



## National Action Programme to Combat Desertification

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

Digital Newsletter

ARGENTINE REPUBLIC

Publication N.º 20 - December 2009

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Digital Newsletter made by the Department of Land Conservation and Combat Desertification of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development

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



Dear friends:

Through this last issue of the Digital Newsletter, I get in touch with you again to thank you all for the reception and answer this initiative, which involves the fight against desertification and its different actors, has had among you.

During 2009, we have carried out several activities, among which we see fit to emphasize that we have organized and hosted the ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (**COP 9**) in Buenos Aires. This was a great effort and an important challenge for our country. Within the framework of this major event, intense discussions have been held with the aim of exchanging knowledge and strengthening the Convention implementation.

I am convinced that, for Argentina, this was just another year in the fight against desertification. The acquired experiences in relation to COP 9 were very valuable for the team I am in charge of, as well as for all those who committed their efforts to provide proper hospitality and show the quality of the work conducted in our country, and which involves Civil Society, Scientific and Technical Institutions, and the different participating public organizations.

As part of this growth, on 16 and 17 December, the team of the Department of Land Conservation and Fight against Desertification carried out a Workshop on Planning and Coordination for 2010, with the purpose of establishing the strategic guidelines for the National Focal Point in this new stage of the National Action Plan (PAN, for its name in Spanish).

Among these guidelines, we may mention the need of generating a National Financial Mechanism for the PAN and an Integrated System of Land Monitoring and Assessment, together with minimum-budget environmental legislation.

Finally, in this Holiday Season, I would like to wish you prosperity and may 2010 find us working in pursuit of a better world for all of us.

### AGENDA

March, 16, 2010 is the deadline for submitting Environmental and Children's projects for the X call of the Fund for the Americas.

More information:

#### Fund for the Americas

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Aires

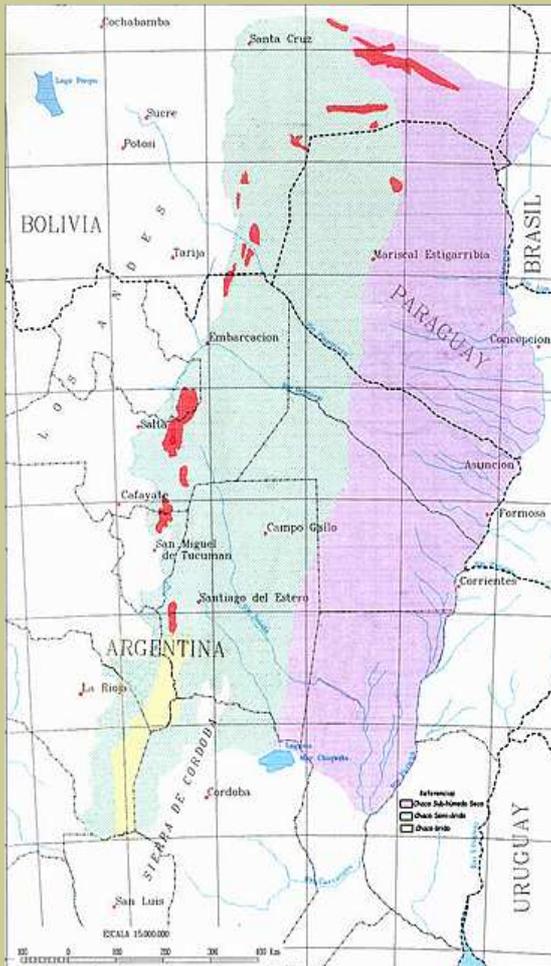
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**UNCCD Focal Point**

## The Great American Chaco and desertification

Carobs, quebrachos, grazing lands, savannah landscapes, riparian forests, martineta tinamous, an autochthonous culture, with an endless range of greens and ochres. In the Great American Chaco, you can find everything and much more. However, among what can be found, there are also the effects of desertification and climate change.



**The Great American Chaco Area**

The Great American Chaco is an area whose natural borders are not limited to the imaginary lines of a map, as it extends through Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina (59% of this region lies on national territory and covers 13 provinces) and a small part of Brazil. The political integration promoted by the [Subregional Action Programme for the Great American Chaco](#) is being carried out in the first three countries before mentioned.

