

**REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA**  
**MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**GENERAL ECOSYSTEMS DIRECTORATE**

**“FIRST NATIONAL REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION  
TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT - CCD”**

**Santafé de Bogotá, April 2000**

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Republic of Colombia is located in the northwest corner of South America and has a northern coastline on the Atlantic Ocean and western one on the Pacific Ocean. Its continental area includes 1,141,782 km<sup>2</sup> and is entirely situated within the Inter-tropical Confluence Zone. It receives the NE and SE Trade Winds and has a population of 38,000,000 inhabitants, most of whom live in the Andean region (mountains and savannas). Colombia is divided into 34 departments, which are in turn subdivided into 1,082 municipalities.

Colombia's location within the Inter-tropical Confluence Zone, where the Pacific phenomenon popularly known as "El Niño" originates, leads to specific effects as El Niño manifests itself directly on the Colombian Pacific coast. These effects consist of higher sea surface temperatures and a higher than average sea level. This phenomenon alters the weather over the entire Colombian territory, affecting the entire natural environment in general and the water cycle in particular.

The intensity of an "El Niño" phenomenon depends on the magnitude of the anomalies and the area affected by same. Although it produces an impact, the intensity of "El Niño" is different from the magnitude of its effect on the weather and from its impact on human activities. The climate effect depends on the time of the year in which "El Niño" happens and the socio-economic impact has more to do with the vulnerability of the different regions of the country and the different sectors of national activity.

The past has seen "El Niño" phenomena of varying intensities. For example, the 1982-1983 event is considered to have been quite severe, while those of 1957-1958, 1965-1966, 1972-1973 and 1991-1992 were severe, and those of 1976-1978 and 1986-1987 were moderate. However, the effects on the weather and the socio-economic impact of these phenomena were not related to their intensity.

The phenomenon of "El Niño" of 1997-1998 had a direct effect on the Colombian Pacific coast, affected the climate over the entire Colombian territory and the vegetation-soil system in terms of attenuating water shortages, affected the vegetation system and succession stages and soils, and the water cycle and water supply.

The impact of the NE and SE Trade Winds coming from the northern and southern hemispheres is greatest between the months of May and September. The clash of these air flows above the Andean masses is responsible for the dual-mode and Andean-perimeter rainfall systems of the country, which tend to manifest a single-mode character.

Colombia is characterized by a variety of climates produced by different temperatures, principally due to altitude gradient and rainfall system. Annual rainfall ranges from 150 - 200 mm found in Caribbean regions such as the Guajira Peninsula, to over 10,000 mm in several areas of the Pacific coast region. Humidity ranges vary from sub-humid to hyper arid and from humid to super humid.

Topographical conditions (mountain chains with alternating valleys) and human settlement patterns in the mountainous regions, with the resulting pressure over the land and its natural resources, and continued deforestation as well as the advance of the agricultural frontier, with inappropriate soil and land use, have led to a soil degeneration process which is currently in progress. This soil degeneration process may be seen in the different types of erosion which accelerate the desertification process that currently characterizes several regions of the country.

These areas, along with others where climate has been a significant contributing factor to desertification processes, constitute a series of land areas in dry, semiarid and arid subhumid regions.

Sadly, approximately 34.7% of Colombia's territory is affected by slight, moderate, severe and/or very severe erosion. It is important to note as well that the degradation process takes place in different ecosystems, a fact which should call the attention of the respective national and international agencies.

For over 30 years the nation has enacted legislation on renewable natural resources and pollution

prevention and control. This legislation has been reviewed and adjusted based on the social and economic needs of the nation. Important legislation includes Decree Law 2811 of 1994, the Natural Resources and Environment Code, the Political Constitution of 1991, Law 99 of 1993 which restructured the ecological and environmental sector and created the Ministry of the Environment, and the restructuring and creation of the Autonomous Regional Corporations (Corporaciones Autónomas Regionales, CARs). This environmental legislative framework constitutes the basis for all types of measures adopted and for the definition of priorities, plans, programs and projects in combating desertification and drought, in alignment with national environmental policy.

Colombian environmental policies include the National Biodiversity Policy, Forests Policy, Policy Guidelines for Comprehensive Water Management, Strategies for a National System of Protected Natural Areas, Colombian Wildlife Environmental Management Policy, programs and/or strategies on the management of renewable natural resources and research on same, and the policies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which include Technology Transfer and Research on Tropical Agriculture.

