

## **Speech at the Argentinian Cabinet for Climate Change**

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## Takes Two to Tango

***There are lots of things that you can do alone but it takes two to tango.***

It is a line from the famous song - popularized in the 1950s - by Louis Armstrong, among others.

I wanted to use a reference to tango in *homage* to Argentina. It also illustrates an important point very well.

Climate change has found its perfect dance partner in land degradation.

Each can do damage alone. But the two – moving together – create a near perfect symbiosis. They each place an immense burden on affected communities.

They amplify each other's – most damaging - characteristics. Destroying the environment. Undermining social and economic development.

Between 1960 and 2010, there was an increase in the average temperature across most of Argentina. In some parts of Patagonia that increase **already** exceeds 1 °C. In the semi-arid zones – the Andean and Cuyo region - there has

been less rain and reduced stream flows. While, in the East of the country, there has been some devastating flooding.

But there is more – probably worse - to come.

There could be up to a 20 per cent reduction in the water level of the La Plata basin within the next 50 years. This is a basin you share with 4 other countries.

And according to climate scenarios, we could be looking at up to a 4°C increase in temperature in the north of the country. An extra 2°C warming in Patagonia. By the second half of the century.

At the same time, Argentina uses 80% of its land for agricultural, livestock and forestry activities. And rates of land degradation are high. Around 100 million hectares of Argentina is now significantly degraded – directly affecting the lives of at least 9 million Argentinians. That is some 30% of the total land area and 25% of the population.

Going forward, because degraded land doesn't hold water well, water availability - everywhere - will become a real challenge. And since periods of reduced rainfall are forecast for the winter season, recovery from drought will be difficult. It is expected that going forward cattle ranching – a backbone of Argentina's economy – will be especially impacted.

The Economics of Land Degradation found (in 2011) that the total loss of ecosystem services due to land use-land cover change, wetland degradation

and use of land degrading management practices on grazing land and crop lands in Argentina is approximately US\$ 75 billion (16% of GDP).

Even considering just the provisioning services with really tangible local benefits, land degradation could be costing Argentina up to 7% of the country's GDP.

Argentina's vulnerability to both climate change and land degradation is important globally because Argentina is fundamental for global food security. With a global population heading rapidly towards 10 billion people, the world simply cannot afford to lose a major food producing region.

But domestically, of course, the threat to agricultural production undermines a sector that has been vital for rapid poverty reduction over the past decades. As land degradation and climate change continue to increase in tempo, those gains are at risk.

This Cabinet has a pivotal role to play in an effective response that secures your past achievements and delivers future gains.

**So yes....**

**There are lots of things that you can do alone but it takes two to tango.**

You cannot fight climate change alone. For Argentina to effectively thrive in a period of intense climate change, you will need to fight both climate change and land degradation at the same time. Amplifying other traits instead.

For example, in Paris, you set a goal of Argentina reducing GHG emissions by 15% by 2030<sup>1</sup>.

While successive Argentine governments have placed a priority on development - with social inclusion.

**By delivering Sustainable Development Goal 15.3 – that is land degradation neutrality – you can do both.**

You have already started the process of setting a national target. Identifying land degradation hotspots, where you can reduce land degradation and where you can rehabilitate. That needs to move from target setting to action.

It will help with your climate mitigation targets.

If you rehabilitated degraded land you could put carbon back in the land and soil where it belongs. Globally, the recoverable carbon reserve capacity of the world's agricultural and degraded soils is estimated to be between 21 to 51 Gt of carbon.

Argentina could rehabilitate 50 percent of its currently degraded land (a target of 50 million hectares out of 100 million hectares of degraded land) over the next 12 years. That is 4.2 million hectares of land rehabilitated a year. In principle, that would be putting up to 172 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent

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<sup>1</sup> That is a reduction in Co2 emissions of 100.5 m/tonnes out of an estimated 670 m/tonnes anticipated in 2030.

back in the land and soil (3.45 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent/hectare/year). It could contribute 100% of your Paris commitments.

At the same time, if you rehabilitated this degraded land in a targeted way and managed crops better, it will help with your adaptation goals too. You could better manage the water cycle. You would limit the impact of intense rain, floods and better recover from other climate disasters such as drought.

There may be opportunities to access additional “climate finance” – from the GEF and GCF - to support your efforts in land based climate mitigation and adaptation.

Early warning systems, better management of land and water, coupled with an investment in modern irrigation techniques could see sustainable intensification on the land currently being cropped. And there will be more productive, rehabilitated land available for agricultural production. It will make your agriculture climate resilient and increasingly competitive.

It is a highly cost-effective approach. The Economics of Land Degradation study, that I mentioned earlier, found an estimated return on investment of US\$4 for each dollar invested in sustainable management of Argentina’s land based resources.

**Argentina could be benefitting from that.**

Models suggest that the transition to sustainable agriculture could create millions of new jobs globally. Worldwide, over 200 million full-time jobs across the food production system in 2050.

The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate has estimated that restoring just 12% of degraded agricultural land could boost smallholder's incomes by 35-40 billion per year and feed 200 million people within 15 years.

**Argentina could be benefiting from a share of that.**

Poverty reduction and job creation through sustainable land use is not, however, limited just to agriculture. Land related activities are also relevant in the broader context of rural development. Examples of poverty reducing and job generating sectors are those related to sustainable forest management, sustainable tourism and clean energy production.

A relatively conservative estimate suggests increasing investment into sustainable forestry for instance could create tens of thousands of jobs in Argentina. And for every job created in forestry, between 1.5 and 2.5 extra jobs will be created in the wider economy.

At the same time, I know you want to increase the share of renewables in your energy mix from 1 to 10%. If you reached Land Degradation Neutrality there would be more land (and water) available for sustainable energy production.

**Argentina could be benefiting from all of that.**

But to secure the climate and additional benefits of reaching land degradation neutrality, you will need to be bold and make some tough decisions.

- **You may want to consider making a special effort to rehabilitate your native forests and wetlands.**

They will improve biodiversity, act as natural, green infrastructure - reducing your overall infrastructure budget - will act as buffers against sea level rise.

- **You may want to consider stricter regulation of cropland expansion and incentives for no-till/conservation agriculture.**

You have done well in introducing no-till for soybean production so far for example.

But we know that in the past, as the demand for soy-bean and livestock production increased, large-scale commercial farmers have been acquiring more land – leading to the migration of small farmers to urban areas. This means the loss of jobs and of traditional farming expertise in rural areas and unplanned urbanization that puts pressure on resources in the cities.

Can we work with you to get the private sector and large scale commercial farmers rehabilitating land for cultivation and shifting to sustainable practices that we know work well in Argentina?

We are planning to launch a LDN Fund with private sector financing with that exact objective. It is something we could explore with you.

- **You may want to consider a programme of green job creation for land rehabilitation in the most at risk areas.**

It would get people back on to the land, employed and empowered. It could kick start green growth and would bring particular benefit to areas in the north of Argentina and could be integrated into the *Plan Belgrano*. It should especially target women who are worse affected by both climate and land degradation impacts.

You know better than I – tango is an expression of Argentine passion. The bodies - moving in harmony - creating a perfect symbiosis. The (English) philosopher Alan Watts, once said *“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance”*.

For climate change and land degradation...it is time to plunge in, to move with it, to join the dance.