



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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Table of Contents

- LEADING ARTICLE
1.-Sociology of desertification.
- BRIEFS
2.-10th Call for Projects of the Programme of Small Donations of the Environmental World Fund.
- BIODIVERSITY IN DRYLANDS
3.-The tatu cart.
- ENVIRONMENTAL DICIONARY
4.-Land degradation, Empowerment.
- OUR PEOPLE
5.-Mario Zapana.

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Leading Article

Sociology of desertification



At world level, desertification processes have begun to be studied by physical-natural sciences, an approach that, over the years, had to move on to an interdisciplinary view that stresses the historic, economic and social factors of the affected areas. It is clear that, according to the ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), socioeconomic aspects are harder to be assessed due both to the lack of data and weaknesses at a conceptual and methodological level, in which one plus one does not necessarily equal two.

Let's take an overview. Fifty percent of food is produced in dryland areas, where 80 percent of the world's poor population lives, and also where the desertification process has settled. In order to visualize it more clearly: 1 out of 5 people in the world lives in an area affected by desertification. And Argentina is not exempt from this problem. So, what do we know about the structure and the operation of these human societies that live in drylands and under the cloak of desertification? What do we know about these people who face a problem that goes beyond its frontiers, a problem that is global and socioeconomic?

In order to figure out some uncertainties, the Digital Newsletter talked to Agricultural Engineer Carlos Cattaneo, from the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development and member of the Chair of Rural Extension and Sociology of the School of Agronomy (University of Buenos Aires), and to Accountant Pedro Tsakoumagkos, one of the founding members of the Group of Agricultural Social Studies (GESA, for its name in Spanish).

Agenda

2 to 4 August, Buenos Aires
Training on Climate Change Adaptation.
For more information, please send an email to shaun.martin@wwfus.org

8 to 13 August, Buenos Aires
IV Binational Ecology Meeting, XXIV Argentine Meeting of Ecology, XVII Meeting of the Ecological Society of Chile.
For more information, please visit www.ege.fcen.uba.ar/rbe2010

11 August, Buenos Aires
Workshop: "Desertification: Biophysical and socioeconomic interaction in space and time".
For more information, please send an email to dbran@bariloche.inta.gov.ar; diego.steinkacker@gmail.com

16 to 20 August, Ceará, Brazil
2nd International Conference "Climate, Sustainability and Development in Semi-arid Regions (ICID + 18)".
For more information, please visit www.icid18.org

**Outstanding date of the month
7 July: National Day of the Soil Conservation**

This date was established in 1963 through the Executive Decree Number 1574, in memory of Doctor Hugh Hammond Bennet, who died on 7 July, 1960.

Doctor Bennet was an American researcher who constantly worked in search for the preservation of the integrity of the soil resource. He was a pioneer in the field of soil conservation in the United States, as well as in other countries of the American continent. He graduated from the University of North Carolina and published several articles and books related to this issue. Furthermore, he founded the Soil Conservation Service of the United States, a Federal Agency which is currently known as the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Our country is mainly made up of drylands, although the Pampas always captures all the attention. The greatest environmental problems rural inhabitants face in these areas are the damage of soils and of their vegetable cover, and the lack of access to water during winters. This is due to the facts that these people are being confined to less endowed territories and that they have limited access to the resources that would allow them overcome such a situation.

A great part of the rural population of these areas is formed by small producers, who, for years, have been carrying out their traditional activities and managing the discreet resources nature provides them. Tsakoumagkos details that, among these people, the kind of prevailing agricultural producers is that of ranch outpost caretakers, rural shepherds and households mainly devoted to sheep and goat raising. However, among the gathered rural population, there are other kinds of workers who are self-employed or wage-earning. As regards the latter, they work for either the private or the public sector (brick layers, firewood men, artisans, fruit harvesters, farm workers in packing sheds, ground workers, etc).



According to Cattaneo and against what many people believe, there is deep awareness on dryland inhabitants as regards the use of resources, despite their lacks, especially in relation to the resource water. Although some issues can be improved, for example, through good practices for crop optimization, Cattaneo considers that the magnitude of the environmental problems exceeds these modest producers' decision.

As it has been shown in other issues of the Digital Newsletter, migration is a historical constant in areas with environmental conflicts. Thus, it has been pointed out that "Latin America is a continent in motion". This is how small-producer populations, especially in the Argentine Northwestern, have migrated seasonally to work in harvests with the purpose of complementing the profits obtained from the activities carried out in the areas they live in. In many cases, women were left in charge of these activities, as well as of their families.

