



National Action Programme to Combat Desertification

Department of Land Conservation and Combat Desertification of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development

Digital Newsletter

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Leading Article

17 June: World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought



In 1995, the United Nations General Assembly declared June 17 the "World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought" ([resolution 49/115](#)), in commemoration of the first anniversary of the approval of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. This declaration intends to raise Nations' awareness so that they cooperate with this challenge which involves the whole planet.

Since then, this day is celebrated with a series of activities carried out in the Convention Party Countries, the organizations of the United Nations System, international and non-governmental organizations, and other interested parties. It is worth mentioning that the Convention is the only internationally recognized, legally binding instrument that addresses the problem of land degradation in drylands. In 1994, Argentina became member party of the Convention, which was ratified in 1996 by the National Congress, by Act Number 24701. Its enforcement authority regarding environment matters is the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development (SAyDS, for its name in Spanish) and, consequently, it is the Technical National Focal Point through the Department of Land Conservation and Fight against Desertification.

AGENDA

22-25 June: Esquel, Chubut
Workshop on the LADA Project
"Design of a Proposal for Training on Evaluation Methodologies".

29 June-3 July, Montevideo, Uruguay
UNCCD Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean
Preparatory Meeting for the Ninth Conference of the Parties (COP9).

We have received the Digital Newsletter N.º 1 made by the Forests Social Programme (ProSoBo, for its name in Spanish) of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development.

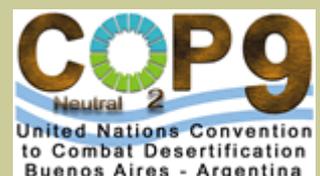
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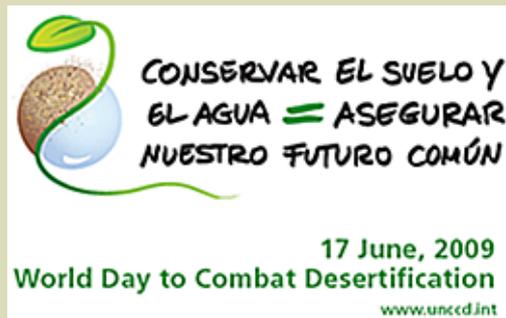
UNPD Project ARG/06/008
"Building Strategic Financial Partnerships to Consolidate The National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Argentina"



This year, the theme for the World Day to Combat Desertification is “**Conserving land and water = Securing our common future**”. As it has been stated in previous publications of the Digital Newsletter, the sense of security has changed. Nowadays, it involves the notion of man’s freedom and, in his way to reach it, the importance of the sustainable development of environment is acknowledged. Why? Because desertification, land degradation and drought threaten human security every time people are deprived of food, access to water and of the resources that allow them to maintain the economy of their homes. Thus, the failure of policies and climate change put on more pressure on land.

Thus, people leave villages –which weakens regional and national security– in search for places that allow them to work for a living. Most recent estimates indicate that the number of environmental displaced persons all over the world is about 17 and 24 million. It is expected that, by 2050, about 200 million people will have to migrate due to environmental matters.

Then, experts came to the conclusion that, in order to achieve the international community’s attention to the land security issue, two separate concepts, which in this case go hand in hand, should be considered. One of them is to ensure land, and the other one is security.



How is land ensured? By increasing the awareness of global policies in relation to the effects of desertification, land degradation and drought on populations’ life. In many countries with great extensions of drylands, fight against desertification and promotion of development go hand-in-hand due to the importance natural resources plays on the social economy and structure.

Land care and, consequently, the fight against desertification, should be understood as the starting point to reduce poverty and protect ecosystems. In this complex relation uniting environmental protection with security and economic development, Dr. Uwe Holtz, development consultant and member of the Expert Panel of the Distinguished Attendees of the Convention, affirms: “The world food problem cannot be solved without maintaining the four main soil functions, namely habitats for people, animals and plants, production, culture, and regulation. Soil has received and still receives, wrongly, too little attention. A soil protection policy needs greater significance and must be put on the political agenda”.

How is security maintained? Long, mid and short term proactive strategies are required to face soil insecurity and the effects related to climate change and biodiversity loss. Thus, the Desertification Synthesis of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (a study that dealt with essential issues such as the benefits of ecosystems for human beings, the changes produced and their consequences) recognizes that there should be a local approach and good territorial approach without ignoring both regional and global approaches. As regards the regional approach, there should be investments in human and social capital in order to acquire further knowledge about the functions and the management of ecosystems. As for the global approach, knowledge and technologies should be shared so as to benefit the whole planet.



