

Executive Summary

The Argentine Republic, placed in the extreme south of the American Continent, has a total extension of 3.761.274 km², including Antarctic Territory and South Atlantic Islands, being in the sense of surface the eighth country in the world. The continental American portion is extended along 3.700 km, between 22' and 55' south latitude, covering 2.758.829 km². This great extension determines an important climatic variety, from subtropical climate in the north to the extreme colds in the south, predominating the template ones within the major part of the country.

The continental portion can be divided into three great ecological regions, according to the hydric regime: Humid Region, Subhumid and Semiarid Region, and Arid Region, representing these last two the 79% of the total surface, and they are extended from north to south through the whole occidental and south portions of the country. The humid zones, where the "llanura pampeana" is founded, concentrate the 80% of the agricultural and cattle production of the country and the 85% of the industrial activity. It has the major density of population, and it concentrates the 70% of the total population. The dry zones, or those which have the longest draught periods, are on the side from a productive and social view, with a scarce participation on agricultural, cattle and industrial activities, excepting the irrigation oasis. Within these zones, the income per capita is lower than the national media and the percentage of people with unsatisfied basic necessities goes beyond 40%.

The Secretariat of Sustainable Development and Environmental Politics (SDSyPA), former Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development (SRNyDS), National Focal Point to Combat Desertification and Draught, is actively working on the design of the National Strategy of Sustainable Development, according to the assumed commitment to put into practice the Agenda 21. Within this context, Argentina during the last years has been developing, several actions in order to formulate and to apply that strategy. It cannot be considered as effectively defined and consolidated yet, being this linked to an intense analysis process, in the frame of new political, economic and social conditions that reach the whole country.

The Argentine Republic has subscribed in 1994 the International Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), believing that this new international normative tool will become a valid instrument to prevent, to combat and to revert serious desertification processes that our country is suffering from nowadays.

In 1996, the CCD was ratified by the National Parliament, through Law 24.701, which has not been ruled by the Executive power yet.

Within the frame of the national sustainable development strategy, it is being developed the National Action Program to Combat Desertification (NAP), initiated by the former Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development. This coordinates a wide discussion with all public national and provincial institutions and organizations, non-governmental organizations and producers' associations linked to the problem, with the goal to contribute to sustainable development in arid, semiarid and sub-humid zones of Argentina.

The NAP has been formulated with technical and financial support of FAO and UNEP. It has also been important the technical and financial support made by UNSO/PNUD and the Secretariat of the Convention respect to activities of sensitivity, development and concretion of the NAP's draft document. The activities of NAP's formulation finished at the end of 1997 with the presentation of the Basis Document, which includes six strategic areas:

1. Provincial, Inter-provincial and Regional Action Programs.
2. National Information Network to Combat Desertification and Draught Mitigation.
3. Education, Training and Public Consciousness.
4. Strengthening of Institutional and Frame.
5. Strengthening of Financial-economic Frame.
6. Insertion of the NAP into Regional and International fields.

At national level, in 1996 the Provisional Executive Committee was established, aiming to facilitate the convocation and to grant its development. This Committee gathers representatives from relevant national and regional institutions at political, scientific, educational, sanitary, security levels among others; and representatives from civil organized society such as NGOs and producers' associations. It organized three national meetings and afterwards it has been using the structure of the Environmental Federal Council (COFEMA), composed by representatives from the affected provinces, eventually using resources from the SDSyPA for the activities' development of the Committee.

Since law 24.701 is not ruled yet, the Executive Provisional Committee has no legal capacity nor budget for its functioning, even though the actions for implementing the CCD did not stopped.

The National Focal Point, the Secretariat of Sustainable Development and Environmental Politics (SDSyPA), kept on generating strategies to include the discussion about desertification at all levels. Is in that way how NGOs began developing activities through RIOD (International Desertification NGOs Network), as well as provinces through COFEMA, the Secretariat of Science and Technology (SECyT), which included "desertification" as a priority subject, and INTA and German Cooperation (GTZ).

In April,1999 when The Planning Workshop of the Agreement (former Secretary of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development- INTA-GTZ took place) several members of the NAP's Provisional Executive Committee were participated, in order to jointly determine short- term goals and actions. One of the established priorities was the strengthening of the NAP's Provisional Committee.