This tripartite responsibility guided forward the sanction of Public [Law 26383](#) which gives rise to —through a cooperation trinational agreement between Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay— a subregional action plan for the sustainable development of the American Great Chaco. Thus, it is intended that the three nations cooperate jointly to improve the social-economic conditions of the inhabitants of the Great American Chaco, in pursuit of maintaining, preserving and restoring the ecosystem, through a participative model that considers the needs, expectations and requests of the different social actors involved.

The Great Chaco has two quite opposite sides: on one hand, great biological diversity that makes it the second biggest forest in Latin America; on the other, fragile ecosystems suffering irreversible damage, which causes such an impoverishment that native people are forced to leave. As compared to the Bolivian (86%) and the Paraguayan (69%) Chaco, only 55% of the Argentine surface is covered with woods and brushlands. In addition to this, there is poor preservation due to mankind activities, such as the excessive wood extraction from the Chaco forests of mid XX century for building ties and producing coal and tannin, and the expansion of agricultural borders.

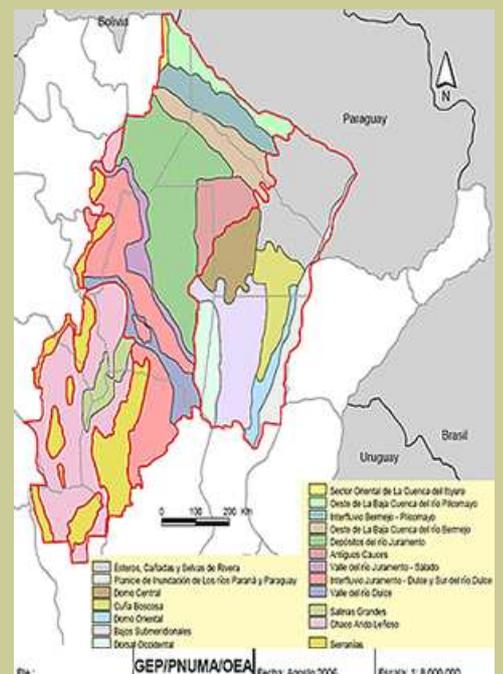
The development of the Great Chaco region has been always related to the use of natural resources, which causes environmental damage. From the beginning of the colonization of Chaco, the environment has been modifying in pursuit of meeting man's needs. Thus, parts of the mount and the forest were used for agriculture and livestock. Moreover, water courses were modified to improve this use. This resulted in the impoverishment of indigenous groups and the degradation of the forest, the greatest resource in the area.

### Chaco Subregions

Subregions are limited by the differences in temperature and humidity, as well as by the geological characteristics. This offers an incomparable biological and cultural richness. The subregion with the greatest diversity is that of the Humid and Subhumid Chaco.

In the Semi-arid Chaco region, a great plain located in the North Central portion of the country, there are advanced desertification processes which are directly linked to the high levels of poverty of the population. Biologist Ricardo Bareiro explains that the Semi-arid Chaco has a forest ecosystem subject to mass clearing and overgrazing that, together with intensive agriculture, exposes soils to extreme rainfalls and temperatures. This causes a loss in soil fertility and water efficiency, as well as erosion processes.

The Arid Chaco has subtropical weather, with a lower rainfall amount than in the Semi-arid Chaco. Finally, the Paraguayan Chaco landscape shows ridges of small mountains and ravines, which cause weather conditions favourable to the presence of woods with subtropical species.



## Threats

As usual, the indigenous inhabitants are the most affected by the threats that jeopardize the Chaco region, as they live mainly on agriculture and livestock, wood extraction and vegetal coal production. Some of the threats affecting the region are as follows:

- \* The effects of high temperatures, which rise up to 50 °C in some areas. Due to the gradual loss of the forest protective cover, these temperatures become threatening because of the expansion of agricultural borders, and they expose animals and plants to insolation and extreme heat.
- \* Economic interests which only seek to earn money without considering the sustainable development of the region. Here can be included the development of biotechnology and international grain trading (cereals and oilseeds) that, as Bareiro points out, is one of the traditional mainstay of Argentine economy.
- \* The abrupt changes between the dry and humid climate stages influence on production and the strategies of adaptation of animals and plants.
- \* Deforestation and the low permeability of soils contribute to floods.
- \* The conversion of the natural environment to agricultural use.
- \* Deforestation and the division of lands into plots destroy natural environments, especially those where hunter-gatherer indians live. Consequently, they must move to other territories to obtain their food.
- \* The increasing wind erosion due to fires, overgrazing, the lack of windbreakers, etc.