A year to remember

The year 2006 was declared the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. Thus, the theme was introduced under a double idea: “The Beauty of Deserts, the Challenge of Desertification”. This idea showed how important is to differentiate between deserts, as unique ecosystems, and desertification, as the phenomenon that causes the loss of the land’s biological productivity.

Therefore, the rationale behind the declaration of the UN General Assembly was to put in first place the fact that desertification, year after year, forces people by the thousands to leave their lands, becoming millions of refugees. During that year, it was discussed the main risks of progressive desertification and the most effective measures to combat it. Through this declaration, all countries were invited to set up national committees or coordination centres in order to celebrate the Year by carrying out activities with regard to this them. Moreover, all pertinent international organizations and Member States were urged to support desertification-related activities. Countries were encouraged to get involved in any way possible and to undertake special initiatives to mark the Year, with the purpose of promoting the Convention’s implementation, etc.

In order to celebrate the International Year of Deserts and Desertification, the Education, Training and Public Awareness Area —created within the framework of PAN Argentina— made, together with the Correo Argentino, two seals and a postmark of the Issuance Day.



The role of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification

Desertification is the result of a combination of factors and, as such, its consequences also open up in different ways. That is why the Convention is not only concerned with the environment protection, the improvement of lands and the fight against soil erosion; but it was also singled out as a key instrument for poverty eradication, as it is interested in the sustainable development of rural areas. One of the Convention's goals is to reduce people's displacement to urban communities, in order to avoid marginalization, socio-economic disorders and economic instability. Moreover, it proposes participatory and democratic strategies based on communities, which promotes gender inclusion. It is also an efficient instrument for coordinating financial resources that come from multiple sources, and it is a legally-binding cooperation instrument, structured in different levels, which establishes a framework for the development of programmes related to the theme of desertification.

The fight against desertification is still barely known for many individuals; this can be told just from talking about it to a few acquaintances. According to Holtz, other people wrongly associates desertification with the deserts which already exist. Some things are known, as for example that biological diversity and indiscriminate deforestation should be controlled. Many people have heard about some subjects related to desertification, but they do not know much about it. Every 17 June, year after year, it is tried not only to make people know about the desertification problem, but also to raise awareness, promote attitudes of change and generate strong commitment from all parties involved.

Sources

* Dr Holtz, Uwe, "The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and its political dimension", document prepared for the Fifth Parliamentarians Forum, Bonn, 26 May, 2003

* United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

Briefs

Museum of Environmental Conscience, Desertification, Biodiversity and Climate Change "How to take care about something we do not know?"



From 17 June, *Fundación Agreste* will present a travelling exhibition made up of a selection of posters of the Museum of Environmental Conscience. Furthermore, some lectures will be given by the Foundation's representatives.

All events will take place at 6 p.m. Presentation dates and places are as follows:

.-17 June: Alfonsina Storni Cultural Centre (Tucumán 3233).

.-1 July: La Usina Santo Cultural Centre (Domingo 2752).

.-15 July: Fortunato Lacamera Cultural Centre (San Juan 353).

- .-6 August: Nuestra Tierra Cultural Centre (Iriarte and Montesquieu).
- .-20 August: Villa Devoto Cultural Centre (Nueva York 4169).
- .-26 August: Julio Cortázar Cultural Centre (O' Higgins 3050).
- .-3 September: Belgrano R Cultural Centre (Pampa 3850).
- .-17 September: Lino E. Spilimbergo Cultural Centre (Roque Pérez 3545).
- .-24 September: Lola Mora Cultural Centre (Río de Janeiro 946).
- .-30 September: Discepolín Cultural Centre (Tronador 4134).
- .-7 October: Roberto Arlt Cultural Centre (Avellaneda 2547).
- .-22 October: Colegiales Cultural Centre (Conde 943).

Note

Interview Ing. Agr. Octavio Perez Pardo

In the framework of the commemoration of the International Day of Fight against Desertification and Drought, Agricultural Engineer Octavio Perez Pardo, Director of the Department of Land Conservation and Fight against Desertification of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development of the Argentine Republic, reviews the issues related to the implementation process of the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification (PAN, for its name in Spanish).



Which are PAN's goals and strategic guidelines?

