEVI the VR are also involved, guaranteeing the function of the institution with the flexibility of a private entity and the guarantee of a public one. FUNDEVI has two different overheads: 15% for sales of services made in public territory and 5% for handling private funds. NeTropica would be in the second category – but with an exception of charging 4% of overhead - .

Questions, comments, concerns and discussions raised by all the Netboard attendants related with the NeTropica proposal and/ or the UCR offer included:

- UCR/ FUNDEVI is the only visible proposal from the Central American point of view as it can cover the Sida/ SAREC requirements, guarantee NeTropica to have flexibility in performing its tasks as known by now and have the lowest of overheads (in comparison to up to 30% university overheads in other countries)
- How far can UCR/ FUNDEVI administration be influenced by political changes and what power of decision/ independency can NeTropica have within this structure: Libia Herrero's response was to assure that NeTropica will be independent in action as long as the contract rules UCR-Sida/ SAREC are respected. The structure of UCR with the history it has, the different participants in the boards (the departments, representatives of students, etc) can only assure that changes are not based on political decisions.
- What kind of relationship can be maintained with KI: various proposals in this subject included the possibility of creating Hosting Labs for Central Americans who want to work for a short period in Sweden. Funds will be retrieved from the separated fund reserve assigned to collaboration with the KI.
- Is Sida/ SAREC aware of the NeTropica proposal: Next NeTropica proposal will be for the three years period of 2006 – 2009. In practical terms we are always starting the periods towards the second half of each year (estimated starting date August 2006). Contacts have already been made with pre-proposals with Sida/ SAREC. There is a meeting between Pär Svensson and Esteban Chaves on the 15/4/2005 in Costa Rica regarding this matter.¹¹

2. NeTropica Internal Administrative Structure:

The proposal of Esteban Chaves for Internal Administration is to have two levels of management: The Coordination / Administration and the Regional Board of Directors. This structure will not be intervened by the UCR administration as a contract will define it.

The Netboard decided the following standards must be taken in creating this internal administration:

1. Central American Board of Directors (Netboard) should be elected every three years. The transition of new proposals must be under an already elected Netboard to allow smooth transition.^{III}
2. As a pool for choosing who can be the electoral body for the Netboard an invitation should be made to all former NeTropica Grantees and KIRTS. Those who demonstrate interest in writing can become the electoral body. However to be chosen as a Board Member only those who have an active project at the moment of the elections can be candidates. Once chosen they can finish the three years term independently from the status of their Grant.^{IV}
3. Funds for the Netboard meetings must be allocated by the main administration of NeTropica and not from the Grantees budget.
4. NeTropica Coordinator: is the one who handles the daily aspects of NeTropica. Is the one who also writes the proposal to Sida/ SAREC. The Coordinator should have a minimum period of five years of compromise with NeTropica and participate in the training of the following Coordinator. Coordinator should not be receiving any Grants at the moment of assuming the post and cannot apply for a Grant during the Coordination post.

Some issues raised in relation with the Internal NeTropica administration as presented in the proposal included:

- Location of the Coordinator in Costa Rica / UCR. Is it possible to have NeTropica as part of the UCR, while the Coordinator is in a different country? (Appointing a general Secretary, for example). This is a subject still to be addressed.
- Creation of a critical mass of investigators capable to become Coordinators of such a project like NeTropica. That will help/ define the possibility of having the coordination of NeTropica traveling among Central American countries.
- NeTropica is not part of any entity, but is a fundraising project. Therefore the positions of Board Members / Coordinators are subject to this aspect.

3. Future Biennials of NeTropica:

New rules regarding the scholarships for participation in the NeTropica Biennials were proposed by the members of the Board. These rules are in the spirit of raising the quality control of the content of the Biennials and increasing the participation opportunities with fellowships, with competitions.

- Each fellow should have either an oral or poster presentation, approved by the Scientific Committee of the Biennial.^V
- The fellowships are open in three categories: former KIRT students, the NeTropica Grantees coinciding with the year of the Biennial and open public. The amount of funds available and the quantity of Grants will depend on the NeTropica applications, sponsors available.
- A process of evaluation and rules for the creation of Scientific Committees have to be established.

4. Creation of Scientific Focus for NeTropica:

For the next application period to Sida/ SAREC Esteban Chaves proposed that NeTropica should create a scientific focus with priority groups for research in the Region. The topics proposed are: (i) Chagas disease and trypanosomiasis, (ii) Envenomations and toxins, (iii) Bacterial zoonosis, (iv) Infectious diarrheas and (v) blood and arthropod transmitted viruses.

The rationale behind this is the need to have NeTropica specialized in subjects of research, allowing this way to create of a profile in Central America that can be attractive for funding not only to Sida/ SAREC but other organizations too.