In July, 1999 the revision of the Basis Document was finished. This opportunity allowed to deepen gender perspective in the strategies of the NAP. To that end workshops of training and diffusion on the subject were coordinated, with the technical and financial support of UNSO/PNUD. These meetings resulted in a Basis Document adjustment, which establishes gender strategies in each of the action areas proposed by the NAP.

The development of the activities that participated on the NAP activities was based on a series of pre-existent projects which at a major or minor emphasis worked on desertification in different provincial territories. Even though the majority of the programs and/or projects did not indicate concretely a goal of desertification control, they did try to identify causes and to propose actions which generated diagnosis and control processes.

The activities of developing and researching centers, together with actions of governmental and non governmental institutions have enabled to reach a high level of knowledge of dry zones and to develop technical tools to combat desertification.

It could be proved that from 1994 to the present, several plans, programs and projects linked to combating desertification and related, in general, with dry zones sustainable development have increased, at national and provincial levels.

It also exists a positive mobilization of some sectors of the national community towards a consolidation of NAP principles. In Argentina this is sustained by the presence of international forums, the goals reached by national program, publicly manifested by the Secretariat of the CCD in his visit to our country in 1998. Anyway it is necessary to tight and deepen the inter-action between involved institutions, mainly in the frame of reaffirmation and revitalization of communication and inter-change links, reached on NAPs elaboration.

The priority of the NAP formulation is the insertion of Argentina in Regional (PAR) and Subregional (PAS) orders, with the object of complement and strengthen involved countries' NAPs. In the NAP is established the inclusion of joint programs convened for sustainable management of natural resources, scientific cooperation and institutions' strengthening.

Within this context, we can point out that Argentina, together with Bolivia and Paraguay, is carrying on the Sustainable Development Subregional Program of the Gran Chaco Americano. Besides, it is also in process of concreting the Puna Americana Program, together with Chile, Bolivia, Peru y Ecuador.

It has also been formulated a project between Argentina and Chile, which includes gender perspective, and it aims to women producers of both countries, for training and technology transference.

For NAPs elaboration, a work methodology has been implemented, and it is based on a participatory focus "bottom-up methodology". In this new process, an important number of persons tightly linked to management and use of natural resources have participated at regional workshops, which permitted to obtain technical information to elaborate the Basis Document.

Agricultural producers, peasants, NGOs, and indigenous communities participated and actively worked with professionals, technicians, scientists, teachers, politicians and representatives from different intermediate entities.

Activities with producers and settlers defined a methodology based on population problems and its relationship with desertification concept. At the same time, meetings at

provincial level were organized, with representatives from different public and private institutions. The scheme was established, in a similar way, at community and/or municipal levels.

During 1996 and 1997, forty meetings and local workshops were organized, in order to define programs that conformed NAP's Basis Document. In these activities participated more than 2000 representatives from governmental and non governmental institutions, universities, researching centers, producers' associations, civil society and members from legislative cameras. The central activity of those workshops was to reach consensus between different regional actors in order to grant the Program's sustainability. When these meetings finalized, it was organized the National Provisional Committee meeting, to analyze the information and experiences gathered at local workshops. During that meeting main tendencies that should be included in National Action Program to combat Desertification were discussed. This mechanism of participation and consulting permitted to obtain documentation used afterwards for the elaboration of the Basis Document, towards the end of 1997.

It has to be pointed out that even though a wide convocation and participation of the society existed during the writing of the Basis Document, members of the population and decision makers haven't still been involved and are not conscious about the problem.

National Focal Point has organized and financed sensitization campaigns on desertification. This campaigns were always assisted by governmental and non governmental organizations of the regions where they took place.

Even though a communication activity about the actions related to CCD has been developed, and this permitted to elaborate the Basis Document, which was distributed to be consulted by everyone involved in the subject; the mechanisms of impact evaluation which allow to identify the evolution of the CCD and NAP postulates have not been generated yet.

NGOs have completed an important task linked to the diffusion of the problem, training of producers and technology transference, several times accompanied by the National Focal Point.

Within arid and semi arid regions, many provinces and institutions of researching and technological transference have started developing programs and projects included in NAP's strategies and added to the Basic Document.

Even though a detailed researching has not been made yet, during 1998/1999, the Direction of Soil Conservation, depending on SDSyPA, has received the contribution of:

- More than 60 ideas, and projects presented by provinces, researching institutions and NGOs, which allowed to elaborate the National Project to Combat Desertification in Argentina, presented to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

- More than 450 small projects from different regions, 91 of them were chosen to be applied through GTZ financing, within the frame of SDSyPA-INTA-GTZ agreement.
- Technical contribution and information from different national organisms' areas and researching institutes such as provinces in order to elaborate the basic document of the Program to Control Soil Degradation and to Combat Desertification in Argentina.