PAN's goal was integrated to the National Development Strategy Argentina is working in. In this sense, PAN's strategy, since its beginning, attempts to interact and work on strategic alliances with the different areas of the national, provincial and municipal government and with the actors of both the civil society and the private sector.

In relation to the strategic guidelines we are working in at present and which are prioritized by the national Government, we can mention for example: the **fight against poverty**, through an integration agreement with the programmes managed by the Ministry of Social Development; the **search for sustainable production alternatives**, related to the work carried out by the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food, and by its technological arm, the National Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA, for its name in Spanish); the **scientific-technological framework**, with strategies related to the evaluation of land degradation and to the elements to be transferred, such as the good-use technologies or the sustainable management of land by the *National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET, for its name in Spanish) and its dependent institutes, as for example, the Institute of Arid Lands Research (IADIZA, for its name in Spanish) or the National Patagonic Centre (CENPAT, for its name in Spanish)*

Furthermore, we are supported by the technical guidelines of applied research conducted by several universities in the country. In this framework, we have entered into agreements with the national universities of Santiago del Estero, Córdoba, Comahue, Jujuy and of Buenos Aires, just to mention some examples.

Another PAN's main pillar is its relation with the non-governmental sector. In this sense, the International Network of NGOs on Desertification (RIOD, for its name in Spanish). PAN is also connected with other organizations that, although they are not members of this network, carry out activities related to the fight against desertification, as for example, training aimed at different levels, and awareness.

As regards the development of synergistic projects that combine desertification, climate change and biodiversity, we have signed an agreement with the National Secretariat of Energy to carry out the National Renewable Project in Rural Markets (PERMER, for its name in Spanish).

PAN's decentralization

As ruled by the Argentine Constitution —which states that provincial states are the primary jurisdiction of natural resources—, it is intended to move forward in the forming policies and strategies of Provincial Action Programmes to Combat Desertification.

At present, there are several provinces that are making progress on forming provincial committees to fight against desertification and that have adopted new guidelines —which keep on getting stronger— related to the fight against desertification with the private activity sector. In this sense, we can mention supply or product providers who are related to the sustainable management of land and companies which support projects connected with the proper water management, the good use of land or with applied technology.

Which are the cooperation guidelines?

Another important PAN's line of action is related to regional, subregional and international cooperation. In this sense, the last agreements are being outlined in order to carry out a project which will be financially supported by the European Union. Moreover, we are about to launch the Plan for the Sustainable Development of the American Great Chaco with Bolivia and Paraguay, which, after several negotiations and discussions, is to be approved by GEF.

Furthermore, we are interacting with the World Mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which we have called Integrated Financial Strategies. This means that we have to identify national, regional and international sources to combat desertification, since we consider that the institutional spaces of the National State's different agencies —as those of the provincial and municipal governments, and the participation of the area of small, medium and big producers and of other sectors, such as the organized civil society— play a leading and strategic role to keep alive policies to combat desertification.

Thus, short-term actions are carried out, but we bear in mind that success is measured in the mid and long run. It is essential to take into account that the fight against desertification do not respect the established electoral or political terms and that an efficient programme exceed provincial and municipal negotiations. Due to this reason, the strategic partners' participation is vital for giving the action further continuance.

Moreover, we have signed agreements with cooperation organizations through integrated experts. In the Department I am in charge of, there is an expert provided by the German General Cooperation in order to work on joint issues which deals with desertification and climate change. These matters are directly related, as we believe that the countries which suffer desertification are double affected by greenhouse gases that causes negative impacts on the management of natural resources and, specially, on land.

At the same time, we are conducting activities together with different cooperation organizations, through small donations to local civil organizations, in order to develop projects. In this point, we emphasize the project contest organized with GEF/UNDP to manage water in the Puna area, as well as the agreement entered into with the national headquarters of the Coca-Cola Company for the financing of projects related to water access.

Projects

As it has been already mentioned in previous publications of the Digital Newsletter, there are different projects in process, such as Patagonia GEF, which has adopted a Sustainable Land Management Strategy from La Pampa to Tierra del Fuego. All the region's provinces, INTA, Patagonian science and technology sectors and local producers are involved into this project.

Another example is LADA Project, which carries on a system for desertification monitoring and assesment at national level in pursuit of relating it with an assesment at regional and global level. In the framework of this project, it is being developed not only a series of indicators to assess desertification —with national institutions and some non-governmental organizations—, but also national and provincial monitoring units, and good-practice measures for agricultural use in each of the regions.

