

A Model US\$ 11-Billion Brazilian Program to End Desertification

Contributed by Marco Bahé
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Faced with a very negative scenery involving desertification around the world, Brazil was responsible for providing the best news about the matter in recent times.

The National Program to Fight Desertification and for Mitigation of the Effects of Droughts (PAN Brasil) was presented to the international community during the United Nations Conference to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in October last.

Desertification is a process of degradation of drylands caused mainly by exaggerated and inadequate exploitation by man. The Brazilian program forecasts investment of 25 billion reais (approximately US\$ 11 billion) by 2007.

Elaborated with the participation of organizations of the civil society, PAN Brasil covers 1,482 cities in 11 states: Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Maranhão, Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Sergipe.

The Brazilian program received immediate support of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), of the United Nations Development Program, of the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Development and of the Global Mechanism, a fund established in the scope of the UN convention to fight desertification. The German government, through the Ministry of Development and Economic Cooperation, also formalized its support in Nairobi.

According to the technical coordinator of the program, José Roberto de Lima, other international mechanisms have also showed interest, among them the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Union, through the Italian government, and the International Fund for the Development of Agriculture.

"We are negotiating with countries from Latin America and the Caribbean and with the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) so that we may support them in the development of plans similar to the Brazilian one," stated José Roberto.

The conclusion of the national plan is connected to an engagement taken on by Brazil in the scope of the UNCCD, of which the country has been a signatory since 1997.

Ratified by 191 countries, the UNCCD is the legal instrument that deals with the problem of degradation of land or desertification in rural areas located in arid, semi-arid or dry-subhumid areas.

Implementation of the PAN Brasil is being coordinated by the Technical Coordination to Combat Desertification, connected to the Secretariat of Water Resources, of the Ministry of Environment.

The Brazilian initiative gained special importance due to the fact that the country has the most populated areas susceptible to desertification in the world. In an area that corresponds to 15.7% of the country's territory, with 32 million inhabitants, is around 20% of the Brazilian population.

This importance was recognized by the secretary general of the UNCCD, Hama Arba Diallo, who said that "Brazil, China and India are countries that may contribute more to the combat of the problem. Brazil may certainly act more, mainly in sharing information about the matter," said Diallo, in Kenya.

Unity

The formulation of the Brazilian program resulted in a pact between important social actors, like governments, the civil society, non-government organizations and the scientific community. The same pact that produced the document presented in Nairobi takes care of putting the program in practice.

Currently, the greatest concern regarding implementation of the Brazilian program in coming years is the capacity for maintenance of the mobilization created amongst the community affected by the plan.

"Articulation between organizations in the civil society is necessary so we may have greater participation in the elaboration of projects," underlined João Otávio Malheiros, Institutional Relations director at the Maranhão State Association for Conservation of Nature (Amavida).

To the executive secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Claudio Langone, the Brazilian government is conscious of this need and has already increased from one to 13 the number of people in the government who are fully dedicated to

questions related to the UN Convention and to the fight against desertification in the country.

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