The fundraising could be in relation with each subject. Priority sub-topics are expected to be presented to NeTropica as results of the meetings taken place on the 24th of February in Leon, by groups of scientists divided in the subjects according to specialization and interest.^{VI}

In an open discussion the following aspects were raised:

- The main focus of NeTropica should be to solve regional problems in a scientific way, whether this is by answering scientific questions or dealing with local community problems
- Subjects not included in the above mentioned five categories should not be excluded, if they are scientifically acceptable.
- Pilot funds can be included for projects that work with communities.

5. Call for Applications:

5.1. Starting with the Call 2005-2007, new rules will be added:

1. The grants will be of a maximum of US\$24,000, annually, per project for a maximum of two years. Final award of financial aid is subject to evaluation (quality of the project, activities description, time schedule & feasibility of the budget per laboratory networking). Disbursement of funds for the second year is subjected to a financial and progress report.
2. One Individual Investigator can participate in several proposals but can receive only one full grant and one partial grant.
A **full Grant** is considered the principal participation of the Investigator in a project.
A **partial Grant** can be of maximum of \$5000 per year and can include expenses only in categories of Laboratory Equipment, Consumables and Overhead.
3. It is encouraged to include a laboratory from a Swedish institute or university per project. Even though this aspect is not obligatory, external evaluators will be advised to consider this as a positive aspect for the project.
Budget available for Swedish collaboration \$8,000 for two years.
4. At the end of this grant (2005 – 2007) a publication/ manuscript per project will be requested.
5. Failure to present reports as requested may resolve into banning the investigator from any further grants of NeTropica.

Furthermore a creation of a manual from NeTropica to be used by the Grantees as an aid for their Financial reports is suggested. Each Grantee 2003 is encouraged to send to NeTropica a list of points to help to the creation of this manual. Deadline proposed is end^{VII} of May 2005.

5.2. For applications starting in 2007, further rules are suggested:

- Any renewal project will need to present a publication / manuscript in order to proceed.
- Any former Grantee in order to participate again to a call for applications starting from 2007 must show a publication / manuscript related to that previous Grant.

6. Master / PhD:

A form will be sent to all Grantees to submit for evaluation to NeTropica any MSc or PhD that they consider as of high quality and therefore eligible to receive students with Grants from NeTropica. This possibility will be available with after the new application to Sida/ SAREC. ^{VIII}

7. Next Netboard:

1. Current Netboard formation will be kept until the next proposal of NeTropica to Sida/ SAREC is approved. That is not to cause any delays in the preparation of the next proposal by changing board members
2. The creation of a pool for Board members has to be started, as stated in point 2.2
3. Next Netboard meeting can be arranged in Honduras during the year 2005, before the submission to Sida/ SAREC of the NeTropica proposal and in anticipation of the next Biennial Meeting, Honduras 2007.
4. Funds for participating in the next Netboard meeting should be paid through the administration of NeTropica and not through the grants of each individual participant.

End of the NetBoard Meeting.

León, 25 February 2005

NeTropica Coordinator in Central America:

Esteban Chaves Olarte

Notes taken by Program Assistant:

Christina Tsagaraki

ENDONOTES:

Summary of Actions to be taken as a result of this Netboard Meeting

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- ^I Establish new model of cooperation between NeTropica & KI.
[Chaves, Thelestam] [by end of August 2005]
- ^{II} New Sida/ SAREC proposal.
[Chaves, Thelestam] [by end of August 2005 – preproposal must be presented to Sida/ SAREC]
- ^{III} Create a chronogram of NeTropica activities in terms of: Proposal to Sida/ SAREC & expected duration of funds, Netboard duration & meetings, NeTropica Coordinator duration, Biennials, Call for Applications
[Chaves, Tsagaraki] [by end of August 2005]
- ^{IV} Create a pool of Scientists actively interested to NeTropica, through the KIRT & current and former NeTropica Grantees. Creation of an invitation form, database & a procedure to participate in future Administrative roles within NeTropica (e.g., Netboard).
[Chaves, Tsagaraki] [starting August 2005]
- ^V Scientific Committee of Biennials: Creation of instructions & suggestions.
[Chaves, Tsagaraki] [starting August 2005]
- ^{VI} Research Priorities for NeTropica: expected results deadline 1st of April 2005.
[Monroy, Pineda, Gutierrez, Herrero-Visona, Torres] [April 1st, 2005]
- ^{VII} Financial Reports Manual
[All Grantees 2003, Tsagaraki, Chaves] [Comments expected till end of May – Manual Ready September 2005]
- ^{VIII} MA/ PhD Application for Student Support Form:
[Chaves, Tsagaraki, to be completed by the interested entities] [August 2005]