



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: a problem that gathered the whole world in Buenos Aires



From 21 September to 2 October, 2009, it was convened, in the City of Buenos Aires, the Ninth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Within the framework of this event, Parties also convened the Eighth Session of the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention (CRIC 8) and the Ninth Session of the Committee on Science and Technology (CST 9). In conjunction with CST 9, the First Scientific Conference was held in the Convention's scope to consider the theme "Biophysical and socio-economic monitoring and assessment of desertification and land degradation, to support decision-making in land and water management".

At the opening of COP 9, Dr. Homero Bibiloni, Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina, was elected President of COP 9. In his office of honour, he expressed his concern about the systematic worsening of the situation of poor people who are exposed to floods and droughts all over the world.

"Planetary health is not on the right track and, when I say so, I think about man necessarily allied to his natural environment. Year-on-year, we hear diagnostics or analyze indicators that tell us we are worse than we were before, in spite of the fact that efforts and statements suggest the opposite. We should move from documents to instruments, from postponement to urgency, from consulting works to territorial work, from complex to simple".

Dr. Homero Bibiloni

AGENDA

2-6 and 9-11 November, Regional Faculty of the National University of Technology, Bahía Blanca
Postgraduate Seminar "Society and natural resources; soil and water in semi-dry conditions in the south of Buenos Aires province".

For more information, please visit
www.frbb.utn.edu.ar/posgrados

3-5 November, National University of Cuyo, Mendoza.

Course on "climate change and water resources. Integral management of water resources in view of changing climate scenarios".

10 and 12 November, Hamburg, Germany

IV International Conference and Exhibition on Climate Change and Flood Protection.

11-14 November, Trelew, Chubut

CONAGUA 2009: National Water Congress, "Water and environment".

For more information, please visit
www.conagua2009.com.ar

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



Otherwise, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, Luc Gnacadja, emphasized the importance of the Convention as the sole international instrument that deals with land and water sustainable management, and he encouraged to develop —despite the different crises— new actions to combat desertification. Furthermore, he urged developed countries that are not still suffering the desertification effects both to invest to prevent it and to support those countries which suffer this scourge.

Voices from the world

It should be stood out the speeches of the regional representatives, the international organizations —UNDP, UNEP, International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), Dryland Science for Development Consortium (DSD), International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Mechanism, etc.—, and of different NOGs.

The voices of the countries participating in COP9 highlighted the different points of interest within the desertification scheme. Thus, the delegate of South Africa —on behalf of the Group of 77 and China—, emphasized the need of improving the Convention's effective implementation by its institutions. Sweden —for the European Union—, highlighted sustainable land management's vital contribution to mitigating climate change. Chad —on behalf of the Africa Group—, expressed that, although Africa governments had adopted National Action Programmes, they had to face numerous challenges when it came to implement them. Myanmar —for the Asia Group—, said National Action Programmes need to be reoriented with the Decade Strategy and stressed the relation between climate change and desertification. Guyana —for the Latin American and Caribbean Group—, referred, among other issues, to the fact that the Group would like to make the CRIC a permanent subsidiary body with a specific mandate, in keeping with the Decade Strategy regulations. Moreover, this country expressed its concern about the limited participation of regional scientists in the issue being dealt with. Ukraine —on behalf of Central and Eastern Europe— strongly hoped that COP 9 decisions would optimize the work of the Global Mechanism and the Secretariat, and confirm the role of the CRIC as one of the Convention's permanent subsidiary bodies.



The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat stated the importance of COP 9 and its outcomes for climate change. Likewise, it recalled the key elements of the post-Kyoto regime to emerge in Copenhagen, including emission reduction, mitigation and adaptation. She also mentioned national-level efforts to integrate climate change and land degradation.

In relation to this, the Global Mechanism said the Joint Work Programme between this organization and the Secretariat is growing in substance, quality and quantity. Besides, it noted the need for the COP's guidance on the delineation of tasks and roles based on the different mandates of the two institutions.

High-Level Segment

It took place on 28-29 September, 2009. For its development, the highest environmental authorities from over 60 countries were invited. In the segment, discussions were held in three roundtables:

1. "The global trends of desertification, land degradation and drought: Liaison with other problems and challenges for decision makers and stakeholders".
2. "Desertification/land degradation and climate change: What role for the land in the ongoing negotiations for a new climate change regime at Copenhagen?"
3. "Partnerships and institutions for combating desertification, land degradation and drought: the path to improvement".

