



National Action Programme to Combat Desertification

Department of Land Conservation and Combat Desertification 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"

Leading Article

The role of international cooperation organizations in the fight against desertification



"Cooperation is not the lack of conflict, but the means to solve it".

Deborah Tannen

(Linguist, expert in communication and professor at Georgetown University)

Desertification is caused by a wide range of factors that affect the environment. If this problem is originated by several reasons, solutions should also respond to multiple, cooperative and organized participation.

So, in order to mitigate the effects of desertification, it is necessary to ask for the help of international cooperation organizations. Thus, it is possible to achieve that dry land rehabilitation and restoration activities endure through time and can be financed in a constant way. This is to ensure the conservation, planning and use of dry land resources, as well as to improve populations' livelihood.

Different sectors should take action for the effective implementation of both Chapter 12 of Agenda 21 ([United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992](#)) and the Convention to Combat Desertification. In this point, a greater coordination is required between donors and technical cooperation organizations —to support national efforts and the training and effective use of national human resources— and a greater technical cooperation towards developing countries.

AGENDA

22-24 september, Cochabamba, Bolivia
First National Agroforestry Congress.

23-24 september, 3101 Cerviño St., Autonomous City of Buenos Aires
Espatial Technology of Land Observation in Espatial Technology of Land Observation in the Assessment, Monitoring and Management of Natural Disasters in Agriculture. Challenges and Perspectives".

29 September-1 October, Denizli, Turquía
International Workshop on Urbanisation, Land Use, Land Degradation and Environment (ULE2009).



The role of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development (SAyDS, for its name in Spanish) —as national focal point in the fight against desertification and as enforcement authority of [Law 24.701](#)— is related to its institutional conception as the body in charge of coordinating and executing the State's environment-related policies through the [Department of Land Conservation and Fight Against Desertification](#). Thus, the SAyDS should conceive and promote international environmental agreements.

Some international allies

According to the Ministry of **Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship**, international technical cooperation is the supply of human and financial resources intended for transferring technical, administrative and technological capacity, with the purpose of creating capacity in recipient countries, for carrying out development activities. Some of the resources international technical cooperation makes use of to achieve their goals are training by sending experts and receiving internships, and equipment donation. The articulation of these resources sets the challenge of ensuring that the goals achieved last in time after the end of each cooperation programme.

As it has been stated at the beginning of this article, the desertification theme requires the support of different organizations so as to carry out the strategies which allow both to make the world aware and to mitigate its consequent effects, such as poverty. Some of the activities conducted by coordination organizations are financial counselling, offer of information as well as of a neutral meeting space, specialized knowledge provision, technical assistance related to national plans and priorities, contribution to human development, and fund management, among others. As example of the latter activity, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has country offices in 166 countries, mobilizes and manages the funds contributed by the member countries themselves. Argentina is one its members. The number of projects the UNDP carries out in Argentina is 17. Among them, it is worth pointing out that of the building of financial-strategic alliances for consolidating the National Action Programme against Desertification (PAN-ARGENTINA, for its name in Spanish). The purpose of this project is to deepen the UNCCD implementation in Argentina through a process of updating the PAN intervention agenda. During this process, it is intended to integrate its strategy with the agricultural and rural sectors, as well as to promote the environmental-policy strengthening and the mobilization of resources (both local and international) aimed at financing it. The project began on September, 2006 and will end on the last day of 2010.

Another cooperation task and joint work that deserves to be pointed out is the project called "Sustainable Management of Arid and Semi-arid Ecosystems in Patagonia, Argentina, GEF*-Patagonia". Its general purpose is to control desertification in Extra-Andean Patagonia through the implementation of practices for sustainable land management (SLM), aiming at recovering ecosystems in their full integrity, stability and functions within a context of sustainable regional development. Thus, it is intended to obtain different results, such as to establish a system for protected areas and for degraded land recovery, aimed at preserving natural and cultural resources (with rural guardians), and at obtaining new information for improving the specifications related to Patagonian ecosystem conservation and sustainable use.

The GEF, together with another cooperation organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), is globally coordinating the GEF/FAO project "Global land degradation assessment" (GLADA). Argentina is one of the seven countries in which this project is being carried out.



