

UNDP/GEF PROJECT

“Sustainable management of arid and semi-arid ecosystems to control desertification in Patagonia, Argentina- ARG/07/G35”

Focal Area: Land Degradation (LD);

REPORT

FINAL EVALUATION

May 12, 2014/ October 28, 2015 and March 2016

Country:	Argentina
PIMS	2891
ATLAS Award ID:	00051313
GEF Focal Area:	OP15 Land Degradation (LD)
GEF Strategic Objective:	Sustainable land management
GEF Budget (USD):	5,183,966, and 350,000 for PDF-B
Co-Financing Budget (USD)	Government: 25,288,905 Multilateral: 1,231,550 Project Identification: 30,000
Project Document Signature	May 31, 2007
Date of first disbursement:	08/08/2007
Original Planned Closing date	July 2011
Executing Agency:	Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development (SAyDS),
Date of Project Closure	April 30, 2014

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Consultant: Horacio Levit

Note:

This Final Report was prepared based on two evaluation assignments independently conducted by Tania Ammour and Horacio Levit. As detailed below, the assignment undertaken by the consultant was carried out in order to include such aspects that given the climatic and political conditions could not be assessed by the first evaluation. This includes on-the-ground visits to the MARAs and meetings with political and technical authorities both at national and provincial level.

This Project is deemed of significant importance since i) it seeks to address the critical problem of desertification in Patagonia, ii) it is fully concordant with the priorities of Argentine PAN, GEF 15 Operating Program and the UNDP-Argentina Action Plan (2005-2009 y 2010-2014). *This Project has been designed with an innovative approach seeking -at different levels- to revert or at least minimize desertification through the enhancement (coverage) of investigation, extension and financing services and in general productive and environmental policies with the focus on capitalizing existing technologies, strategies and initiatives.*

Several natural disasters (drought and the eruption of the Puyehue Volcano in Chile) and constant changes of provincial and national authorities have affected the Project mainly between 2007 and 2012. In the case of the climatic events the Government's response has been to declare Patagonia in a "state of emergency and of agriculture and livestock disaster". This situation was used as an opportunity to evidence the need of an articulated and integrated work by such agencies related to the livestock sector in Patagonia. While in the case of change of authorities this forced to redouble the lobbying efforts with the authorities.

As Final Supplemental Evaluation, the aim of this document is to "analyze and record the outcomes obtained as a result of the execution of the project during the period 2007-2013, establish the scope of impacts, sustainability and lessons learnt" and supplement the Evaluation performed in May 2014 **in order to deepen negative aspects and conduct an on-the-ground visit to the two participating provinces of the Project to confirm the existence of the USPAS and prove the continuity of the actions promoted under the Project.** Another aspect that deserves mentioning here is that at conducting the partial evaluation -timely prepared by the Engineer Tania Ammour- the Consultant had to face a series of difficulties -by way of illustration there was no local interlocutor, not all the information of the project was available, neither provincial players of the project nor producers or technicians could be interviewed and she could not make any on-the-ground visit- therefore *"the evaluation was mainly based on the analysis of the secondary information, i.e. partial documents and registries"*.

Therefore, the objective of this complementary analysis is to:

- Analyze factors identified as non-satisfactory in the First Evaluation Report.
- Evaluate aspects which could not be assessed in the First Evaluation Report, defined below as NA.
- Carry out on-the-ground visits (see the Report enclosed).

In conclusion this report focuses on such aspects as abovementioned given that the aspects related to the MTE impacts and the changes in the organization and composition of the Project team were broadly covered by the First Evaluation Report.

The breakthrough influencing the rate of development and focus of the implementation of the Project has been the MTE in 2010. The inquiries regarding the execution, performance, efficiency and operation of the Project gave rise to several adjustments and positions: on the one hand the reformulation of the specifications and contents of the logical framework indicators and personnel and Project organization changes and on the other hand a change in the approach of the Project in order to allocate the efforts towards the design of new models *in new areas of work* where the INTA was not present. The actions at the provincial level were maintained with the creation of devices aimed at measuring and addressing the desertification problem (meteorological stations, SIC, MARAS, economic models for sheep systems) and by forecasting climatic phenomena (early alert systems). In addition institutional agreements were suspended. The combination of these changes was detrimental to the efforts towards programs and policies at provincial and national level. In fact at the original design of the Project the SAGPyA through the INTA was the “drive belt” through which the Project was going to be introduced at provincial and local committees, LO unities, productive projects and programs offering an environmental approach. The new authorities changed substantially -in the adjustments made- the role of INTA which became from a “strategic partner” and a pivotal link in the work strategy at the different levels to a “consultant” engaged in providing specific goods and services. It should be noted that INTA’s goods and services focused on the design and validation of SSS at provincial level and in lesser degree at local level (attention to pilot sites, extension systems).

After the MTE, the “Redesign of the Project” report, the “Multi-annual Plan” and “Management Response” i.e. the response of the Direction or the Coordination of the Project ***were not sufficient to clarify the “manne/way” in which the Project was to comply with the expected changes at institutional, politics and producers levels.*** Especially through which agency or organization the Project was supposed to have a “liaison” to the complex institutions of each Province on the grounds that the INTA was supposed to operate as an “agency providing services”? And that the team hired by the Project was to focus their efforts at local level. Likewise reports demonstrate that the recommendations made by the MTE were followed only for a few months and there was no evidence that the specific recommendations made for the medium term and up to end of the project have been reintroduced neither in specific reports nor in PIR through the period 2011-2013. Several key indicators of the Project tend to generate effects and impacts on the implementation of the MST practices at Patagonia through financing and an extension system of greater coverage and orientated to address environmental desertification issues. All of the above implied evidencing the effects of the Project on such aspects.