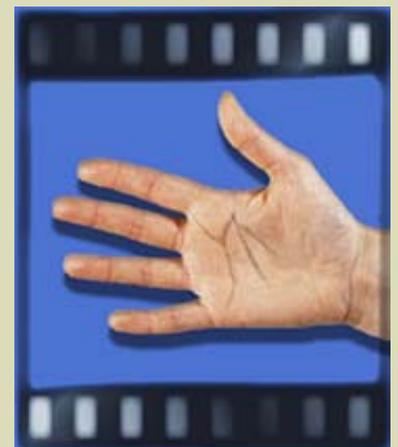
Cattaneo explains that, historically, the weight property component of income (that is to say, is achieved in the property zone) had in relation to the extra property one was more balanced. Nowadays, the marketing factor has tipped the balance in favour of the extraproperty profit, which threatens the possibilities of greater settlement and development in dryland areas.

Therefore, in addition to the environmental problems, there are the structural limitations, which, in many cases, are related to landholding, the access of products to the market and the lack of possibilities to compete on an equal footing with greater producers. According to Cattaneo, although these situations are tried to be solved, they set a limitation when making a greater development possible for producers. This should be taken into account, as it makes difficult both the progress and the future of the children of those who would like to go on living in those lands.

It is essential to take measures that improve the dryland inhabitants' income. This implies to advance in relationships associative proposals with processing or purchasing instances of production, proposals that should not keep the producer's image from 30 years ago and that necessarily develop a set of instances and measures that are born from the productive necessity, but that stress on the trading instance.

In order to get a better understanding of how theory is put into practice, Cattaneo gives the example of the free fairs of Misiones province, where there are quite effective trading alternatives to solve the small producers' problems. This is achieved when there is compatibility in the view and way of acting of the different actors implied (social programmes, producers, municipalities, etc.).

Tsakoumagkos points out that, on the basis of experiences with Creole and mapuche shepherds, when they could access to natural resources and to other sufficient productive means, they have shown the feasibility of management as regards the economic, social and environmental aspects. Thus, it is essential to involve them in the development processes and make them play the leading role. Besides, it is important that they are consistently included in the society as a whole. This is especially due to the fact that, for years, they have maintained their families and their activities with undoubtedly low subsidy levels. Tsakoumagkos also suggests transhumance as an appropriate and historically-rooted alternative to face environmental problems, as far as it occurs under certain logical conditions.



Realities of drylands

Although desertification is an issue that relates climate factors to the anthropic action, some people find it difficult to understand, accept and give it a name. This situation is clearly exemplified in a report by Larry Andrade, from the National University of the Austral Patagonia, on desertification and sheep producers from the Central Plateau of Santa Cruz. According to some producers, the fall in their animal stock, as well as in their profits are due to a "climate conspiracy", an idea to which the concept of "naturalization of the problem" adds, and that supports the idea that producers did not make any change, but climate was what changed and destroyed the fields. Andrade points out that, although climate and predators are partly to blame, the producers' speech shows a combination of factors that fail to admit the main reason for the crisis: sheep overgrazing. And this denial is based on a wisdom speech on "the old correct way of producing", a production that, far from being appropriate, exceeded in the amount of heads that grazed in the lands. According to Andrade, failing to assume the responsibility in the problem is a "principle of self-defense" that avoids accepting one's fault in the destruction of our own source of income. And it can almost be included the notion of magical realism that, far from literature, makes them believe that a succession of good years will come and fields will improve. However, producers are not obviously the only ones to be exempted from every fault and responsibility. Andrade considers that there is a whole chain of institutions and people that has benefit from sheep exploitation and has hidden behind the public face, that is to say, that of the producer's. The idea is not to find someone to blame, but to understand the root of the problems in order to mitigate the effects of desertification. A point to emphasize is that the non-adoption of technology is due to the fact that producers have not visualized neither the real reasons for the problems nor the wide-spread crisis and, consequently, they have not considered necessary to incorporate technologies. As regards this "invisibility", we have picked Elena Abraham's opinion about the growth of land desertification or degradation has increased because, although there are visible and detected reasons, such as overgrazing, deforestation and non-sustainable agriculture, there are other "invisibilized" causes—a mechanism of invisibilization is a set of power mechanisms that, as they disguise conflictive realities, tend to demobilize the social actors' actions in the restitution of structural causal compounds of situations of social control—which acts on the roots of the problems. Here are framed the inequality of the accesses to different resources (natural, economic, political and social) and the survey of areas to a condition of marginality.

