



## 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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Combat Desertification in  
Argentina".

### Leading Article

## Desertification and rural development in dry lands



**A**rgentina has such a vast territory that invites to live different climates, from temperate to subtropical to even cold weather. However, this diversity causes a spatial shape that brings about unbalanced rural development, with places that shelter communities integrated by rural inhabitants who have different idiosyncrasies. According to what biologist Ricardo Bareiro expressed to the Digital Newsletter, this unevenness among regions is accentuated by the economic agricultural and livestock export model of the country, as the participation of the Humid Pampa, for its natural characteristics, is not the same as that of other inland regions that suffer adverse weather conditions.

As it has been shown throughout the different issues of the Digital Newsletter, poverty is in tune with degraded rural areas. That is how a higher percentage of extreme poverty is concentrated in the rural sector: a great part of rural poor people live in areas in which land is dry, fragile and with scarce potential. Who are included in this poverty sector? According to the IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), this sector mainly includes small agriculture owners who lack access to markets, credit and technical assistance; indigenous groups living in unfavourable environments; rural women with no or low income who are household heads; rural workers and landless peasants that are seasonal workers.

### AGENDA



**7-14 december, Copenhagen, Denmark**  
United Nations Climate Change Conferencia (COP 15).

**14-18 December, Faculty of Exact Sciences, Engineering and Land Surveying, National University of Rosario**  
Entry-level Intensive Course on Geographic Information Systems.

For more information please visit:

<http://posgrado.fceia.unr.edu.ar>

**Contest of Projects on Land Conservation, organized by the Argentine Association of Soil Science**

Until 10 March, 2010, it is open the call.

For more information please visit: [www.suelos.org.ar](http://www.suelos.org.ar)

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## The threat of desertification

Desertification emphasizes the problems in arid land areas, as it contributes to continuous land degradation. This entails multiple problems, such as the loss of traditional production systems, migrations and social exclusion. In Argentina, this phenomenon has great influence on the rural development in dry lands. Let's think that 75% of its territory —made up of arid, semi-arid and sub-humid dry areas— is at desertification risk. According to the agroecological classification (NAC —National Advisory Committee—, 2002), there are dry land areas in the following regions: the Chaco region (arid, semiarid and subhumid), the Puna region, the Valles Áridos region, the West Central region and the Patagonian region.

### What are dry lands?



Dry lands are those arid, semi-arid and subhumid dry areas that show a relationship between annual rainfall and potential evapotranspiration ranging between 0,05 and 0,65.

This dryness index is often within the indicated values when the isohyet is lower than 600 mm of rainfall.

In Argentina, one of the main factors that causes desertification is the advance of the agricultural strip, when promoted together with single-crop farming, inappropriate agricultural practices, overgrazing and deforestation. In turn, the same extensive practices aimed at increasing land incomes in the short term cause a loss of productivity in the long term. Bareiro points out that current productive systems, mainly extensive cattle breeding, are not adapted to the environmental capacities of many areas. As stocking rate exceeded both the availability and the capacity of local ecosystems, they were degraded to the extent of causing permanent damage. Consequently, current productivity levels are considerably lower than the actual potential of the area. Due to this and other reasons, populations are forced to leave and this causes migrations.

## The role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Agricultural engineers Daniel Tomasini and Octavio Pérez Pardo —in a working paper elaborated for the Conference on Development of Rural Economies in Latin America and the Caribbean: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources, Land Access and Rural Finance— described the unflattering scenario for dry lands within a framework of investments for development, in which there are areas with greater environmental potential. However, they pointed out the existence of numerous investment opportunities in these areas, which, within the framework of projects for small producers' and peasants' sustainable development, show that the efficiency level of the capital invested in this kind of productive-environmental project can reach highly positive values.

The role of international cooperation and financing is essential to ensure the success of the implementation of comprehensive-nature programmes, such as those to combat desertification and to promote rural development. To this end, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, through the implementation of the National Action Programmes (NAP), comprehensively helps to face poverty and environment problems in dry areas. Thus, the three key elements in the development process —economy, environment and society—, are integrated effectively.

According to engineers Tomasini and Perez Pardo, in the process of rural development for dry lands, high-priorities objectives exist for the allocation of resources. These are:

\* **Productivity Increase.** To achieve this goal, small producers require certain tools that allow them to increase production. Among these tools are adaptable and appropriate technology generation and transfer —including dry land inhabitants' traditional techniques—, drought-resistant cultivation, efficient water management, sustainable management of grazing lands, improvement of the drought early warning systems, normalization and improvement of the issues related to the resource possession, development of opportunities for investing in small irrigation projects, rural microfinancing systems and development of supply and product markets.

\* **Improvement of access to land.** It is necessary to increase the security of the resource possession and the efficiency of land market.

\* **Development of financial services.**

\* **Sustainable management of resources.**

\* **Promotion of non-agricultural rural productive activities**

## Promotion of Regional Crafts in the Process to Combat Desertification and Poverty. Project "Knowledge and Secrets of Dry Lands"

In the search for the development of rural areas in dry land regions, there is also space for craft production. This is how the above-mentioned project was developed in order to promote the participation of both local communities and vulnerable sectors.