The limited available time (after the MTE) to implement new LcD models (2011-2013) has implied that the experiences developed have not matured enough, although under the interviews carried out potential signs of sustainability regarding investments and efforts made were acknowledged.

According to the opinion of the consultant of the EF, the MTE, the changes in the organization and composition of the Project’s team and the knowledge acquired since 2007 regarding the situations of the Provinces and the regional context provided the opportunity to the National Coordination

and Agency together with the Executive Committee to measure the scope of the indicators by province and to specify strategies prioritized and differentiated by provinces, areas and institutions (different levels). The information available shows that different devices defined as key in the document of the project (REPAM, SITT) were not reintroduced and thus those adjustments were not included in regular reports.

The MTE conducted in 2010, approximately two years as from the beginning of the Project eased to concentrate the efforts on the design and implementation of new models for areas of work named USPA (Socio Environmental and Productive Unity). The intervention strategy through the USPA was intended to address LCD and foster MST practices at local level. The point to note here is that the **USPAS** are composed of agro producers, the School and the municipality or the representative authority of the local government **offering them an important “liaison” to the environment which goes beyond the execution period of the GEF**. This strategy was designed to put into practice a notional approach composed of biophysical, economic and social aspects at a local level taking into account **vulnerable population and producers which are part of the desertification problem and in turn its main victims** pursuant to the commitment undertaken by the country in the LCD convention and approved by Law 24.701¹.

The fact that only just **as from the year 2010 the implementation of the project was boosted through the USPAS ended up affecting the performance of the project**. Probably an earlier commencement would have contributed to the achievement of several objectives of the Project in a more significant manner.

Some considerations about land degradation:

The Patagonian region has centered on livestock grazing production systems principally sheep (wool and meat) followed by goat (fur and meat) and cows (meat and milk). **These production systems depend on ecosystems services**, such as, natural grasslands biomass and water provision. Overgrazing emphasized by inappropriate land use and inadequate grazing practices is highly recognized as the main cause of land degradation and desertification processes in Patagonia².

This project sought to address the desertification process through the participation of national, provincial and local authorities. Therefore it was an ambitious initiative believing that desertification intrinsic problems should be addressed with the appropriate institutional support of the different players who by participating may have an influence on a MST.

Section 3 of the Sheep Law establishes **pastures evaluations** to determine the carrying capacity of the proponent farms as a prerequisite for financial resources approval. However the information available allows us to understand that this procedure was barely known by the farms. Therefore **the contribution made in the project evaluation stage by the GEF** was of significant importance in the LCD enabling different producers to have access to the Sheep Law. Such contribution consisted in the training of farm evaluation and minimum limits of carrying capacity and pastures evaluation for approval of sheep farming activities.

INTA’s role (National Institute of Agricultural Technology)

As from the MTE the INTA -apart from continuing with the training programs- started to participate through the implementation of the MST practices in pilot sites. In its capacity as strategic partner the INTA was present at the Executive Committee, inter-institutional round tables, Sheep Law, LADA and in land execution both in relation to such activities as defined in the letter agreements

¹ Assessment Report Jorge Prada

² Assessment Report Jorge de Prada

(environmental monitoring systems–MARA-, Geographic information systems –SIG-, Early alerts, pilot sites, among others) and in connection with such activities arising out of the demands of USPAS or of the provincial coordinators of the Project³.

According to the information disclosed, the USPAS and pilot sites models of INTA are part of other initiatives under execution as they have been applied as different intervention strategies in line with the previous experiences in the territory. The INTA used productive facilities as pilot sites where there is an intensive institutional activity through its Dependent Agencies (as for example in Zapala, Chos Malal, Valcheta, Gobernador Costa, Trelew, Gobernador Gregores).

Another aspect that deserves mentioning is that the INTA’s contribution was not only limited to training and implementation programs of the MARAS but -in relation to the USPAS- the INTA had an active role through direct and indirect participations by giving advice and training to human resources of the Project, professionals of the region and producers by means of activities and workshops related to the construction of electric wire fencing and watering facilities, sheep and goat management and reproduction and courses on facilities forage evaluation. The INTA’s goods and services centered on the design and validation of the SSS at provincial level.

MARAS (Systems of environmental management)

According to the information provided by the INTI, there are at present **358 MARAS**, all financed by the GEF. The distribution is as follows:

Province	Amount
CHUBUT TRELEW	49
LA PAMPA	12
LA RIOJA	4
NEUQUEN	39
RIO NEGRO	78
SANTA CRUZ	128
TIERRA DEL FUEGO	1
CHUBUT ESQUEL	47
General total	358

