



Grupo Ambiental para el Desarrollo (GADE)

Message of Sonia Ramírez, president of the NGO GADE :

“Young people living in affected areas are not fully aware of the problem of DLDD. It is important to show them what is going on so they can contribute to the solution”

Sonia Ramírez, president of the NGO GADE (Grupo Ambiental para el Desarrollo), has been dealing with desertification problems since 1999. Nowadays, she is absolutely sure about the need of teaching people how to behave in an environmentally respectful manner.

Since its inception 12 years ago, this Argentinean NGO focuses on two main ideas: to promote environmental education and environmental protection and to implement sustainable development projects. Sharing and improving environmental awareness have proven to be good methods to preserve the environment.

9 million people affected by desertification

In Argentina, 75 per cent of its territory is considered as arid and semiarid zones, with the linked land degradation and migration movements, two of the main problems of desertification/land degradation and drought (DLDD). In order to combat this enormous problem in the countryside, GADE is working on establishing mechanisms of formal education among several age groups: “By making society aware of the consequences of desertification we build a better future”, says Sonia Ramírez.

One outstanding current initiative is the Forestry project to combat desertification, mitigate climate change and protect biodiversity "Youth Environmental Groups". The overall project goal is to improve the enforcement of sustainable development policies in Argentina, particularly those related to the implementation processes of the three major environmental conventions (UNFCCC, UNCCD and CBD). These actions promote the involvement of young people, who receive training and become agents of dissemination and awareness. Moreover, the president of the NGO stressed the economic benefits of the activity: “The project will also provide employment opportunities to young people from 18 to 25 years”.

Sonia is optimistic about the expected timeframe of this pioneer young initiative: “We are aware of the long duration of the project, but the fight against desertification is not a quick process, so we need to plan for the future, too”. The project includes an initial period of five years, during which the planting takes place, followed by a second stage of fifteen years, during which the organization will monitor the forest development.

Through the reforestation of 3,000 hectares, the project will primarily: mitigate climate change by reducing the amount of atmospheric carbon dioxide, combat desertification and promote recovery of degraded soils, protect biodiversity and restore the native forest, create employment opportunities and improve socio-economic conditions in the area of influence, and increase environmental awareness, particularly among young people. All these factors are fairly related to DLDD and its effects can be lessened by their successful accomplishments.

Talking about the attitude of the civil society organizations (CSOs), Sonia Ramírez is a supporter of not lowering the bar: “We can never stop. These are necessary groups, and we need to feel useful to the society, keep building a consciousness within humankind”. She highly encourages other CSOs to work in new initiatives, and, above all, to not lose hope, since all of us still can change the course of desertification together.

Good advice:

“It is important to have Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) between different CSOs: sharing information allows the organizations to get more profound and deeper knowledge of the problem”.

For more information about **GADE**: gade@gade.org.ar