How are lines of work related?

Through the different meetings held by the National Advisory Commission (CAN, for its name in Spanish), which relates all the above-mentioned areas, several recommendations are developed, such as the problem of the advancement of the agricultural frontier or the need of integrating the desertification issue or of sustainable rural development, in the science and technology system.

At present, we are working on a document about water management in dry areas, where the theme of water intake and use is a strategic value.

CAN's meetings are held 3 or 4 times a year. A larger number of public and private institutions, and organizations of the civil society participate in each of these meetings, with the purpose of joining this process and working on the search for permanent mid-and-long term policies that are able to overcome the circumstantial changes of Government.

Which is the international agenda?

In the international environment, we are organizing the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), in which the Argentine Republic showed its interest in being the host country. This motion was approved.

We would like to emphasize the importance this event has, not only for our country, but also for the whole world. It is a great challenge to celebrate an event of such characteristics, where over 2500 participants from the 193 Member Countries of the Convention, different NOGs and producers' organizations, among others, shall attend, and where the problem of land degradation and management will be strongly discussed. And all this will take place two months away from COP 15 on Climate Change that will be held in Copenhagen.

OUR PEOPLE



**Marco Antonio Ferrero,
member of ADARSA**

He is Pro-Secretary of the "Friends of San Antonio River" Association (ADARSA, for its name in Spanish), an environmentalist organization founded in 1998.

ADARSA's main purpose is to create innovative perspectives and strategies in both the public and private decisions for the region's sustainable development. At the same time, it intends to encourage the interrelation of all social actors in the area in order to promote scientific researches and actions that make possible a sustainable social and economic project. Furthermore, ADARSA works to ensure that these actions be transferred to the population, in order to be applied to it.

With the COP9 fulfillment, the Argentine Republic will be the first country that is not Convention host to hold high-level international meetings and include, with this, all the Conventions, as it previously hosted COP3 on Biologic Diversity and COP4 and 10 on Climate Change. This shows the commitment level our country has in environmental issues.

In this opportunity, Argentina, as host country, will be President of COP9. Therefore, the country's role will be to conduct the discussion and aspire to capture the developed countries' obligations and to consolidate both the responsibilities and duties of the affected developing countries. This important role also poses a challenge on other subjects, such as the relation between the fight against desertification and the adaptation of dry lands to climate change; the task of estimating the negative effects desertification has on arid and semi-arid lands; and the direct impact on vulnerable lands.

We are aware that this will not be an easy discussion: there are many conflicting interests between developed and developing countries, there are points of views which are not necessarily common, there are duties and responsibilities that will be reviewed in order to consider its achievement status. Therefore, we intend that, in this 15 days, in Buenos Aires, it can be established more clearly where we are, where we should go in relation to this theme at international level and which the strategy to combat desertification is, according to the issue to be discussed in December, in Copenhagen.

The problems of the fight against desertification are related to those of climate change. Anyway, all the subjects involved in this relation will not be discussed in Copenhagen, since all the technological transfer, the training in technologies which makes a proper use of land and the support for development in order to reduce poverty levels that attempt against degradation –all this being considered mainly from the point of view of reducing or mitigating greenhouse gases– are not the main subjects to be deal with in the Convention that will be held in the previously mentioned city. The fact of thinking that in Copenhagen the problem of desertification will be solved is a simplification that we do not accept. Although we consider that there is a strong relation with the adaptation to climate change in particular, there are other commitments with the assistance to development, poverty reduction, migrations or transfer of technologies that will not be discussed in the COP on Climate Change, but they will in the UNCCD scope.

At present, ADARSA is formed by neighbours from the five towns of South Punilla: San Antonio de Arredondo, Mayú Sumaj, Icho Cruz, Tala Huasi and Cuesta Blanca.

This NGO works in everything related to the protection of the San Antonio River basin, which, together with the Los Chorrillos and Cosquín rivers, forms the "water tank of the city of Córdoba and the greater Córdoba area", from which over 3 million inhabitants are supplied.

Likewise, ADARSA is part of RIOD Argentina as an Alternate Sub-national Focal Point. It also conducts, in different schools in the area, several sensitization campaigns, such as those aimed at combating desertification, preventing fires, achieving environmental urban ordering, etc.

For more information please visit www.adarsa.org.ar

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