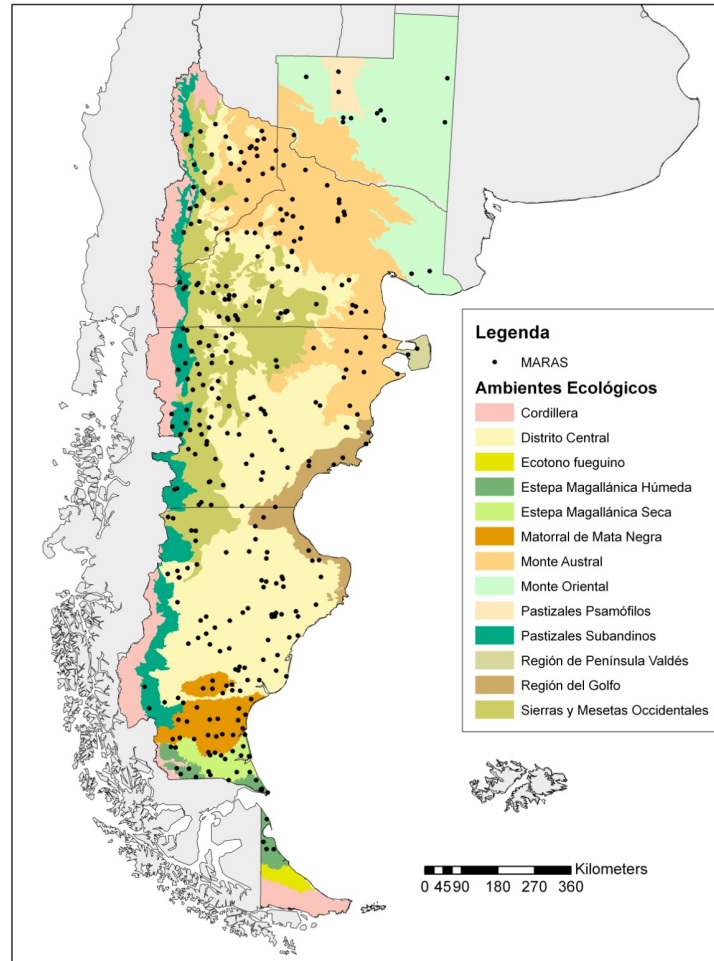
These MARAS have been completed in their entirety and an 80% have been entered in data bases, process which will continue until the end of 2015, at the data base developed for such purposes at <http://sipan.inta.gob.ar/mod.php?url=bWFyYXMvbWVudS5waHA>

It should be mentioned that although the GEF project has already finished the INTA took all the steps as deemed necessary and obtained for this current year 2015 a budget from Fundación ArgenINTA to carry out the re-reading of the first 100 MARAS which were installed with the GEF evincing the importance of the project contribution and giving continuity to it through other financing sources once the project has finished. This Evaluation points out the continuity of certain activities two years after the end of the GEF project. There is no doubt that this is deemed as a

³ See Exhibit Summary INTA

positive aspect of the intervention of the GEF project and evidences its consistent allocation of resources.

Location map of the 358 MARAS carried out by the GEF project (Source INTA)



Pilot Sites

One hundred and fifty thousand (150.000) hectares of pilot sites of INTA were monitored where MST practices were carried out. Among other activities in such sites strategic supplementation was promoted in order to ensure a greater survival of brood and infrastructure works were performed and training courses were given to producers on such sites.

Province	Farms	Amount
Río Negro	<i>El Algarrobo de Ariel Sosa, Sierra Colorada,</i> <i>El Mojón, de Guillermo Yanca, Valcheta</i>	2
Neuquén	<i>Paso Aguerre,</i> <i>Family Espinoza, Zapala,</i> <i>Mr. Italo Luna, Paraje la Pileta,</i>	3
TOTAL		5

The USPA model; an experience to understand

The land area subject-matter of the Project is surrounded by a socioeconomic context characterized by: lack of productive diversification, internal migration from rural to urban areas due to lack of job opportunities, cultural devaluation of rural and handcrafted works. The intervention strategy through the USPA was designed to address LCD and promote MST practices at local level. The USPA is composed of agro producers, the School and the municipality or the local government therefore it constitutes the **planning, follow-up and evaluation unity of the Project**. In short it poses a new paradigm by addressing dry land areas problems -where the community, poverty and the social and physical interactions should be taken into account in a systematic manner allowing producers to change their productive practices⁴.

In order to make up each Socio Environmental and Productive Unity (USPA) seven consecutive tasks were carried out: 1) selection of the area and USPA components, 2) preparation of baseline actions, 3) formulation of an intervention plan, 4) training, 5) infrastructure provision, 6) communication and extension, and 7) monitoring and evaluation.

Out of the seven tasks foreseen for each USPA, the preparation of a clear and precise baseline was the most difficult to execute as it helped to increase the main structural weakness of the Project already mentioned.

The USPA approach arose from producers' needs to establish work objectives and strategies involving different agencies, technicians, and investigators in order to provide solutions to revert desertification problems. The affected producers and their families met with specialists in the search of participative intervention plans. The combination of knowledge resulted from the USPA constitutes a validation space of sustainable land management providing experience and working criteria to the Technology Transfer Integrated Systems (SITT) and offering supplies to the Decision Support System (SSD), these last two services were expected under the Project.

In the light of the USPAS visited, the selection of the beneficiaries participating of same was a relevant phase of the Project not only because it deals with the most vulnerable producers and with fewer resources but also because they are both the first victims of desertification and the cause of it. Poverty induces to overexploitation⁵ of land resource.

Especially the USPAS were selected in areas where desertification and poverty problems were more critical and there was insufficient institutional presence: provinces like La Pampa, Neuquén, Río Negro and Chubut, with difficult access tracks and far away from provincial and/or participating agencies offices or dependent offices. Such decision implied to work in remote areas with almost bare or null history of provincial actions which meant on the one hand to focus the efforts on sites with pioneering actions but on the other hand it was very difficult to accompany such actions with regular visits.

Province	Amount of USPAS
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⁴ Daniel Pérez, USPAS for the Rehabilitation of Arid and Semi-Arid areas of the Patagonia of the Republic of Argentina.