COP 9 "carbon neutral": projects to offset carbon emissions

In response to the growing challenge of climate change, several United Nations bodies and international and national organizations are starting to estimate the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated from their meetings and international events with the purpose of taking steps to control and compensate for them.

During COP 9, the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina, through the Department of Climate Change and the Department to Combat Desertification, endeavoured to link the emission offsets to projects related to land degradation mitigation and biodiversity conservation.

The total emissions of CO₂-equivalent caused during COP 9 were estimated through an internationally recognized methodology and included emissions of air travel, local emissions caused by the Conference and the corresponding value to offset them.

This initiative will contribute to the implementation of two field projects located in Argentina: a reforestation of native species project in Santiago del Estero province and a renewable energy project, which involves building solar stoves, in La Puna. Contributions required to offset the carbon emissions generated in COP 9 are calculated in accordance with the actual sequestration costs of the two projects.

BRIEFS

The COP 9 and its most outstanding topics

During the COP 9, several important decisions were taken in relation to science and technology, two pillars in the fight against desertification and drought. Therefore, some of the main issues dealt with by the Parties were as follows:

* **Grant awarding.** The convention will launch an international grant programme to promote the training of professionals who specifically work on desertification-related issues. This programme will allow Argentine technicians to make exchanges with well-known scientific institutions. Moreover, it will allow scientific and academic institutions in the country to show their capacity and experience in different fields. This will make possible to train technical experts from different places in the world and, thus, to position themselves in the international framework.

* **Establishment of a methodology for Land Degradation Assessment in Dry Lands.** The LADA international project—in which Argentina is involved and in whose framework a standardized methodology has been developed in order to know the causes and impacts of desertification in different ecosystems and productive systems— has been presented in the COP 9. Party countries have successfully supported the continuity and the expansion of the project. Due to the fact that Argentina is one of the 6 pilot countries, it will play a relevant role in this process.

* **Establishment of indicators for assessing progress in the actions against desertification.** Party countries have agreed a set of indicators for assessing the progress and the impacts made both by the Programmes against Desertification implemented in each country and in relation to the global initiatives. This set of indicators will provide regularly collected and comparable information in order to know whether the actions taken to reverse desertification and to improve drylands inhabitants' quality of life are producing the expected results and, otherwise, to make the appropriate adjustments.

* **Call-invitation to international experts.** For years, the Convention has been attended by people from all over the world who are experts in desertification-related fields (meteorology, agriculture, soils, vegetation, etc.). Party countries have decided to add a new topic: Desertification Assessment. In doing so, they will summon scientists from all nations. Argentina is one of the countries of the ALC regions that is most experienced in this issue. This opens the door to the incorporation of numerous local scientists and technicians into international forums.

* **The importance of science and technology in the political field.** Party countries long discussed the need of bringing decision-making closer to information and knowledge generation, and vice versa, within the Convention framework. Both processes should jointly support each other. As a consequence of this discussion, it was agreed to begin a process with a view to turn the UNCCD into a world authority on desertification-related scientific issues, through an integrated model that gathers both representative scientists of each country and decision makers. In the coming years, we will quickly move forward to an interdisciplinary and intergovernmental panel or mechanism similar to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change).



Mobilizing resources for fighting against desertification

Financing, aid, synergy, solidarity, conscience. Both the resource mobilization for combating desertification and to provide aid to the people living in the world's dry, require some decisions be made. During the COP 9, it was emphasized the collaboration that should arise between the Convention and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Thus, it was discussed the relevant role of this organization in the financing and mobilization of resources for developing countries, especially, with regard to land degradation and desertification issues. Moreover, this organization is asked to provide greater support and an increase in the drawdown of funds for the implementation by the Party Countries of the National Action Programmes against Desertification. Besides, the GEF, the UNEP and the UNCCD Executive Programme for institutional strengthening, in order to monitor the implementation of the UNCCD Decade Strategy (2008/2018).

As regards the support of connection activities between the Fight against Desertification and the Adaptation to Climate Change, the Parties agreed to ask the GEF to include this issue in the funds created within the framework of the Kyoto Protocol on Adaptation.