This project gave birth to handcrafted weaves made with hand-spun wools and natural dyes from the forests of the region.

The beneficiaries of the project that, besides, promotes equitable gender participation and strategic alliances among governments, companies and organizations, were 23 women from the Yanasa Group who make loom knitting. In addition to them, there were other 19 women, who belong to different spots of Atamisqui department, Santiago del Estero, Argentina.



### NAC Recommendations

On 27 and 28 November 2008, in the facilities of the Technological Scientific Centre, in Mendoza city, it was held the XII Meeting of the National Advisory Committee within the framework of the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification. This meeting was attended by authorities of the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development, of the National Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA, for its name in Spanish), of the South American Network of NGO's working with Drug Addicts (RIOD, for its name in Spanish), of Small Producers from the northwestern area of the Republic of Argentina, of the National Indigenous Rural Movement and of the Undersecretariat of Rural Development and Family Farming of the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Fish and Food. In this meeting, it was strengthened the "Trigger Document on Rural Development in Dry Lands in Argentina, last version", which gave origin to the NAC Third Recommendation Document, which is related to the Rural Development in Dry Lands. These recommendations focus on the strengthening coordination and participation processes involving rural inhabitants through their own representative organizations; consolidating the conditions to achieve territorial ordering that promotes environmental health; controlling land possession to ensure settlement of dry land populations; strengthening infrastructure for settlers to have access to public services; redirecting the different social actors' education and training in pursuit of achieving sustainable development in the rural environment; rescuing traditional knowledge and experience; promoting the diversification of productive activities; acknowledging water as a strategic, limited and critical resource that requires guarantees for its preservation, management; etc.

As the NAC points out in the Trigger Document, the path for rural development should be based on strengthening and rebuilding economic and social capacity, by means of the necessary tools and knowledge to carry out productive activities that take into account the reasonable use of natural resources and environment preservation.

"A rural sustainable development strategy should consider a new social agreement, based on the idea that it is essential both the eradication of poverty and the inclusion of helpless people into a productive. Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge the relevant role rurality plays in society, its joint economy and general growth (...). Building this new rurality requires the full and democratic participation of all actors: the Government, local communities, NGOs and producers' associations. (...). In order to achieve this new sustainable development from the social, political and environmental point of view, it is required to adapt the normative framework, the economic policy and tax rules, as well as to incorporate new production technologies, agroindustries and clean energy systems. With all these supplies, an appropriate policy is established for the agricultural and the rural sector".



In Argentina there are different initiatives related to rural development in dry lands. Among them, it is worth mentioning the building of community dams in 9 de Julio Department, Santa Fe province, an area in hydric emergency and whose main sustenance comes from cattle breeding and farming activities. Karina Kasprzyk, who belongs to the communication department of the National Undersecretariat of Family Agriculture, Santa Fe Local Office, told us about this project, which was developed with the aim of mitigating the drought situation that different rural settlements in the areas have been suffering for four years. This project that was born and implemented this year enables to build dams in the community of Las Quinientas. In order to become independent from local rains during dry periods, it was taken into account that dams should be built near roads, so as their ditches could be used to collect water. Thanks to this work, the 81 families living in the area will be able to improve both their harvest and water management during prolonged drought periods (as the current one), and to have water for human consumption. In addition to this, they will be able to avoid moving from one place to another, which results in cattle death. The project is still larger and different works are being carried out in other settlements.



Day after day, land degradation, aggravated by climate change and desertification, is a problem that urges to be solved. Thus, in Argentina, as well as all around the world, the poor are the most affected; as they depend on land for their subsistence activities. As Bareiro expresses, subsistence agriculture is self-sufficiency farming in which small producers grow only enough food to meet their needs and for their own consumption. Their activities are work-based and not capital-based, as they produce for consuming rather than for earning profits. Their workforce is family-provided; they have scant resources, few hectares and production output (for example, sheep raising in the Puna, fruit growing and cotton culture in Tucumán, etc.).

Every year, degradation implies a cost of thousand dollars, which reduces the agricultural GDP percentage of numerous countries. In Argentina, it is estimated that land degradation causes a 1000 million dollar loss and the consequent life quality worsening, poverty, hunger and insecurity. Among the multiple UNCCD recommendations is to take into account the decisions of land users, who should participate in the search for solutions, as well as receive responsibilities, incentives and information.

## Briefs

### Third Water Contest Final results, October, 2009

The Contest was launched by Coca-Cola Argentina and the Foundation for Wildlife (Fundación Vida Silvestre, FVSA), with the support of the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development. In this Contest, 51 projects were submitted. This amount has noticeably increased in relation to that of 2008.

The Final Evaluation Committee was made up by Maurice Rumboll (FVSA Administrative Council), Engineer Miguel Gómez (Coordinator of the Office of Water of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development (SAyDS, for its name in Spanish)), and by Dr. *Alicia Fernández Cirelli* (Director of the *Centre of Trans-Disciplinary Studies on Water*, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, University of Buenos Aires).