⁵ Evaluation Report Jorge Prada

1	Chubut	3
2	La Pampa	4
3	Santa Cruz	2
4	Neuquén	2
5	Río Negro	2
	TOTAL	13

To sum up, as from the final presentations and reports prepared by the Coordination Unity it can be stated that the image projected by the GEF/Patagonia has posted a strong emphasis on implementation at local level centered on the design and implementation of the USPA. **Notwithstanding the foregoing, there is a lack of analytical information available evidencing a systematic process of monitoring.** Additionally the reports revised hardly show the articulation between the great number of activities and generation of devices (SSD) and the several contributions of the Project to the actions of other institutions specially the INTA.

Training

Training and dissemination activities demanded relevant efforts of the project as evidenced by the reports of the Coordinators and the on-the-ground visits. Three hundred and forty two (342) training activities were carried out altogether involving five thousand and two hundred ninety three (5293) persons among producers, technicians, students and population. Most of the activities were conducted locally. Many of such actions were aimed at inserting women in productive process, by training them in trades which enable them to generate resources in an alternatively manner. Reflecting on the achievements of the Project it is important to highlight as follows:

- ***The Project extended to other geographic areas the attention to producers and players to foster the use of TME practices.*** In fact in most of these areas, the INTA has not been present.
- ***The selected producers*** in the USPA and pilot sites “belong to the groups with fewer economic resources (...) and with lack of productive infrastructure in order to run properly their farms – pastures and watering facilities in relation to the size of the farm-“ (2013. Evaluation report. Prada).
- ***With such actions as carried out, awareness processes and decision-making processes were under way*** by local players **articulated** (School, Commission, Producers and their organizations) around their environmental, productive and economic problems at local level. The use of the early alert reports illustrates the usefulness of the information generated.
- ***The Project promoted the actions of the Dependent Agencies of the INTA*** involving them in the attention of the USPA and fostering the exchange between the USPA and the pilot sites of INTA both at technicians and producers level.

However, the partial evaluation of the economic, environmental and social effects prepared by the Project reveals a gap between practices knowledge and its application by the producers interviewed.

Even taking into account the unfavorable conditions to carry out the final evaluation, the main problem identified and which has restricted the assessment of the performance, effects and impacts of the Project is the lack of a results-orientated implementation approach. Especially planning, monitoring and evaluation of different kinds (operative, effects and impacts) and at different levels (local, provincial, national) ***has been one of the Achilles' heels of the Project. Even when it is possible that foreseen and unforeseen effects and impacts have taken place, the Project could hardly evidence them through the information generated (lack of systematization, managerial and technical reviews, LcD progress reviews, social and economic outcomes and capabilities strengthening and its impact).***

In other words –and acknowledging that the Consultant has not counted with any on-the-ground reference in the Provinces- in fact ***the Project has supported two types of on-the-ground intervention models in order to address desertification: on the one hand the USPAS with an implementation led by the personnel hired by the Project and with the involvement of local and provincial players and on the other hand the own pilot sites/extension systems of INTA. However even at the end of the Project there is neither any summary/analysis of the concrete or potential outcomes of such methods nor any comparison between them.***

Within the context before mentioned, **some sustainability signs** could be identified but with limitations for the replication of the outcomes generated.

- Most of the professionals who perform their duties at provincial level (La Pampa, Neuquén, Rio Negro, Chubut) in the Project were absorbed by provincial governments or work at universities or organizations related to the actions of the provincial government and at least in La Pampa they are still providing services to the USPAS. This is a very positive sign taking into account that the technical capacities acquired and the knowledge of the actions of the Project constitute the base for any sustainability and actions replication processes.
- At least in two provinces the desertification problem was institutionalized through the creation of the Secretariat for the Environment in Neuquén and the incorporation of the desertification issue in the Strategic Plan of the Provincial Government of La Pampa.
- In accordance with the interviews carried out with INTA's personnel and the review of documents and Web pages, it is clear that the products of SSD generated within the framework of the Project are institutionalized. For example in the case of the MARAS, an initiative is being negotiated to incorporate this device and its use within the priorities of the PAN. Likewise Dependent Agencies which have supported several actions with the USPA and pilot sites are expected to continue providing services and assistance to these groups under their sphere of responsibility.

The limitations to processes sustainability include several elements: some associated to the own characteristics of the Project and others resulting from external situations:

- The limited period of time passed as from the commencement of the activities at local level may put the sustainability of the actions at risks especially on account of the expectations created.

- The lack of experience, methodologies, guidelines systematization as well as the costs associated to the implementation of the USPA model and the work articulation proposals between players of different levels constitute an important limitation given that they do not count with any support to direct or adjust the model itself.
- The foregoing is directly related to the lack of a Project exit strategy.

Finally one of the negative “external” factors is the loss -at the central level of the Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development- of all technical capacities, the institutional memory and the experience gained by the professionals of the Project. In fact the employment agreements of all the personnel of the central team were terminated, except for the advisor distinguished by the Soil Department, and the personnel were dismissed from the Secretariat.

The recommendations of the EF are of two kinds: operative recommendations to improve the technical closure of the Project and strategic recommendations in order to deliver to such local and provincial players as selected evidences of the achievement of the Project and proposals for the continuity and sustainability or replication of the actions.