Promoting the desertification issue

The spread of this problem allows to raise awareness and critical capacity. From the smallest population to the most powerful state should be involved in the desertification issue and in its consequences. Thus, it was agreed:

*** To declare the period 2010-2020 as the United Nations Decade for Deserts and the Fight against Desertification.** This has been proclaimed by Resolution 63/195 of the United Nations General Assembly. Moreover, in the COP 9, the international community and governments were asked to include activities for promoting this issue in their agendas. This initiative has its precedent in the year 2006, which was declared the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. This year has had significant impacts, especially in Argentina, where local and national activities were carried out. For example, a postmark was issued jointly by the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development (SAyDS) and the *Correo Argentino*.



*** To emphasize the participation of civil society.** The importance of civil society's role is relevant and several publications of the Digital Newsletter have shown it.

During the COP 9, civil society organizations played an outstanding and deserved role. They attended different events and took part in several activities, such as in the High-Level Segment, together with the Ministers of Environment. In that opportunity, they could make their statements and set straight their points of view from that of civil society, besides being able to set them out to the most remarkable officers involved in this theme. Furthermore, on Thursday, 1 October, these

organizations and the Parties conducted an open dialogue session, which was opened by Homero Bibiloni, Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina, in his charge of President of the COP 9. In this plenary session, they could show their knowledge and works as well as exchange their experiences with civil society organizations from other countries and with the delegates of international cooperation organizations.

Relation between desertification and climate change

The ties that link and foster both problems must not be ignored. Taking into account the proximity of the next Climate Change Meeting in Copenhagen —an event scheduled for December 7-18, 2009—, it was decided to send out a strong message to the twin Convention. Thus, among the relevant topics discussed during the Second Roundtable of the High-Level Segment, the Ministers pointed out the importance of a relation between desertification and climate change, as dry areas are most affected by this phenomenon, and that it is necessary to use the tools of the Convention on Climate Change in order to solve this problem, especially in terms of Adaptation to global warming. Moreover, a decision was approved with clear mandates of the Parties, so as to strengthen synergies and create better opportunities for developing countries.



A final thought

In order to conclude their deliberations on the established agenda items, the Parties continued deliberating relentlessly before the final gavel came down at 7:50 am on Saturday, 3 October. Among the positive outcomes reached, the following stands out:

Programme and budget. The first UNCCD budget was established following the principles of the management and budgeting based on results and which obeys to the Ten Year Strategic Plan, in order to improve the Convention implementation.

Regional Coordination Mechanisms. The Parties decision of strengthening regional coordination through the Regional Coordination Mechanisms and provide them with technical and financial tools for its effective implementation. Among these mechanisms, some of the most noteworthy are the collaboration between the UNCCD Executive Secretariat and the World Mechanism, its incorporation in the UNCCD basic budget and the establishment of basic parameters for the Regional Coordination Office, and the Memorandum of Understanding entered into with the host Country.

CRIC terms of reference. The development of a decision related to the Committee for the Review of the Implementation of the Convention's Term of Reference (CRIC), to enable it to become a standing subsidiary body of the Convention and to be in charge of monitoring the results of its implementation.

Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the assessment of the Global Mechanism. Another most outstanding decision was the request to the COP 9 Bureau, the Managing Director of the Global Mechanism and to the UNCCD Executive Secretary —taking into account the views of other interested relevant entities, such as the host countries and the IFAD— to undertake and supervise an evaluation of existing and potential reporting, accountability and institutional arrangements for the Global Mechanism and its legal and financial implications (including the possibility to identify a new institution/organization to house it).

Considering the scenarios presented in the assessment of the Global Mechanism by the JIU (document JIU/REP/2009/4) and the necessity of preventing duplications and overlays in the labour of the Secretariat and the Global Mechanism, it is also requested to the Bureau of the COP to present to COP 10 a report on this evaluation for a consideration and a decision on the GM Reports, rendering account and institutional arrangements.

COP 9 postcards

THE NINTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (COP 9)

Together with the COP 9 activities, the first edition of the Competitive Poster Session related to Land Sustainable Management themes took place. Through it, a space was created for the private sector and non-governmental organizations exhibit their products and services with the of both raising awareness and to spread sustainable ways for land care, as well as for the rational use of natural resources.