The task of this and other world cooperative organizations is essential to mitigate desertification. Innovations in different fields —economic, political, institutional—, and in the market can produce changes and create opportunities through latent possibilities. For this, it is necessary to know what to choose among a whole series of cooperation instruments and mechanisms, such as microfinance, land care cooperation, credit and marketing associations, organizations gathering multiple interested parties, infrastructure improvements, etc. Thus, people's talent and interest in improving land vitality are strengthened. A 2008 UNCCD report states that, lately, there has been an increase in countries' efforts and a certain level of external cooperation to cope with the problems caused by desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD). However, these efforts are still limited although there is a greater awareness to understand the relation between these factors and poverty, natural disasters, climate change adaptation and loss of biological biodiversity. The UNCCD considers that achieving sustainable management of drylands and of other natural resources is within the scope of all multilateral environmental agreements. In order to set national policies that reverse the DLDD process, it is necessary to identify effective answers, concrete measures and leader-quality relevant cooperation allies. Thus, the DLDD should be one of the priorities as regards cooperation. The UNCCD also points out that the development of both donor profiles and of an international-cooperation network will create a specific interest in the external financing field for the achieving of the UNCCD goals.

Then, there is no doubt that the UNCCD philosophy shows and is based on participation for development. Cooperation requires the commitment of every link in the chain, from national action programmes, which promote local participation, to support multinational organizations. This is how every programme should promote policies that strengthen the institutional frameworks that develop cooperation and coordination, with a spirit of solidarity, between donors, government and local people. And always with a planning idea that is not then forgotten, but that remains in time.

*GEF (Global Environment Facility) or its name in Spanish, *Fondo para el Medio Ambiente Mundial (FMAM)*. It is a global partnership among 178 countries, international institutions, non-governmental organizations and the private sector

Sources

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- * Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship.
- * UNCCD, Compendium for individuals in charge of policies.
- * UNCCD, "Policies to cope with the processes of desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD), aimed at the strengthening of the role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)", 2008.
- * Secretariat for the Convention to Combat Desertification, Down to Earth, 2008.

Briefs

Nuevo Cuyo Regional Strategy to Combat Desertification



On 28 July, 2009, in the Civic Centre of the city of San Juan, there was a meeting between representatives of the Department of Land Conservation and Fight against Desertification and environmental authorities of the provinces that form the Nuevo Cuyo region (San Rioja, Mendoza, San Juan and San Luis). The purpose of this meeting was to discuss about joint strategic actions and to analyze the elaboration of an Action Programme.

In the above-mentioned meeting, an Agreement was signed in order to carry out a Nuevo Cuyo Regional Strategy to Combat Desertification. This strategy will be aimed at, among other purposes, creating a coordination sphere to strengthen the application of local action plans of fighting against desertification and, through joint initiatives, of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

At the same time, the parties commit themselves to exchange information as provided in the Environmental Federal Council. Moreover, it will be possible to submit initiatives for carrying out research works to fulfil projects of common concern.

Interview to Alejandro Kilpatrick, Programme Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Global Mechanism

What is your opinion about the role of the international cooperation in the UNCCD implementation?

International cooperation plays a key role in supporting the UNCCD implementation in all its aspects, through the strengthening of capacities, technology transfers and of financial support that contributes to design and carry out actions that are directly related to the UNCCD implementation.

When it comes to international cooperation, it must be considered a wide range of institutions, such as the United Nations agencies, the bilateral and multilateral cooperation –especially through development banks–, besides philanthropic foundations and the big international NGOs, which should be also taken into account.

Acknowledging the important role of international cooperation, it is still necessary to strengthen the understanding of the different actors on the UNCCD, in the sense that both the Convention itself and its implementation are not yet fully integrated into the strategies, the programmes and into the international cooperation projects. This is why we consider that efforts should be continued by the UNCCD community (Country Parties' officials, Convention institutions and the delegates themselves of the International Cooperation agents that participate in the Convention) in order to position the issues related to land degradation, desertification and to the Convention itself through arguments that show, on one side, that land degradation, desertification and drought are themes that arise from the purely environmental sphere and, on the other, that they have serious implications to move forward in development and poverty relief of the affected populations. Consequently, to invest in the UNCCD implementation is a way of contributing directly to improve the life conditions of millions of people. Moreover, it should be strengthened the understanding that the Convention is a valuable international instrument to guide these investments and, therefore, it deserves a greater attention.

