



## 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

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### LEADING ARTICLE

## Desertification and forests in drylands



**T**he term "forest" gives rise to many others, such as "green", "trees", "vegetation", "fauna", etc. This family of words and living beings requires to make a differentiation between a native forest and a cultivated or an implanted one. A native, spontaneous or natural forest is made up of autochthonous trees and self-regenerates naturally due to the interaction between biotic and abiotic factors in the area. A cultivated or artificial forest is that created by man and which is obtained by sowing or implanting native or exotic tree species adapted to the place and with commercial, industrial or recreational purposes. This introduction allows to go deep into the forests and into their importance for both the environment and the community, especially in the dryland areas affected by the desertification process.

### Argentine forests: patrimony, issues and desertification

As in other places in the world, forest patrimony in Argentina has been affected by the increase in population and the industrial activity, the advance of the agricultural frontier (particularly due to soya expansion) and by the overexploitation of natural resources. Current rates of extraction of natural resources are making the inherited natural capital —in which forests are included— disappear. These places that, through their flora and fauna, help to protect the soil, regulate the climate, prevent erosions in hillsides and regulate the balance of the water cycle, suffer the fulfilment of multiple threats, among which the desertification process stands out.

AGENDA



**8-12 March, La Quiaca and Purmamarca, Jujuy**  
Workshop on the Project "Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands" (LADA).

Until 25 March, 2010, it will be held the electronic forum developed by DesertNet International and the Institute for Water, Environment & Health of the United Nations University ([UNU-INWEH](http://www.unu-inweh.org)).

This global scientific enquiry forum allows to know the contributions related to land degradation and desertification issues made by the different regions and interested parties. Moreover, scientific advice will be given to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification to collaborate in the decision-making process to combat land degradation and achieve sustainable drylands management.

For more information please visit:  
[www.desertnet-international.org](http://www.desertnet-international.org).

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Agricultural Engineer Cristina Résico, Coordinator of the National Programme of Non-Timber Forest Products, of the Office of Forests of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development, lists the main reasons for the problem related to the forest activity in Argentina:

- \* Exclusively commercial forest exploitation.
- \* Reduction in the forest mass surface and quality.
- \* Relative ignorance about both the forest dynamics and the characteristics of indigenous woods.
- \* High percentage of mature and over mature trees (ill individuals).
- \* Excessive wood cutting for firewood.
- \* Low added value of the products obtained from forest activities.
- \* Prioritization of agricultural and livestock culture.
- \* Expansion of the agricultural and livestock frontier.
- \* Society's lack of perception in relation to their dependence on the resource.
- \* Deficiency in the inspection and control of the forest regulation application.

#### **UNCCD's role**

Within the framework of the policies to combat desertification processes, land degradation and drought (DLDD), aimed at strengthening the role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), UNCCD reports have emphasized the relation between land degradation and forestry. Party Countries have stated that deforestation is one of the main reasons for land degradation and they inform about the possibilities of promoting forest activities in drylands (including mountain ecosystems). In order to achieve it, different ways of acting are being created to support the mobilization of resources and the alliance consensus. These initiatives could lay the basis for a deeper development and their start-up in other contexts through a systematic advice process that is part of the proposed integrated knowledge management system.

#### **2009 World Forest Congress: thoughts on desertification**

Every six years, the World Forest Congress is held. From 18 to 23 October, 2009, Buenos Aires became host again. During its opening, the Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development, Homero M. Bibiloni, emphasized Argentina's role in the preservation of the autochthonous forest mass based on the Native Forest Law (Public Law 26331, see box below) and he urged to value the economic dimension of natural resources as strategic assets in developing countries. Due to the fact that very important events —such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Desertification and the International Summits on Climate Change and Biodiversity (2010) — are close in time, Dr. Bibiloni stressed the elaboration of joint forest policies and social restraint, in order to avoid mass migrations from the country to the city. In keeping with these thoughts, Jan Heino, Assistant Director-General of FAO, pointed out that mitigation and adaptation to climate change will not be successful without sustainable forest regulations.