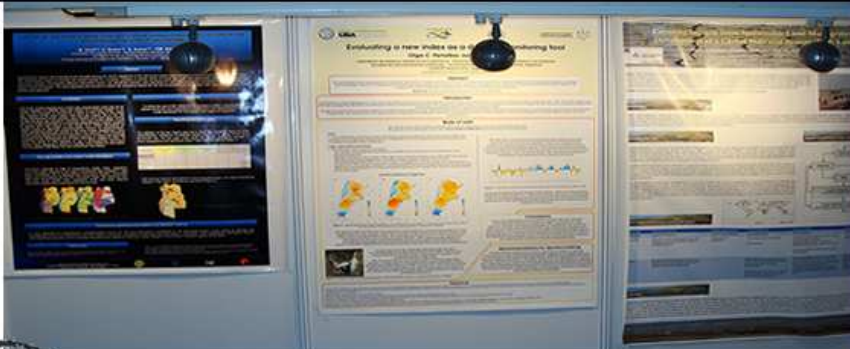


THE NINTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (COP 9)

In this Poster Session, 40 scientific extended poster abstracts were exhibited. They were selected by a call of the Dryland Science for Development (DSD) Consortium, which were tasked to organize the First UNCCD Scientific Conference.



THE NINTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION (COP 9)



For Argentina, 16 extended poster abstracts participated in the poster session. They were selected by the Department of Land Conservation and Fight against Desertification of the Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development, the National Institute of Agricultural Technology, the Argentine Institute for Research in Dry Areas and the Patagonian National Centre.

Live words

What expectations are held about COP 9. What goals are intended to be achieved through it. Difficulties and longings

In this article, some thoughts of the representatives from different organizations and countries participating in COP 9.

Octavio Perez Pardo (Argentina)

"We are very pleased of having been the host country of this COP, which will allow us to strengthen strategies nationally. I would like to acknowledge all the Parties' efforts to reach the necessary consensus to make progress in negotiations.

Likewise, I would like to highlight the effort made by both the Argentine Government to host this important international event and by the provincial Governments for their active participation. Moreover, I would like to emphasize the contributions made by the national parliament and civil society organizations, as well as those of the Argentine scientific society and the taskforce created under this Focal Point, which were also responsible for the success of this Conference".



Ilham Atho Mohamed (Islas Maldivas)

"I expect that everything will be settled on time so as to solve the COP 9 budget".



Yousef Brahimi (Mecanismo Mundial)

"We expect this Conference to provide support to continue working at a national level in the countries".

Zida Bertrand (Burkina Faso)

"I expect that we will be able to achieve good results and that decisions will be drafted for the Convention. We should go further to make good decisions and work hard to take the best advantage of this Convention. We are expecting it. The organization I represent has an economic function that includes negotiating financial issues".

Martial Agondogo (Gabón)

"In my opinion, this COP is crucial. We have huge problems and we must solve them".



197 participants from civil society registered.

The summary is as follows:

UNCCD Annex I: 19 participants
UNCCD Annex II: 9 participants
UNCCD Annex III: 14-7 participants
UNCCD Annex IV: 19 participants
UNCCD Annex V: 3 participants



Héctor González Idiarte (Uruguay)

"During COP 9, very complex negotiations take place on a subject that it is naturally difficult. The Convention origin itself already poses some challenges that have not been able to be clarified: what is the change of desertification?, how far is land arid or not?, what is the relation between desertification and degradation?, what happens with climate change? It is very hard to reach a consensus with a certain degree of precision. When negotiations are hard to make, it is often that the positions adopted are not clear or precise enough".

Side events



Within the COP 9 scope, over 50 side events were carried out. They were all focused on major issues in the Convention process, including land degradation assessment, financing strategies, thematic programme networks, early warning systems, presentation of dryland product, indicators, cooperation programmes, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and investment strategies.

The purpose of these side events is to benefit both attendees to the Conference of the Parties Sessions and the Convention subsidiary organs.

The Secretariat of Environment and Sustainable Development conducted side events: "Environmental Productive Network (REPAM, for its name in Spanish). A new experience of environmental productive horizontal coordination for sustainable management of arid and semi-arid ecosystems to Combat Desertification in Patagonia", "Sustainable Management of native forests: a start-up policy to tackle desertification"; "Land degradation in arid areas, preliminary results of LADA project in Argentina", "Desertification and climate change: financing options and institutional opportunities in the international field", "possible synergies between Desertification conventions, RAMSAR and the activities of the Committee for the Sustainable Development of the Mountain Regions of the Argentine Republic".

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