There is also the Alternative Development Plan (PLANTE), Technological Development Policy, the National System on Agroindustrial Science and Technology, Integrated Organization and Sustainable Development of Coastal Areas, Policy Guidelines on the Environmental Organization of the Territory, Clean Production Policy, Policy Guidelines on Pesticide Use and Management, Strategic Plan for the Restructuring and Creation of Forests in Colombia (Plan Verde), Plan Verde Implementation Program - Forests for Peace. Incentives are being considered for reforestation and forest preservation by way of the Forest Incentive Certificate (CIF - Certificado de Incentivo Forestal) and the Incentive for Rural Capitalization (ICR - Incentivo a la Capitalización Rural).

The entities in charge of the environmental sector, such as the Ministry of the Environment and its affiliated agencies such as IDEAM (Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies - Instituto de Hidrología Meteorología y de Estudios Ambientales); Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Research on Biological Resources (Instituto Alexander von Humboldt de Investigación en Recursos Biológicos); Regional Autonomous Corporations; Agustín Codazzi Geographical Research Institute; the entities in charge of research in the agricultural and animal husbandry sectors (CORPOICA and ICA); the entities in charge of land resources management, such as INAT (National Land Preparation Institute - Instituto Nacional de Adecuación de Tierras); and other government entities and, on occasion, private entities, have contributed with knowledge through their studies on dryland ecosystems and on the causes and consequences of desertification and drought processes, and have placed these studies at the disposal of communities. Likewise, in terms of the preparation of specific plans, programs and projects, community participation processes were undertaken to identify the causes and analyze the consequences of the process, thus transforming communities into actors involved in the management and resolution of the effects they are experiencing.

However, the struggle against desertification and drought requires ample coverage in Colombia, starting with an intense awareness-raising plan at all levels geared at changing attitudes in favor of preventing and controlling desertification processes. This will facilitate inter-institutional coordination and preparation and the initiation of programs and projects, as well as the efficient monitoring of their execution. Multilateral as well as bilateral international technical and financial cooperation is also required, including the Global mechanism.

Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNCDD) is of the highest importance. The First Seminar - Preparatory Workshop for the National Report of the UNCDD was held on February 10 and 11, 2000, with the participation and support of the Regional Autonomous Corporations, including the participation of dryland areas in their jurisdictions, such as CDMB - Corporation for the Defense of the Bucaramanga Pateau (Corporación de Defensa de la Meseta de Bucaramanga), CORPAMAG - Magdalena Regional Autonomous Corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional del Magdalena), CVC - Valle del Cauca Regional Autonomous Corporation (Corporación Autónoma del Valle del Cauca), CORPOGUAJIRA - Guajira Regional Autonomous Corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional de la Guajira), CAM - Upper Magdalena Regional Autonomous Corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional del Alto Magdalena), CORTOLIMA - Tolima Regional Autonomous Corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional del Tolima), CRA - Atlántico Regional Autonomous Corporation

(Corporación Regional del Atlántico), CORANTIOQUIA - Antioquia Regional Autonomous Corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional de Antioquia), CAR - Cundinamarca Regional Autonomous Corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional de Cundinamarca); the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and its related institutions (CORPOICA, ICA, INAT), IDEAM - the Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies Institute (Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales), the IGAC - Agustín Codazzi Geographical Institute (Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi), NGOs by way of ECOFONDO, PACOFOR Project, a representative of the Tolima Indigenous Communities and different interested offices of the Ministry of the Environment. Financing is required for the activities programmed, which include the following for the current year: the awareness-raising sessions of PAN - National Action Program (Programa de Acción Nacional), the creation of OCN - the National Coordination Body (Órgano de Coordinación Nacional) and preparation of the PAN.

Colombia's situation, with a considerable portion of its surface consisting of dry, semi-arid and arid sub-humid regions; with accelerated soil and ecosystem degeneration processes; with abundant, adequate legislation on natural resources and the environment; with long-term erosion control and erosion prevention projects; and currently re-directing its actions according to the criteria of the Convention, will require national and international financial support to implement the PAN, including its infrastructure, equipment and human resources, etc.

According to the above, during the preparation of the PAN, priority proposals are to be defined for submitted submission during the forthcoming Conference of the Parties (COP).