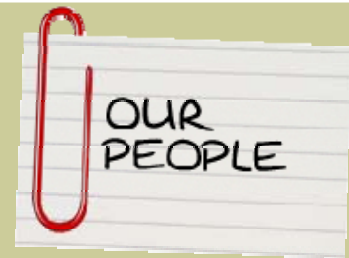
What are the existing financial resources to combat desertification?

It is difficult to specify an exact number of the national and global resources that are currently allocated to combat desertification. This is due to the mainstreaming between several aspects of this theme, as the fight against desertification is shown in the different actions carried out by a variety of areas, in an equally wide range of institutions, both governmental and of another kind. For example, actions such as rain water intake or improvement of irrigation systems that, in a certain way, are actions to combat desertification. The same can be said of actions to introduce seed varieties tolerant to drought, afforestation and reforestation programmes or projects to stop saline intrusion in low-lying coastal areas. All before mentioned contributes or may contribute, without any doubt, to fight against desertification. However, the programmes designed for these purposes are not generally "labelled" as tools to combat this scourge and, in very few occasions, are conducted within the framework of the UNCCD or its application instruments, such as PANs (acronym in Spanish for National Action Programmes) or Subregional Action Programmes.

Through that, it is hard to quantify the resources in which investments are being made. If the aforesaid is taken into account, it could be considered substantial. However, the UNCCD implementation as such still receives a very small part of the total financing. GEF is one of the few cases in which we can have an exact figure: anyone can visit their website and know exactly how much there is available and how much has been invested, as there is a specific operational programme that finances projects to fight against desertification. However, it is well known that, although being an important contribution, these resources are not enough due to the scale of the problem. In my opinion, this is a key topic in the Convention discussions. Considering that the fifth GEF replenishment is currently being planned, this is a right moment for the UNCCD actors to achieve a better positioning of the Convention themes and, thus, achieve a greater resource allocation to the desertification operational programme.

What is the importance of financial supports?

It is necessary to differentiate between two kinds of financial supports. In a first category, we find catalytic supports, that is to say, the lower-scale financial resources that are used to support processes which create the enabling conditions for a more substantial resource mobilization. This is the kind of resources the Global Mechanism (GM) executes to support national and/or subregional processes. In the second category, there are financial supports for investments, that is to say, those substantial resources that support the direct execution of projects on the ground, such as the GEF or public budget resources that support the



**Héctor Aníbal Billoni,
President of the National
University Foundation of
Southern Patagonia
(FUNPA, for its name in
Spanish)**



This Foundation –whose head office is in the Main Campus of the National University of Southern Patagonia in Río Gallegos, Santa Cruz province– was born in 2003 with the aim of *strengthening* FUNPA's operational capability in non-strictly academic activities and which require an agile and dynamic management. The Foundation is made up of the academic senate and representatives of the private sector engaged in the different actions aimed at capitalizing potentials for the development of the region.

Since 2005, FUNPA has been part of the International Network of NGOs on Desertification (RIOD, for its name in Spanish) as a Patagonian Regional Focal Point, together with the *Arte y Parte* Foundation in Chubut province. To the date, FUNPA has initiated the accreditation process in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

FUNPA's central work themes are: to discuss and to elaborate proposals aimed at defining policies for sustainable development; to make coordination easier between the communities affected by both the degradation processes in arid lands and the governmental programmes; to promote, through information and experience exchange, synergies between NGOs and grassroots organizations, while actions against desertification and poverty are strengthened.

Besides being the President of the Foundation's Board of Directors, Engineer

What is the role of the integrated investment frameworks and the financial strategic alliances? Actions and experiences of the GM.

One of the most important aspects of the Decade Strategy, as regards financing, is the explicit inclusion in its implementation framework of the need that the Country Parties and their partners join efforts towards the development of the Integrated Investment Strategies (MII, for its name in Spanish) that support the Convention implementation processes.