## Forest areas in drylands

The Argentine Republic is divided into 6 differentiated areas as regards native forest resources: Monte, Patagonian Andean Forest, Bolivian-Tucuman Forest, Chaco Park, Paraná and Espinal Forest. Due to their characteristics and their implication in these areas' desertification, we will go deeper into Chaco Park and Monte regions.

The Chaco Park covers 22% of the continental surface of the country and 58% of the surface of the Great American Chaco, which, as it has been indicated in the 20th Issue of the Digital Newsletter, is divided into Humid Chaco, Semi-arid Chaco —the largest subregion of the Argentine Chaco—, Arid Chaco and Paraguayan Chaco.

The Great Chaco is essentially a forest region, whose dry woods have been historically considered the largest ones in the world. They are the second most important forest mass in our continent, after the Amazon forest.

According to the First National Native Forest Inventory, the surface of forest lands and rural woods in the Argentine Chaco Park covers 23.367.984 hectares. This region —crossed by large rivers— shows great diversity of environments, which include plains, mountain ranges, savannas, marshes, wetlands, saltpetre beds, brushlands and forests.

For the last two centuries, these forests have suffered from clear-cut logging to the point that, at present, only 30% of the surface maintains its original structure and operation. During the second half of the XIX century, forests have suffered the consequences of two related economic processes: the consolidation of the agricultural and livestock export and the expansion of the railway networks. As a consequence of these processes, there were a remarkable demographic growth, clear-cutting of quebracho forests for railroad ties, excessive firewood and coal consumption for industrial or domestic fuel, tannin extraction for tanneries, the expansion of the agricultural and livestock frontier at the expense of forests and the advancement of livestock exploitation in forest lands. This brought about the continuous degradation of forests and lands in the driest areas in the Semi-arid Chaco — which aggravates the desertification process—, the increase in the land salinisation as a consequence of bad agricultural practices, water erosion, land structure loss due to nitrogen and carbon volatilization and land exposure to high caloric energy. As regards the latter, it is necessary to add that in areas without forest cover, such as those affected by the desertification process, lands receive a huge amount of caloric energy, which reduces water availability for plants and "burning" of organic matter. In addition to all these serious problems, there is the expansion of the agricultural and livestock frontier, with the consequent risk of desertification due to the ecosystem fragility. This agricultural expansion process (movement towards drier areas, historically non-suitable for agriculture) has been replacing native forest.



Another forest area that suffers the consequences of desertification is Monte. Its fragility is due to the weather conditions, the wind and water erosion processes that sweep away soil higher fertile horizons, the progressive decrease in vegetation stratum —this has led to the loss of soil fertility and the extinction of autochthonous species due to the indiscriminate logging of carob forests, overgrazing and —man's action, which aggravates the existing problems because of natural weather conditions. The desertification process in oasis in semiarid and arid areas is caused by the lack of technical assistance to producers, deficiencies in irrigation infrastructure and the inappropriate field systematization, with the consequent salinisation.

### A curiosity to protect

The Chaco Region is crossed by the 30° parallel of latitude. This zone is the only non-desert one, in the central area of a continent, which is located in this parallel. This is due to the fact that it is covered by a forest ecosystem that protects it efficiently. For this reason, it is essential to protect its vegetation cover, as the desertification threat is always lying in wait.

According to some experts, dry-forest clearing, the indiscriminate use of fire in the formations of Monte and the Espinal Forest and extensive overgrazing have caused the destruction of the vegetation cover and have increased the erosion and desertification processes.

Despite these discouraging data, it should be pointed out that it has begun a reappraisal process of the use of the forests in Monte and the Arid Chaco, aimed at the rationalization of their use and the reforestation of degraded forests.