In the \$200,000 category, the winning project was "Water and Life for El Alfarcito", submitted by Santa Rita Parish, located in Salta province. This project will benefit 237 inhabitants of El Alfarcito, a small town which must face the challenge of living in dry areas.

The project goals are clear and specific:

1. To revert El Alfarcito's water deficit and to meet the health care needs of the school age population (both elementary and high school).
2. To promote both economic sustainable support and life quality improvement, besides offering an efficient opportunity for social integration.
3. To encourage development in order to make easier definitive settlement in these lands.

The proposed actions for the project are: design and execution of water intake works (local execution and contracted technical management), and training of local staff for operation and maintenance of the Drinking Water Supply System for El Alfarcito.

Furthermore, the winning project in the \$100,000 category was "Sustainable Management of Water Resources in the Original Community of Cueva del Inca", submitted by the Aboriginal Community of Cueva del Inca, Villa Florida, Tilcara, Jujuy province.



The project purposes are:

1. To make the community adopt a new water-management-related culture based on conservation and awareness.
2. To promote the restoration and recovery of the Andean ecosystem.
3. To strengthen agricultural systems by using native plants.

The proposed actions are: water-conducting trench cover, building of 3 water-retaining deposits, water-channelling works, seedling placement and floor-strata building.



We would like to thank the work, the commitment and the seriousness of those who participated in the Third Water Contest. As from the beginning, each new stage of the contest will be spread and supported through the Digital Newsletter.

### **Institutional Representatives**

## **UNPD Project ARG/06/008 “Building Strategic Financial Alliances to Consolidate the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Argentina (PAN Argentina, for its name in Spanish)” between the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development, the UNCCD World Mechanism and the United Nations Development Programme**

**S**ince 2007, the Department of Land Conservation and Fight against Desertification of the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development has been carrying out the implementation of this project. The purpose is to deepen the execution of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Argentina. Furthermore, this project –which is part of the PAN Argentina agenda– allows to generate an institutional framework in accordance with the needs of the programme and with the mobilization of local and international resources, aimed at its operation. For such purpose, the project allocates its funds in pursuit of three specific results:

.-To have a strengthened National Coordination Agency, which is able to negotiate financing and to integrate the fight against desertification into sectorial policies. This allows the National Advisory Committee (CAN, for its name in Spanish) of the Programme to have greater operational efficiency and better sectorial and regional participation.

.-To implement a resource mobilization strategy through a multiinstitutional platform in order to ensure PAN financing by means of strategic alliances with both national governmental and non-governmental sectors and with different international cooperation institutions.

.-To create a designed, validated and in-implementation National Financial Mechanism to combat desertification.



The project expects governmental authorities, non-governmental organizations and local populations in arid and semi-arid areas, together with its community organizations, to gain experience and have financial tools and availability of funds to be used more efficiently, so as to solve the problems of degradation in dry lands.

### **Some of the products obtained by the activities generated by the project:**

.-Establishment of improvements and new relations with PAN key partners, both in the public and private sectors, as well as with scientific and academic institutions.

.-Strengthening of the relation between the National Coordination Agency and Civil society. Consolidation of the NGO network and the support of its member organizations.

.-Improvement of the CAN operation during its intersessional periods and the Committee approach to the UNCCD processes.

.-A new strategy to disseminate activities, calls and all relevant information of the National Coordination Agency.

.-Development of financial tools to combat desertification: Practical Guideline for the creation and administration of a revolving fund to fight against desertification.

.-Creation of strategic alliances through entering into institutional cooperation agreements for resource mobilization. It is worth pointing out the agreements entered into with the Ministry of Social Development and with the Renewable Energy Project for the Rural Market (PERMER, for its name in Spanish) of the Secretariat of Energy. This is in addition to the alliances created with a private company for the financing of initiatives by grassroots organizations in dry lands to access to water, as well as different GEF projects in dry lands.



### Strengthening of Communication

The project, framed within its activities, supports the monthly publication of this Digital Newsletter, which has elaborated 17 issues so far during half and a year of uninterrupted work. These issues can be found both in Spanish and English languages, and they are published in the website of the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development. The spread of the Newsletter is achieved through an interactive database with over 3000 contact e-mail addresses and which is permanently updated and installed in the National Focal Point. This activity has made possible the exchange of data and information, while at the same time, it has produced an increase in spreading events related with the fight against desertification.

The project would like to deeply thank the support received from the different institutions which have participated, as well as from the implementer agencies. Moreover, the project emphasizes that the goals achieved so far are very important in this PAN consolidation stage, especially in the light of the new UNCCD Ten-year Strategy. Furthermore, one of the challenges of the project —and of all the institutions involved in the fight against desertification—, is the creation, in the next few years, of an investment integrated framework enabling proper and foreseeable financing that allows the development of dry lands in the Argentine Republic.



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