At present, FUNPA is collaborating with every project that aims at improving life quality in the provinces of Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego, and in every place where Patagonian universities carry out permanent or temporary activities.

MIIs should be the way in which predictable financial, appropriate and sustainable resources can be ensured to combat desertification. With the intention of promoting the creation of these investment MIIs, the GM supports the Country Parties in the implementation of Integrated Financial Strategies (EFI, for its name in Spanish) or financial alliances.

In essence, these alliances are structured approaches that allow, on one side, to identify the existing barriers in legal, institutional and regulatory terms for the mobilization of resources and, on the other, to give opinions about how to articulate, in an integrated package, the different pools of resources existing in a country, that is to say, the internal pools (public budgets, incentive systems, etc.), the external pools (bilateral and multilateral donors) and the pools we call innovative (for example: climate change mechanisms, accesses to markets, participation of the private business sector, etc.). According to our experience, the EFIs are also a vehicle to strengthen the articulation of the UNCCD themes with the environment-related national priorities, showing through solid arguments, the importance of the sustainable management of land, as a contribution to the national development and searching, in turn, for the involvement of the actors that are in charge of making decisions, such as the ministries of finance and planning.

In our experience, in many occasions, the lack of financial support to the UNCCD themes is not due to a lack of resources, but to the fact that a part of the existing resources has not been allocated to the Convention implementation. Here is where the importance of the EFIs lies, as instruments for strengthening the different existing sources within an integrated framework of investments which support the UNCCD implementation. This does not mean that the search for new resources should be given up. On the contrary, to have both a well-structured EFI and a MII can be a basis for creating the tools and the credibility necessary to attract new resources, for example, from the private sector or emerging mechanisms, such as those for the climate change adaptation and mitigation.

In this sense, I would like to point out the actions that are being carried out for the Alliances Project in Argentina, an initiative we have had the privilege of supporting in collaboration with the Argentine focal point and the PNUD (acronym in Spanish for United Nations Development Programme in Argentina). The Alliances Project was the first in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean to adopt the philosophy that then became the EFI. This clearly shows the importance of building strategic bonds with the actors and programmes of the Government, as well as of other sectors, such as the private one. Moreover, this Project shows the validity of an integrated approach for the mobilization of resources towards the Convention themes, directed at the "win-win" approach, that is to say, an approach in which all actors are benefited from when collaborating with and investing in the Land Sustainable Management on the basis of their respective sectorial or programmatic priorities.

Likewise, as we have seen, the Alliances Project has functioned as a catalyst for the PAN (acronym in Spanish for National Action Programme against Desertification) Argentina with the Decade Strategy, and they were also pioneers in the region. The achievements of the Alliances Project can be used by other countries as a model and nourish the processes the GM has supported for the elaboration of EFIs in several countries, such as Guatemala, Peru and Honduras, just to mention some of them. To sum it up, we can say that we are now in a very favourable situation in relation to these tools and experiences in order to advance in a systematic and ordered way towards our ultimate purpose: to obtain sustainable, predictable and appropriate financial resources that explicitly support the UNCCD implementation.

What are the expectations in relation to both financial and general issues with a view to the next COP9?

COP9, which will be held in Argentina, will be a situational session for the future of the Convention implementation. Many decisions will be discussed and made, and they will direct the practical application of the Decade Strategy during the remaining time, especially in relation to the actions of institutions and the Convention organs, to the strengthening of the scientific basis and to issues connected with the improvement of the coordination in different regional annexes, aiming at reinforcing the strategy application by the Country Parties together with the different partners. All before mentioned has obvious implications for the financial issues; for example, regarding the Convention budget, as, among other subjects, its budget for the next two-year period will be discussed.

Considering that the world is going through a financial crisis, to achieve an increase in the budget can be a challenge, so the arguments to get such an increase must be very solid and well-presented. I consider, then, that the COP discussions will have to send the clear message that the Parties do know what they want, where they want to get to and what they need to achieve it; and, therefore, reach a consensus on solid decisions that generate credibility and trust in the Convention, which can be an incentive to obtain greater resources.

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