### Protection, recovery and management of calden forests

In January 2010, the Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development, Homero M. Bibiloni, and the Ministry of Production of La Pampa Province, Abelardo Ferrán, have entered into five agreements by which the environmental budget will grant \$3.600.000 for the implementation of projects on Native Forest Preservation and Management in the above-mentioned province.

The selected projects are aimed at the protection, recovery and management of calden forests, with the purpose of valuing the function of soil protection offered by this specie—specially in the drylands areas that suffer the desertification process— and making possible the use of grasses for sustainable livestock production, as well as permanent forest protection. This specie is, together with ñandubay, the one with greatest coverage in the Espinal Region.

### Native Forest Law (Public Law Number 26.331)

It is aimed at promoting the preservation of native forests by land use planning that regulates the expansion of the agricultural and livestock frontier and any other change related to land use; implementing measures to control native forest surface reduction; improving and maintaining the ecological and cultural processes in pursuit of benefiting society; and promoting activities that enrich, preserve and restore native forests.

### Prevailing Vegetation in dryland forest areas

**Ñandubay District:** Corrientes, Entre Ríos and Centre of Santa Fe. In this area, there are xerophilous species of scarce height which grow in open communities and with thick herbaceous vegetation under the trees. Little forests alternate with meadows and palm forests (park). It is also possible to find species such as the above-mentioned ones, besides *prosopis affinis*, Chilean palo verde and palm trees (yatay and caranday).

**Carob tree district:** Centre of Córdoba and West of Santa Fe. This climax community has almost disappeared. Here are white carob trees, black carob trees, Chilean palo verde and caranday palms.

**Calden district:** East of San Luis and Centre of La Pampa.

It is possible to find species such as calden, white carob trees and Chilean palo verde.

**Tala district:** It is located in the Paraná ravines, from Santa Fe to Buenos Aires; in small shell shoals of the Río de la Plata; in dead dunes of the Atlantic Ocean which extends to Mar del Plata. The species that can be found here are the tala, bull's shadow trees, Chilean palo verde, ombu and sauco trees.



## Sources

- \* Biologist Ricardo Bareiro.
- \* UNCCD.
- \* Agricultural Engineer Cristina Réstico, Office of Forests, Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development.
- \* Office of Forests, Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development, "Atlas of the Argentine Native Forests", 2005.

## BRIEFS

### Call for interest statements to participate in the elaboration of studies within the framework of the Third National Communication on Climate Change



Secretaría de Ambiente  
y Desarrollo Sustentable  
de la Nación



Jefatura de  
Gabinete de Ministros  
Presidencia de la Nación

The Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development, in compliance of the commitments assumed by the Argentine Republic before the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, has begun the corresponding process for the elaboration of the Third National Communication on Climate Change.

In this context, universities, research institutions, Civil Society organizations, private consultancy companies and independent consultants have been invited to submit interest statements to take part in the activities and studies planned for the next two years within the Convention framework.

Working fields that will be approached are as follows: 1) greenhouse gas inventory and development of tools for data management, 2) climate models, 3) socioeconomic scenarios, 4) impact and vulnerability assessment, 7) mitigation and adaptation policies and measures, 8) institutional strengthening and ability development, and 9) publication and dissemination of results.

Those interested should fill a [form](#) and e-mail it ([cambioclimatico@ambiente.gob.ar](mailto:cambioclimatico@ambiente.gob.ar)) to the Climate Change Office of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development. Deadline is 22 March, 2010.

## EVENTS

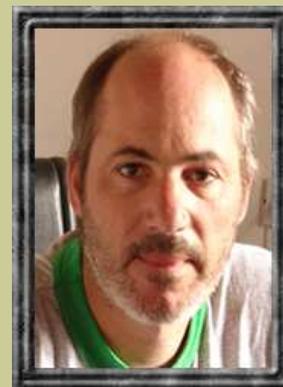
### Buenos Aires, venue for the First Meeting of the Bureau of the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9), of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification



The COP 9 Bureau, chaired by the Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development of the Argentine Republic, Dr. Homero Bibiloni, hold sessions on 10 -12 February, 2010. The Bureau chairmanship is held by the Argentine Republic for two years.