- **Operative Recommendations** are designed to: I) arrange the information generated under the Project with a clear index of documents, publications and reports. It is recommended to give priority to technical and methodological information in order to be able to deliver to the Provinces and selected players the support of the outcomes and activities carried out. By way of illustration, the SIG of each USPA should be posted on any Web site (National Observatory of Land Degradation and Desertification in Argentina?) knowing that the server of the Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development does not count with sufficient capacity to host all information. This issue should be managed by the Soil Department which has a direct influence in the LADA Project (the formulation of its new phase); ii) make available to focal points and other partners the reports of the Project including data bases of the information gathered; y iii) complete and clarify the Transfer Agreements of goods acquired to make viable the continuity of the actions and services to the USPA.
- **Strategic Recommendations** are designed in favor of UNDP and the SAyDS: so as they may consider the possibility to carry out a specific course of action to record the achievements, effects and impacts of the actions carried out at a local level. For such purposes, it is advised that together with the focal points such most successful USPA and pilot sites be identified and selected (in terms of implementation of practices, involvement of producers, schools, local authorities and INTA and articulation with superior authorities at provincial level, etc.). In line with the above, restore and complete the baseline, summarize and analyze the strategies and actions implemented resulting in positive outcomes– and negative outcomes- at the different levels (environmental, economic, social and institutional), record and quantify the outcomes of the different levels. Thus it is expected that for *selected cases* a complete quantitative and qualitative analysis be prepared of the experiences developed, the necessary conditions, the additional costs, the lessons learnt (positive and negative), gaps, as well as a proposal specifying next courses of actions, aspects to be considered and persons to be involved (technical assistance, financing, organized support, commercialization, etc.). The purpose is to put in writing and record the “USPA models” and “pilot sites” analyzing their feasibility for their

incorporation to the lines of work of the Provinces. Such work may be carried out together with the universities (through the students) or Institutions at a provincial level. To such ends, the advice is to reintroduce the LADA methodology enhancing the analysis carried out at the pilot sites already executed. Additionally it is recommended that besides the USPA and the pilot sites selected for the analysis abovementioned, the practices and work guidelines implemented in the USPA be reintroduced (not only in relation to technical aspects but also regarding the organization in the transformation/commercialization.) to prepare Cards similar to those included in the book “Evaluation of the Desertification in Argentina”. It is expected that with this work the information can be arranged and saved including description, scope of application, estimated costs, adaptability, efficacy, impacts on ecosystems services, institution and contact person. Taking into account that several “practices” were applied in several provinces, USPA and pilot sites, the differences in their application can be evidenced enhancing the analysis of their feasibility conditions.

The final assessments of the Project according to its different aspects and issues are detailed as follows:⁶

1. Project significance	R
2. Project design and adjustment	FS
3. Events/risks	MR
4. Contribution to remove barriers	FS
5. Management of the project	FS
• Organizational structure and operation	FS
• Role of other authorities and organizations	FS
• Relationship with other projects	FS
• Administrative and financial management	S
• Planning, monitoring and evaluation system	U
6. Comparative advantages of UNDP	FS
7. Performance analysis	FS
8. Budget performance including co-financing	FS
9. Project effects and impacts	FS
10. Sustainability	FS

The recommendations included below are of two kinds: operative recommendations to improve the technical closure of the Project and strategic recommendations in order to delivery to such national players as selected evidences of the achievement of the Project for the continuity and sustainability of the actions.

Operative Recommendations:

⁶ S: Satisfactory; FS: Fairly Satisfactory; U: Unsatisfactory; UA: Non-Assessable
MR: Moderate Risk; R: Relevant;

- It is imperative to arrange all the information generated under the project with a clear index containing documents, publications and reports. Such data base could be arranged by Specific Objective/Outcome and by Province on the understanding that such administrative/financial information and the aide memoire of the Coordination Unit are national level information for the whole Project. Acknowledging the difficulty to gather information for the whole period the advice is to give priority to such technical information/methodology in order to deliver to such Provinces and players as selected the support of the outcomes and activities carried out.
- Especially in the case of the information of the USPAS and the pilot sites (SIG, indicators survey...) it is advised to post such information on any Web site (National Observatory of Land Degradation and Desertification in Argentina?) knowing that the server of the Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development does not count with sufficient capacity to host all information. This issue should be managed by the Soil Department which has a direct influence on the LADA Project (the formulation of its new phase).
- Deliver to the Focal Points of the Provinces and other partner players the reports of the Project (the Annual Report 2007-2011, evaluation of productive, social and environmental effects) including the data bases of the information gathered to prepare such reports;
- Complete and clarify the Transfer Agreements of the goods acquired and the products generated by the Project (vehicles, computers, other equipment to be defined, publications, spreading materials...), taking into account that the continuity in the assistance to producers association and other local partners depends on the availability of such equipment and material. Such letter agreements should clearly include the commitments and contributions of the Provinces and be executed by the permanent authorities of SAyDS and provincial governments.

Strategic Recommendations

- UNDP and the Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development are advised to consider the possibility to carry out a specific course of action to record the achievements, effects and impacts of the actions carried out at a local level. For such purposes, they are advised that together with the focal points to identify and select such most successful USPA and pilot sites (in terms of implementation of practices, involvement of producers, schools, local authorities and INTA and articulation with superior authorities at provincial level, etc.). In line with the above, they are advised to restore and complete the baseline, summarize and analyze the strategies and actions taken resulting in positive outcomes at the different levels (environmental, economic, social and institutional), record and quantify the outcomes of the different levels. Thus it is expected that for *selected cases* a complete quantitative and qualitative analysis be prepared of the experiences developed, the necessary conditions, the additional costs, the lessons learnt (positive and negative), gaps, as well as a proposal specifying next courses of actions, aspects to be considered and persons to be involved (technical assistance, financing, organized support, commercialization, etc.). The purpose is to put in writing and record the "USPA models" and "pilot sites" analyzing their feasibility for their incorporation to the lines of work of the Provinces. Such work may be carried out together with the universities (through the students) or Institutions at a provincial level. To such ends, the advice is to reintroduce the LADA methodology enhancing the analysis carried out at the pilot sites already executed.
- Additionally it is recommended that besides the USPA and the pilot sites selected for the analysis abovementioned, the practices and guidelines of work implemented in the USPA be

reintroduced (not only in relation to technical aspects but also regarding organization, transformation and commercialization) to prepare Cards similar to those included in the book "Evaluation of the Desertification in Argentina". It is expected that with this work the information can be arranged and saved including description, scope of application, estimated costs, adaptability, effectiveness, impacts on ecosystems services, institution and contact person. Taking into account that several "practices" were applied in several provinces, USPA and pilot sites, the differences in their application can be evidenced enhancing in this manner the analysis of their feasibility conditions.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