In relation to livestock production —one of the most important income sources in Chaco—, it should be pointed out that livestock overloading, without field rotation, causes soil compaction and the loss of natural vegetation, which speed up desertification processes.

## Subsistence agriculture

In the previous issue of the Digital Newsletter, it was emphasized the subsistence agriculture in the dry land regions of the interior of the country. In Chaco there are examples of this kind of economy as regards cotton harvest, livestock and forest exploitation.

Let's remember that subsistence agriculture is self-sufficiency farming in which small producers grow only enough food to meet their basic needs and, in some cases, for self-consumption. Their activities are work-based and not capital-based, and their workforce is family-provided.

As Bareiro points out, during the last years, an expansion agriculture process has been initiated towards the West of the Argentine Chaco, replacing native forests and moving towards drier regions, which historically were not suitable for agriculture. This process of "pampeanization" of marginal lands —this is the name for the process in which crops typical of the Pampean areas, such as soya, are adopted in extrapampean zones—, which mainly takes place in the Chaco region, causes environmental damage.

As in other areas of the interior of the country that are outside the Pampean region, the Great Chaco is within a rural development model that leads to the disintegration of the productive, political and social systems. Impoverishment, marginality and social exclusion are some of the factors that affect the area due to inefficient and evil productive and environmental policies. It is essential to rescue the inherited natural capital, besides to preserve the world's largest extension of dry forests, which contribute to stabilize soils, maintain diversity, regulate the water system and bear high temperatures.

According to the Chaco Argentina Agroforestry Network (REDAF, for its name in Spanish) —a Civil non-profit Association, member of the Great American Chaco Committee and of the Agro-ecology Movement of Latin America and the Caribbean (MAELA, for its name in Spanish)—, it is possible a model that allows the Chaco region to be managed and used with sustainability criteria, as from doing so, it can be found the benefits of a productive potential that is highly above current values. One of the key elements to reach this potential is the necessary establishment of resource recovery schemes, through the creation of multiple production systems that maintain, in turn, the maximum possible biological diversity.

### **"The Dry Chaco Conservation in fiscal lands" Plan**

During the second week of COP 9, Homero M. Bibiloni, Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development, opened the presentation of projects related to the fight against desertification in rural and indigenous communities. The main purpose of these projects, which were financed by the Mid-donation Decentralized Programme (PDMD, for its name in Spanish) of the World Environment Fund (GEF-FMAM), is to encourage both the participation and the access of organizations and institutions at local level.

The Programme receives contributions of about 3 million dollars. In order to receive these funds, 19 projects related to federal scope, environmental priority and replicability were selected.

One of the exposed projects was "The Dry Chaco Conservation in fiscal lands", which is connected with the resource use planning at regional level and participatively. In order to carry it out, a zoning scheme of the "Impenetrable Chaco" Resource Reserve was submitted, a Plan agreed by the actors of the comprehensive use of state and private lands in the Dry Chaco was drawn up, and training was given for the sustainable management of forests and the integrated management of forests and livestock by Creole, indigenous communities and governmental organizations.

### **The Didactic Briefcase, an initiative for Environmental Education**

The Didactic Briefcase —which contains three conceptual notebooks, an Atlas of the Great Chaco and a Trainer's Guide CD-Rom—, was introduced in the fifth issue of the Digital Newsletter. It is part of the Environmental Education Programme —within the framework of the Project called "Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the South American Chaco"—, in which participate the Secretariats of Environment, the Ministries of Education and numerous civil society organizations.

The spreading strategy of this Programme responds to three priorities: participation, effectiveness and continuity, through the strengthening of local actors.

This Programme deals with the training of different actors in regional workshops. These actors become trainers at national level. Since mid-2007, about 3500 people have been trained in Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. Trainers' task multiplies the Programme in their workspace (classrooms, teacher training institutes, national parks, trade unions and commune centres) and, thus, it is promoted Environmental Education, as well as the awareness- raising of teachers, children, young people and students of the Chaco region.