The Program to Combat Desertification in Argentina does not have a budget of its own yet, but it is a mechanism to optimize financing resources from the most varied sources.

The National Focal Point, annually assigns about U\$S 500.000 from its own financing resources for spending and investing in the management and promotion of the NAP.

At provincial governmental level of the dry region, the financing- economic assignment for its natural resources and environment management is unequal, being established a range between 0.02% to 0.5% of the annual provincial budget. If we consider that the added budget (1996/97) for 17 provinces of the dry region reaches U\$S 10 thousand million, a total average assignment could be estimated in U\$S 28 million annually.

Respect to scientific and technology levels, several national sources compound an important economic-financing basis. Together with Arid Zones' Institutes Network (IADIZA), National Council of Scientific and Technical Researching (CONICET); Regional Centers of the Water's National Institute (INA); National and Provincial Universities and the Program of Science and Technique it overpasses U\$S 8 million annually.

Since INTA was created, it has been working on technological development to control resources deterioration within arid zones. During the last years, INTA total budget reached U\$S 120 million annually, from which 34 million were assigned to salaries and operative spends of 25 Agricultural Experimental Stations and extension agencies of the dry region linked to them.

The Secretary of Agriculture, Cattle Fishing and Feeding (SAGPYA) developed the Social-Agricultural and Cattle Program (PSA) from 1994 to 1999, which assisted technically and financially to small- holder - agricultural producers of the whole country, for a global amount of U\$S 54 million. From this amount, U\$S 26 million belonged to technical and financing assistance from dry zones' provinces.

Briefly, we can point out that mobilization of internal financing resources for the management, researching and development of dry zones' natural resources in Argentina is not exiguous, but important and sustained, and has to be admitted that the major part of these resources are assigned to salaries of technical and professional staff, which develops different tasks at governmental and academic centers and institutes of the region.

This situation allows to consider that a basis of technical and institutional capacities exists, scattered within the whole dry region, over which incremental financing resources, assigned by national programs and projects, and by cooperation or international credits' ones, should have a very high cost-effectiveness relationship.

Activities of international cooperation in Argentina, related to combating desertification, has been really significant.

Technical and financing support from FAO, UNEP, UNSO, IPNUD, Spain government, permitted the elaboration and consolidation of NAP's Basis Document; the beginning of Subregional Gran Chaco and Puna Programs; and the deepening of gender subject.

German government cooperation, through GTZ has been permanent and one of the most developed, even though before the CCD was created. Within the last ten years significant projects related to combating desertification have been developed, and as a counterpart more than US\$ 20 million were invested on them.

This support was also present at workshops' development (land tenure, traditional technologies, education, among others) and in small investing projects to combat desertification within different dry regions of the country.

In this process of international cooperation an efficient inter-institutional coordination mechanism has been achieved, through an Agreement Act between the former Secretariat of Natural resources and Sustainable Development, GTZ and INTA, started in 1999 with the aim to support the National Action Program.

Since 1998 international financing organisms have assumed a more engaged role in cooperation to combat desertification. Argentina has initiated conversations with IDB for a credit to develop a project to combat desertification which link all dry regions of the country. This will be developed through the execution of different components which include training, investing in infrastructure and networks, equipment and organization of natural resources' users in dry zones.

Up to the present some study and researching components on desertification have been executed in Patagonia (SAGPYA/BIRF) with an investing of 1 million dollars; meanwhile other ones are being analyzed at national level (SDSYPA/BID) for US\$ 750.000.

The Secretary of Sustainable Development and Environmental Politics with the support of the International Reverting and Foment Bank (IRFB), led a project on native forests and protected areas, with the object to improve management and conservation of them at national and provincial levels. Activities of Forest Inventory, Integral Studies and Applied Researching Projects within forest regions associated to dry zones, involve a global investing of 4 million dollars with a 40% of national component and 60% of the bank.

At another level of investing SAGPYA initiated, in the frame of the Program of Provincial Agricultural Services (PROSAP), projects of rehabilitation of great irrigation systems in dry zones affected by salinity and coat outcrop.

The Program financed by BIDIBIRF invested more than 16 million dollars over a total assigned of 65 million in studies and projects for hydric labors.