In the publication *Poverty, desertification and degradation of natural resources*, it is shown how two areas belonging to the same place can live so different realities. This is what happens in the department of Lavalle, located in the northeast sector of Mendoza. Here is an irrigation region—called oasis area—intended for vitiviculture and horticulture; and another non-irrigated one—called unirrigated zone—destined as subsistence livestock activities. Although both regions are fairly similar in extension (the first one is 10,334 km² while the other one is 10.007 km²) they are completely different from each other. In addition to the above-mentioned characteristics, there are the serious desertification processes, related to the poverty conditions, which affect the unirrigated zone, an area that integrated in a subordinate way the province's market economic circuit, which was oriented towards an agroindustrial-viticultural model of oasis under irrigation. Throughout its history, the area has suffered the logging of its natural forests—which left its inhabitants without wood resources and, consequently, they shifted to livestock in a sustainable way (animal overload, sustainable caprine/goat exploitation, etc.)—, an infrastructure and service deficit, the lack of access to basic resources as well as of social inclusion plans, etc. Thus, to describe their productive practices as irrational is to ignore the reality of the area's inhabitants. Although this is true, there is no room for something like "future environmental sustainability" in their current economic situation. Without a framework of social equality and in a scenario that forces them to live on the overexploitation of natural resources—while at the same time they are criticized for this reason—, future is nonsense. According to the authors' view, this community's problem solving should be developed in the short, mid and long term, and it should consider the improvement of the road system and communications, an increase in the availability of water for drinking and irrigation, and the resolution of situations related to the lack of material and which goes beyond welfarism.

According to Elena Abraham, the development model to be implemented in the areas which suffer desertification is the view of a sustainable development of drylands, that is to say, a model related to sustainable development, directed towards territorial balance and social equity. "Whatever the development model selected, it must be implemented within the frame of a planning and management process in which the generation of knowledge to monitor changes", Abraham states. Thus, drylands and the inhabitants living from their gifts and lacks require a general approach, but planned for an area in particular and not generated in a global receipt that forgets the local idiosyncrasy.

Sources:

* ANDRADE, LARRY, *Sociology of desertification in Austral Patagonia: sheep producers from the Central Plateau of Santa Cruz*, in *Social Representations of desertification. The case of sheep-extensive producers in the central area of the central plateau. Province of Santa Cruz*, National University of Austral Patagonia.

* TORRES, L., E. ABRAHAM, E. MONTAÑA Y E. TORRES, "Socioeconomic dimensions of desertification: advances in the use of indicators. An exercise in the case of Mendoza, Argentina", *Poverty, desertification and degradation of natural resources*, CEPAL, 2005.

10th Call for Projects of the Programme of Small Donations of the Environmental World Fund

PPD ARGENTINA
PROGRAMA DE PEQUEÑAS DONACIONES DEL FMAM

SGP

Programa de Pequeñas Donaciones del FMAM

FMAM

UNDP
Argentina

The Program of Small Donations of the Environmental World Fund (FMAM, for its name in Spanish) —implemented by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)— will organize, between 19 July and 16 August, the 10th Call for Projects for grassroots community organizations and non-governmental local organizations from the Argentine Northwest (Jujuy, Salta, Tucumán, Catamarca y La Rioja).

The FMAM's purpose is to contribute to the resolution of environmental problems of global interest included in its Strategic Focal Areas: biodiversity conservation; climate change mitigation; prevention of land degradation; sustainable forest management; deforestation emission reduction; land degradation and use; change in land use and afforestation; and a reduction in the use of chemicals (persistent organic contaminants and substances that reduce the ozone layer). Furthermore, the FMAM seeks to improve the quality of life of the local communities.

Projects should be environmentally focused and related to any of the previously mentioned Focal Areas. Moreover, it is required institutional strengthening and environmental education components. Projects should also have a gender approach and training in the project's subject areas.

Those interested can send their queries by email at hugo.iza@undp.org and federicoR@unops.org. For further information about the Programme of Small Donations, please visit <http://www.ppdargentina.org.ar>.