Bearing in mind the limitations recorded in the development of the final evaluation please find below partial conclusions centered -on the one hand- on such aspects in respect of which some evidences could be gathered (circumstances occurred as from the formulation and during the implementation of the Project, Project performance, design, and adjustment, Project management and monitoring) and -on the other hand- on the reflection about the Project implementation approach and in short what the Project generated.

From its beginning the Project had to face several external adverse circumstances related to natural disasters (drought and volcano ashes) and changes in national and provincial authorities entailing adjustments in the implementation pace and adaptation for insertion within the institutional and political framework. These external factors have been deemed as opportunities to demonstrate even more the need to promote MST practices and to strength the impact at local and provincial levels (politics, producer assistance models, transport of technical capacities).

The factor that had the greatest influence on the Project was the MTE 2010 posting strong inquiries relative to the management, performance, efficiency and operation of the Project, which forced to carry out a series of readjustments in the technical team, partners' participation, institutional insertion, approach and priorities.

The efforts carried out as from 2011 made it possible to speed up the execution of the project (technically and financially) and minimize institutional conflicts pursuing a greater on-the-ground interaction between institutions and initiatives with common interests towards the LcD. However the adjustments carried out pursuing a greater efficiency of the Project at local level (on-the-ground) led the team (Unity of Coordination, National Agency) to grow apart from the Logical Framework as foreseen and from the main strategies of the Project.

Analyzing the development of its implementation, the Project has focused all efforts on the local level leaving aside one of the main elements of the Project which was the articulation and impact with other levels (provincial and national).

Thus it chose to focus on the design of a "new model" of intervention at the local level (the USPAS), promoting them in areas where there was lack of institutional presence and of high vulnerability

(social, ecological and in terms of infrastructure). The project chose to prove this approach knowing that it only had a bit more than three years.

Pursuant to the information available, the performance of the Project (regarding the compliance of the products and services foreseen under the logical framework in terms of outcome) was relatively low taking into account that only twenty six per cent of the objectives were met in a satisfactory or fairly satisfactory manner. Forty per cent of the objectives record from an unsatisfactory to a highly unsatisfactory performance. It should be noted that the thirty four per cent of the objectives cannot be assessed as it was not possible to make on-the-ground visits and/or because the reports and documents of the project to which the Consultant had access did not provide any evidence. This low performance is due to “de facto” changes in the implementation of the Project but keeping even in the logical framework a series of products, effects and impacts at superior levels. Besides this is attributable to the weak monitoring system of the Project which did not allow registering a series of effects expected in players not directly related to the USPA (institutions technicians, producers of pilot sites, producers who expected to benefit from the dissemination of the MST practices).

Although the GEF/Patagonia 2011-2013 Annual Report set out that the sample of producers interviewed “showed that the actions carried out were widely accepted and that they appreciated the contributions of materials or equipment received and the training and knowledge acquired” and that “the activities were carried out together with the INTA-GEF Patagonia team to transfer knowledge to local technicians and producer of the USPA”, it is no clear until what point and in what the intervention has generated changes in the institutions, in the manner of working of the producers’ organizations and in the local and provincial policies towards the LcD. From the ten effects and impact indicators, seven could not be evaluated due to the lack of evidence and three (relative to institutions incorporating MST in the decision making processes, institutional capacity for MST and grade of change in the Project due to the lessons learnt in the evaluation) has a low grading due to fact that the reported information does not match with the information verified in the reports and document of the Project.

It should be acknowledged that the initial design of the Project has been very ambitious both in relation to its scope and its coverage taking into account the diversity of institutional, social and ecological situations within its scope of action. ***The MTE was the opportunity– based on the path trodden since 2007 and the knowledge of reality gained to measure the intensity of the actions the intervention strategies by Province, level of intervention and subject.*** This could have been carried out in 2011 even keeping the logical framework but specifying the scope of the indicators, actions intensity and specific strategies by province.

Although –pursuant to the information revised- the initial design was carried out with a wide participation of the players at national and provincial level facilitating the sustainability of the actions, its readjustment resulted in the suspension of the institutional agreements and was conducted without fully considering the *possible implications* of the actions at the remaining period of time of the Project. In fact, the decision of the Project to focus on “new implementation models

of MST” based on territorial approach,⁷ even when it is a valid proposal it would have required of a lot of more time than the remaining period of 2011-2013. Likewise this “new” model would have required a deeper conceptualization with an explicit design evidencing the original strategy of the project (work through players at different levels using the existing structures). This would have facilitated through a sound information follow-up, learning and knowledge management system the implementation of proposals and recommendations for the sustainability, replication and scaling of the outcomes obtained.