Monitoring activities, carried out in different towns, have shown that training has a noticeable impact on the social structure, which creates new social articulation and participation spaces. The contents of the Didactic Briefcase are not only intended for the educational sector and environmental technicians: the Environmental Programme is also promoted by neighbour's associations, rural women and female workers, indigenous groups and theatre casts, that, besides relating between each other, in many cases, cross borders.

In turn, sustainability strategy goes beyond the own Environmental Education Programme design, as it especially focuses on the development of strengthening social processes regarding genre themes.

### **Sources**

*\*Subregional Action Plan for the Sustainable Development of the American Great Chaco, Environmental Education for the American Chaco, Didactic Briefcase, 2006.*

\* Chaco Argentina Agroforestry Network (REDAF).

**INSTITUTIONAL  
REPRESENTATIVES**

**Contest of Projects  
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Argentine**



**OUR PEOPLE**

**Ramiro Ragno  
Red de Turismo Campesino**

The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Argentine Republic yearly finances up to 15 social projects, which are, in general, educational or environmental profiling and supported by non-profit organizations or institutions. The German Government's contribution amounts to €20,000.



According to Günter Rudolf Kniess, Ambassador of the German Federal Republic in Argentina, this support translates into financing projects "which must mainly involve issues related to the training and the improvement of both the life conditions and the property situation of non-privileged groups of people. Its main goal is to promote the self-funding of the endeavour, in order not to depend on external finance for its continuity. Therefore, its total financing should be secured by the responsible organization".

Projects should be submitted and supported by non-profit organizations or institutions, whether from the governmental, the communal sphere or civil society.

As regards the main themes of the projects, the Ambassador states that "when selecting the projects, we follow sustainability, projection and development criteria. This year, eleven projects have been financed; out of which nine were somehow directly related to rural development and natural resource management. For example, we have financed the building of a model house for the use of renewable energies, the water supply of a nursing home, the equipment of production workshops in rural schools and the printing of learning material related to environment care".

### **Some outstanding experiences in the environment sector and in the use of natural resources in rural areas**

According to Ambassador Kniess, every area poses different needs. In some places, such as Santiago del Estero, Chaco or Formosa, the appropriate use of natural resources means a survival factor. Therefore, through the Programme, the basic needs of water supply are tried to met, as well as forest grazing or drip irrigation projects are financed. In Jujuy, projects of solar energy use in marginalized areas are supported. In Misiones, rural productive projects are financed. "We notice that climate change is having more and more influence on peasants' lives and we will surely get down to financing more strongly projects involving adaptation technology", Kniess points out.

### **What cofinancing areas will be strengthened in the future?**

Kniess emphasizes the need of focusing the aid provided through the Programme on development projects that make the most of local capacities, new technologies and the possibilities of achieving multiplying effects.

The call for submitting projects closes at the beginning of each year.

For more detailed information please visit

[www.buenos-aires.diplo.de/Vertretung/buenosaires/es/05/Technische\\_Zusammenarbeit/Kleinstprojekte.html](http://www.buenos-aires.diplo.de/Vertretung/buenosaires/es/05/Technische_Zusammenarbeit/Kleinstprojekte.html)



He is technical advisor of the *Red de Turismo Campesino*, a cooperative made up of 50 families of artisans and small agricultural producers from 10 rural communities of the Valles Calchaquíes, in the south of Salta province. This area has hot climate all year round, and rainfalls concentrate in summer, but occur grudgingly in the other seasons. Furthermore, the vegetation is xerophilous and it is adapted to both dry weather conditions and solar exposure.

The cooperative was born in 2004 with the purpose of promoting integrated local development through sustainable and responsible tourism. Furthermore, it aims at strengthening the relationship, the organization, the identity and the integration of the communities in the area as a whole; while it guarantees the rights of their members and enhances their cultural heritage.

The coordinating committee of the *Red* has established internal operative regulations to control the offer and the quality of the services rendered, as well as a code of conduct for respectful travellers. In community tourism, several factors combine: cultural exchange, the experience of sharing the moments lived in communities and natural ecosystems, and the possibility of generating participative income and having a leading role in sustainable local development.

The work in tourism carried out by the *Red* has triggered, within families and communities, the task of recovering local history; the search for the identity shared by both old and young people; a return to community work; the restoration of value of cultural expressions, such as traditional architecture, gastronomy and festivities; the appreciation of archaeological sites and their communities' responsibility for preserving them; the local revaluation of the role of woman as a recipient of both live culture and social cohesion.

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