

Almost 20% of Northeastern Brazilians Suffer with Desertification

Contributed by Isabela Vieira
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The desertification process, which consists of the degradation of arid, semiarid, and dry subhumid regions, as a result of climactic factors and of human action, affects 44 million Brazilian citizens - approximately 18% of the population living in nine northeastern Brazilian states.

The same phenomenon is also present in some of the cities in the north of the state of Minas Gerais (Southeast) and in the northeast of the state of Espírito Santo (Southeast), according to data supplied by the Brazilian Ministry of Environment.

In the northeastern Brazilian city of Fortaleza, the 1st Brazilian National Conference on Fighting Desertification discussed actions and planning initiatives to avoid degradation and impoverishment of the soil, which would render the region desert and unfit for living in coming years. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) points out that the semiarid tends to become much hotter and drier due to changes in climate.

On this first day of debates, according to the representative of the network of non-government organizations Articulação do Semi-Árido (ASA - Articulation of the Semiarid), Paulo Pedro de Carvalho, the coordinator of the National program of Action for Combating Desertification (PAN Brasil) of the Brazilian Ministry of Environment, José Roberto de Lima, invited the society to "strengthen the program" and to help "institutionalize the theme within the government."

"We are aware that desertification does not receive due attention, even within the Ministry. And we have committed ourselves with Lima to helping attract our government's attention to the problem and working together to expand our program," said Carvalho.

The ASA brings together more than 700 non-government organizations, and carries out programs such as construction of cisterns and techniques for capturing rainwater for consumption, agriculture, and cattle-raising. It also promotes lectures to explain the importance of not deforesting natural vegetation and saving water.

"The man must do as the caatinga (the Brazilian savannah) itself does: store water during the rain period, which is short, and then manage the resource in the drought period by limiting consumption," said Carvalho.

Also participating in the meeting in Fortaleza are representatives of the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA in the Portuguese acronym), of the Foundation of Meteorology and Hydric Resources of the State of Ceará (Funceme), among other partners.

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