The “suspension of the institutional agreements” after 2011 mentioned before has had several consequences: the articulation with the Sheep Law -main counterpart of the Project- has been consigned to oblivion and at least based on the information analyzed and the interviews carried out there is no evidence of any Project implications in such financing instrument. The same happened to the INTA, institution which was considered as from 2011 as a consultant providing services for a compensation but without any interference in the definition or analysis of the implementation strategies of the “new model” of the Project. The INTA is deemed to have had a key role in the training activities to producers and other local players within the USPA framework.

In other words, -and acknowledging that the Consultant has not counted with any on-the-ground reference in the Provinces- in fact ***the Project has supported two types of on-the-ground intervention models in order to address desertification: on the one hand the USPAS with an implementation leaded by the personnel hired by the Project and with the involvement of local and provincial players and on the other hand the own pilot sites/extension systems of INTA. However even at the end of the Project there is neither any summary/analysis of the concrete or potential outcomes of such methods nor any comparison between them.***

The Project has invested a great amount of resources (financial and human) to develop technical devices for the decision making process for the LcD: MARAS, meteorological stations, early alert systems, geographic information systems, simulation models which constitute valuable and necessary tools. During the implementation of the Project there are evidences that some of these tools were used (meteorological stations and early alert systems in the provinces providing services to producers, SIG for credit priority to producers). However it has ***lacked of an implementation approach orientated to effects and impacts*** hindering substantially the identification of product use, appropriation and effects.

According to the FE this situation has its origin in a weak management of the Project. Although the Project has an adequate formal governing structure and several supervision and orientation processes (Secretariat for the Environment and Sustainable Development, Executive Committee, UNDP, Coordination Unit), the situation identified by the MTE (***“lack of clarity in the performance accountability of the Project as well as significant inconsistencies between the information reported and the information revised during the evaluation process, lack of distinction between the achievements of other players which are tendentiously reported as achievements of the Project; lack***

⁷ Addressing the desertification issue from an approach of multi-players, productive alternatives diversification and value chain improvement.

of mechanisms giving rise to critical reflection enhancing the actions and operation of the Project” p. 94 of the MTE) was still effective during the last period of the Project (2011-2013).

The planning, monitoring and evaluation of different kinds (operative, effects and impacts) and at different levels (local, provincial, national) has been one of the Achilles’ heels of the Project. Even when it is possible that foreseen and unforeseen effects and impacts have taken place, the Project can hardly evidence them through the information generated (systematization, managerial and technical reviews, LcD progress reviews, social and economic outcomes and capabilities strengthening and impact.) According to the opinion of the EF one of the reasons of the this inadequacy is the lack of assistance (on the part of the National Agency, National Coordination, the Executive Committee and the Argentine UNDP) given to the documents subject-matter of the Project (PRODOC, MTE Evaluation, RTA Recommendations in the PIR), which constitute the commitments of the Project.

The Project did not provide for any termination strategy or any exit strategy, leaving several experiences which can be promising without any systematization or proposal to guarantee the continuity of the actions. Apparently there is a political decision at provincial level (La Pampa and Neuquén) to continue providing assistance to the USPAS at institutional level, although it has not been defined yet to which extend and which elements under USPA notion will be adopted (school involvement, commissioners, INTA).

Some lessons learnt:

- In order to foster **demonstration processes** at local level in short periods of time (even in five years) capitalizing the existing structures and knowledge (TME, MST intervention strategies with a territorial approach) it is necessary to:
 - **Give priority to such areas/groups of actors** where it has been clearly identified: the installed/ organizational capacities (of the permanent institutions at local and provincial level and of the producers’ organizations), political decision, resources degradation level and potential recovery, diversification potential with more possibilities and technical and financial support options.
 - **Design explicitly an intervention plan** for each area (USPA, pilot sites) based on solid baseline, a productive, environmental and institutional follow-up system. Especially the intervention plan sets out negotiations regarding the contributions of the parties, the definition of an image, objective which allows the measuring of the intensity and the intervention strategies and the application of investigation/actions/follow-up devices.
 - **Be alert in order not to fall into “activism”**, sacrificing reflexive and systematic analysis allowing evaluation (quantitative and qualitative), readjust and promote the use of methodologies and achievements at the “absorption” pace of players.
 - **Design and implement a communication strategy** to selected players at different levels with the purpose of guaranteeing the dissemination of information as a constant process.

- ***To promote the involvement of provincial players*** from the beginning of the Project, it is necessary to clearly bear in mind that the Implementation Plan abovementioned should include the financial commitment of the Project and the counterpart for the service life of the Project and annually. Otherwise the failure to reflect such financial commitment may give rise to instability and insecurity which may affect the involvement of other partners.
- ***To guarantee the proper implementation of a project*** of this kind, it is necessary to obey all the time the documents of the Project (including organizational, financial and co-financing commitments), the indicators of the logical framework, the recommendations made by the MTE in order to be able to identify and adjust the diversions/adjustments of the Project. This is particularly necessary when it is acknowledged that the Project should be operated on an *adaptive management* basis. Such tasks will fall within the scope of the responsibility of the Coordinator, the National Agency, the Executive Committee as well as the UNDP to guarantee that at any time one of the responsible members (under its own authority) may “raise the alarm” to redirect the Project.
- ***To guarantee that the Project is orientated towards effects and impacts***, the reports prepared by the partners and personnel cannot be only deemed as instruments to report activities and prove the respective payments. It is necessary that they show progresses in terms of effects and impacts. Only in this way the reports will become instruments necessary for the decision making processes and for the review of the Project progresses. This quality control and reflection promotion task is critical and will fall within the scope of the National Coordination. Otherwise the Project becomes a source of financing of products and activities which is not necessarily orientated to effects and impacts or which does not create the necessary supports.
- ***For a Project of this kind to have sustainability and replication capacity***, the monitoring system should not only be deemed as a data “recording” and “storage” system but it should generate the necessary information to orientate, auto-evaluate and take decisions regarding the performance and impacts of the Project. Again the quality control of products and indicators reports should be highlighted. Likewise, the comments at UNDP level (national and provincial offices) should be taken into account and followed as well as the recommendations of the MTE until the end of the Project. It should be noted that systematization, analysis, quantification and projection are as important as on-the-ground activities.