Present at this important international event were Argentine authorities, such as Engineer Octavio Pérez Pardo and Ambassador Silvia Mérega; representative authorities of the governments of Georgia, Iran, Uganda, Bhutan, Austria, South Africa, Chad and Mexico; the Global Mechanism's Managing Director, Christian Mersmann; and the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Luc Gnacadja.

## OUR PEOPLE



**Diego Ramilo**  
IPAF NOA

Diego Nicolás Ramilo is the Director of the Institute of Technological Research and Development for Small Farmers (IPAF NOA, for its name in Spanish). It is located in the district of Posta de Hornillos, in Jujuy province and its intervention range covers all the provinces of the Argentine Northwest.

Dr. Bibiloni emphasized the importance of promoting synergies between the above-mentioned Convention and those of Climate Change and Biodiversity, as well as of generating further actions and verifiable products that reflect on concrete results on the field. "During this intersessional period, it is urgent to develop clear and marked coordination between the Executive Secretary and the Global Mechanism and, during my term of office, I will make sure this is achieved, so that efficiency in the management of the resources of these two organizations is at the service of the Party Countries of this Convention to Combat Desertification", Dr. Bibiloni stressed. Furthermore, he pointed out the need of providing aid to the sister Republic of Haiti, due to the difficult situation it is going through.



Among other issues, both the final report and the results of COP 9 —held in Buenos Aires, from 21 September to 2 October, 2009—were presented. Moreover, there was a discussion about the adjustments to be made in the individual and joint work programmes of the UNCCD and the Global Mechanism, and in the guidelines to be followed in the 2010-2011 period.

Besides, an analysis was made of the activities carried out by the Workshop on Science and Technology, and the preparatory actions for the Ninth Session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 9).

Furthermore, reports were presented on the points of view of the representatives of the Joint Inspection Unit of the Global Mechanism, the Convention Executive Secretary and of the representatives of the Governments of Italy and Germany.



One of the outstanding facts of the meeting was the videoconference between the Bureau representatives and IFAD Vice President. This initiative was first applied in a similar event with the purpose of saving time and financial resources.

Among the most important conclusions, it can be mentioned the definition of the arrangements and the guidelines for the Regional Implementation. It is also worth pointing out the financial aid developing Country Members will be given in order to meet the new requirements of the 4<sup>th</sup> National Report, and the training instructors will receive on new tools and methodologies for elaborating the Report.

IPAF NOA is part of the National Programme of the National Institute for Agricultural Technology (INTA, for its name in Spanish). Its main purposes are the development of technological proposals appropriate to the conditions and the characteristics of family agriculture, and the generation of knowledge that contributes to the rural development of country people, family farmers and of indigenous communities.

In order to achieve these aims, the Institute has created a research project portfolio whose knowledge goals have not been set at random, but have arisen from the requests themselves and from the reflexive moments of the organizations in the area, as a result of an intense process of participative diagnosis carried out during 2005.

Some of the issues approached by IPAF NOA in its research projects are the limitations in the access to essential resources, such as water and land, the lack of suitable technologies that humanize rural work and improve the increase in the stages and quality of production, and the difficulty in trading production surplus. These realities are the backbone of the structure and the productive processes of family agriculture, which limit or favour these families' subsistence and their reproduction in the territories.

These research projects are intended both to promote concrete rural development actions that improve the life conditions of these sectors and to generate knowledge contributing to review and design legal and regulatory frameworks that consider the characteristics of family agriculture. Moreover, information and elements for analysis are provided to extension workers, organization technicians, provincial programmes and governments, political advisors, etc.

IPAF NOA proposes methodologically the active participation of small farmers and their organizations, not only when expressing the problems that should be solved, but also during the reflection process on the different alternatives to solve them. Through participative research-action, it is intended to link dialectically the development of knowledge with its concrete application creating a proper framework for the actors' empowerment..

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