Biodiversity
in Drylands

2010 International Year of Biodiversity



Species living in drylands: the tatu cart

*Poor Tatu's heart fell into his boots.
A thick tear went down his cheeks...
"The tatu and his evening cape"
(Mito Aymará Bolivia)*

Lonely and nocturnal, the tatu cart, common name for the Giant Armadillo, is the largest species of armadillos —one of the oldest mammal families in South America. In Argentina, it can be found in areas, such as xerophilous forests and dry and semi-dry forests in Chaco.

In these areas, the tatu cart finds ant and termite colonies to meet its nutritional needs with the help of its tongue covered with a viscous substance.

Tatu's physical description shows an elongated head, and so are its claws (the longest can reach 20 cm), with which it digs deep caves quickly and easily. These caves are very close to ant's nests and termite mounds, and away from flood-likely areas. Another notable characteristic, which refers to its family name, is its retractable shell that covers its back, tail and extremities. It is also a good swimmer and smell is its most developed sense.





When the other armadillos saw how the old but still agile Tatu Cart fought, they followed him and combated by his side. With his battleship 50-centimetre tail, he dug like if it was a sword into the legs of the invaders, who fell down wounded. Once on the floor, they were torn by the claws of his forelegs. Seeing the courage of the armadillos, the other animals decided to help the conquerors and together put them on the run. The men rushed away in horror where they had come from...

The Tatu Cart and "The Dorado"

The tatu cart and its conservation status

* According to the International Union for the Nature Conservation (1996), this species is categorized as Endangered and Critically endangered (CR) in the Sarem Red Book of Mammals of Argentina (Díaz and Ojeda, 2000).

* According to Resolution N° 1030/2004 of the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable: species in danger of extinction.

* According to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES): species included in CITES Appendix I.

In our country, the tatu cart is seriously threatened with extinction. Unfortunately, some inhabitants living in areas where this species is found eat and sell giant armadillos. They also give it to zoos, turn it into resonance boxes of the *guitarrón* (a six-stringed, acoustic, bass guitar common in Latin America) or keep it as pets. The destruction of its habitat (due to clearing, agriculture and livestock practices, and hunting) corners the tatu cart in smaller and smaller protected areas, which emphasizes the problem.

Thus, the Department of Wildlife (DFS, for its name in Spanish) of the National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development —promoter of the "Tatu Cart Project"— considers that it is essential that, in this journey to protect and rescue tatu carts, awareness and commitment be raised by local communities with their environment, as well as with their inhabitants. In the Year of Biodiversity, the Digital Newspaper supports this request for caring the species that make up the wonderful Argentine fauna.

Sources: National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Images: Lic. Gustavo Porini, Wildlife Direction, National Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Mario Zapana



He was born 70 years ago in Santa Ana, a rural community in Jujuy close to the Quebrada de Humahuaca and located 3500 metres above the sea level. Reaching Santa Ana is not easy: about 4800 metre-high mountains have to be crossed.

Mario finished high school in San Salvador de Jujuy, where he obtained a degree as mining technician. Then, he participated in an oil company's invitation to tender to recruit employers, which lead him to work in Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut, over 2900 km away from his home.

During 8 years, Mario—who worked as a geology assistant and in the subsoils of oil and gas wells— travelled the vast Patagonian territory, where he deeply knew the social and environmental problem of desertification. Later, his destiny was set in Bahía Blanca, where, already retired, he has lived for 30 years.

The experience in Patagonian lands leave its marks, as Mario often attends courses and seminars that deal with different environmental issues, particularly with those related with land preservation and the combat against desertification. These themes interest him because they are part of his life, as they are connected to and affect the areas he was born, worked and lives now.

Despite the years and distances, Mario goes on loving his land, the cultural values and the traditions he inherited from his ancestors. They cultivated the land in a region of harsh winters and great temperature range during the day. Among the traditions he treasures, Mario keeps the plea to the Pachamama (Earth Mother) for not suffering droughts.

Land Degradation

According to article 1 of the UNCCD, "land degradation is the reduction or loss, in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, of the biological or economic productivity and complexity of rain fed cropland, irrigated cropland, or range, pasture, forest and woodlands resulting from land uses or from a process or combination of processes, including processes arising from human activities and habitation patterns, such as:

- (i) Soil erosion caused by wind and/or water;
- (ii) Deterioration of the physical, chemical and biological or economic properties of soil, and long term loss of natural vegetation".

Empowerment

According to Word Bank "empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups the make choices and to transform those choices in to desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions wich both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context wich govern the use of these assets".

Source: Matallo Junior, Heitor. *Glossary of terms and concepts used within the UNCCD context.*