Conclusions and lessons learnt

From its beginning the Project had to face several external adverse circumstances related to natural disasters (drought and volcano ashes) and changes in national and provincial authorities entailing adjustments in the implementation pace and adaptation for insertion within the institutional and political framework. These external factors have been deemed as an opportunity to demonstrate even more the need to promote MST practices and to strength the impact at local and provincial levels (politics, producer assistance models, transport of technical capacities).

As a result of the Final Evaluation of the Project it is clear that the Project formulated an objective consisting in the application of extensive management technologies (TME) to 6 million of Ha. which turned to be **extremely ambitious** but **it lacked an strategic approach** orientated to outcomes evincing a shortfall of reports and registries proving the progresses under indicators well-defined. The planning, monitoring and evaluation of different kinds (operative, effects and impacts) and at different levels (local, provincial, national) has been one of the Achilles' heels of the Project. So is the case that even when it is possible that foreseen and unforeseen effects and impacts have taken place, the Project could hardly evidence them through the information generated (lack of systematization, managerial and technical reviews, LcD progress reviews, social and economic outcomes and capabilities strengthening and impact). This is evidenced by the efforts that the personnel still engaged in the Project (Alejandro González and provincial technicians) had to make to gather the information necessary to carry out this Final Evaluation.

Notwithstanding the foregoing it is clear that the Project has attained significant achievements which -taking into account the amount of participating provinces and the remote location of the USPAS and pilot sites- could be **evaluated as fairly satisfactory**. Some of the achievements are as follows:

- Strengthening producers' and technician's capacities in MST implementation;
- Implementation of data bases shared among different national, provincial and municipal agencies;
- Awareness of Patagonia environmental problems;
- Implementation of better MST practices such as: screen of vegetation, electric wire fencing, water capturing, strategic supplementation, reproduction management, distribution of animal carrying capacity, grazing land management as a result of the forage evaluation, implementation of copses among others.
- Producers who started to implement structural practices such as pasture construction, watering facilities distributions, animal examinations; feedlots; improvement in water management through water retention, direction and pumping.
- Climatic risks forecast through the installation of sixteen automatic meteorological stations and the maintenance of the existing stations involving the INTA and personnel of the Schools of USPA facilitating a better water irrigation management.
- Use of the Early Alert System by provincial players and SIG for forage evaluations.

As detailed in the Exhibit "Assessment of Performance Indicators" the Project obtained an uneven result in relation to the four Specific Objectives.

Likewise and as demonstrated in the number of USPAS implemented and in the training carried out, they reveal the emphasis placed on the creation of capacities at local level, fact which was demonstrated in the on-the-ground visits carried out under this Final Supplemental Evaluation to the provinces of Neuquén and Rio Negro.

Even when the Project achieved an important integration with other related Agencies (INTA, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, etc.) proving the **full compliance with one of the objectives consisting in its insertion in existing structures and programs**, another objective is to **promote the use of rotating funds** so as the actions which could not be implemented may continue after the end of the project.

Although the execution term was extended it should be noted that the sites where the MST practices were applied (13 USPAS, 358 MARAS, 5 pilot sites) did not comply with one of the objective of the Project consisting in the MST extension to 6 million of Ha; this is due, among other reasons, to the fact that the dissemination of the MST practices requires that producers acknowledge the need to change and become aware of the advantages of the new practices and in this sense they should modify knowledge, attitudes and behaviors, something which is without doubt difficult to producers accustomed to dealing with grazing practices for several decades.

Another of the achievements of the Project consists in that many of the participating professionals were incorporated in provincial and municipal governments, the INTA and other agencies⁸; giving solid grounds to replicate the actions in the future and prepare a second stage of the Project.

Recommendations

1. Upon the preparation of the Project it is important to identify possible and real objectives which out of the experience gained would facilitate the achievement of the objectives as laid down.
2. Identify indicators in such contexts/provinces where it is more viable to achieve effects and impacts at different levels and in their interactions.
3. The baseline formulation should be one of the main objectives of the new Project. In this sense it is important to identify, among other elements, the conditions of each of the MARAS, pilot sites and USPAS executed. This will facilitate the use of the baseline as a follow-up and management tool in order to intensify, complete and/or enhance the actions timely initiated by the GEF. It is recommended that in such formulation the professionals of the new Project take part together with external consultants in order to achieve a baseline facilitating the monitoring of the Project and the partial Evaluations of the progresses of the Project in terms of results.
4. Strengthen USPAS as management unities addressing them from a water basin viewpoint.
5. Introduce Project monitoring by the UNDP through the position of a Project Supervisor entailing regular on-the-ground visits. Such supervision may be part time or eventually shared with other UNDP Project.

⁸ By way of illustration, the Eng. Germán Carriac, who was Coordinator of the GFE, is now working as Officer in charge of Projects within the INTA; position which he won by competition on the basis of his experience in the GFE which was a determining factor. Also worthy of mentioning are the technicians who work in the municipality of Rincón de los Sauces.

- Carry out a workshop for the evaluation of outcomes in furtherance of a better implementation of the new GEF Desertification Project.