



# Shadow Report on the Implementation of SDG 15.2 in Paraguay from the Perspective of Women

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## Executive Summary

For years, Paraguay has experienced an accelerated rate of deforestation as a result of sustained growth in the production of export goods, especially genetically modified soybeans in the eastern region of the country and beef in the west. The environmental destruction is also aggravated by the massive and abusive use of pesticides. Both factors generate a wide range of social conflicts related to disputes over land, peasant and indigenous resistance to monocultures, and the criminalization of social activists.

All government measures aim to favor this productive model that

generates greater economic growth than in other countries in the region, but without benefitting the population, which grows more impoverished every day. In this unfavorable scenario, women and girls suffer particularly serious impacts.

The measures implemented to “meet the Sustainable Development Goals” are false to say the least; they are focused on the production of eucalyptus monocultures and the incorporation of peasant farms and indigenous communities into value

“ I learned that the future of the world is in our hands, in the hands of poor women. If it were up to them, we could write it off, but we are going to keep fighting. [1]

”

chains for soybeans and beef. These measures are sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), organizations that in theory should be committed to economic and social transformations that favor a more equitable and sustainable society.

# Introduction

The Paraguayan State has signed a commitment to achieve, by 2020, an end to all forms of discrimination against women and girls (SDG 5), and to achieve sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and increase afforestation and reforestation (SDG 15.2). Both

objectives are, in addition to basic human rights, crucial for reversing the alarming inequality generated by the national economy due to unsustainable productive practices. If the empowerment of women and girls has a multiplier effect and helps to promote economic growth and development at the global level, Paraguay is an example of

the opposite social dynamic; the productive practices that dominate the country's economy have generated rates of deforestation that are unprecedented in the world, as well as poverty and migration, with a particularly severe impact on women and girls.

## Brief evaluation and key statistics regarding the current status of the country's implementation of SDG 5 and SDG 15

Achieve Sustainable Development Goal 15.2: Protecting, reestablishing and promoting the sustainable use of land ecosystems and managing forests sustainably implies critically observing the basis of Paraguay's economy.

In Paraguay, there are currently about 5.5 million hectares planted, of which 94% are destined for export markets. In 2017, the country exported more than 300,000 tons of beef and more than 11.5 million tons of grain, including GMO soybeans, GMO corn and rice (Heñóí 2018). However, Paraguay, with a population of only 7 million, is home to more than 1 million people living in poverty and extreme poverty, most of them peasants and indigenous peoples.

Poverty affects 28.98 percent of the urban population and 34.76 percent of the rural population. [2] This reality directly impedes progress toward meeting all of the Sustainable Development Goals and affects women and girls in particular.

This is because, first of all, the expansion of extensive production requires land, which has led to a process of urbanization that, although among the slowest in the region, has pushed families to the peripheries of cities and into conditions of unhealthiness, overcrowding, unemployment and underemployment. The 1992 census indicated for the first time that over half of the population—50.3%—was already living in urban communities; by

2013, the proportion had increased to 59.9%. [3]

Second, social exclusion affects the education and health of women more than that of men. In Paraguay, compulsory basic education consists of nine years, while full schooling (primary and secondary education) includes 12 years. However, the average



number of years of schooling completed among the urban population is 10.3 for men and 10.2 for women; among the rural population, these figures drop to 7 years for men and 6.8 years for women. Illiteracy affects 3.7% of urban women and 10.2% of rural women, rates that are higher than for men.

Third, women, despite being heads of household in 36.4% of Paraguayan homes, [4] earn approximately 70.6% of what men earn, regardless of educational level or hours worked. The rate of



Rural communities are forced to live with industrial soy production. **Luis Wagner**

underemployment is 23.1% for women and 18.7% for men, while women's unemployment rate is 6.1%, compared to 3.9% among men. Unemployment for young women is 10.7%, demonstrating a kind of double inequality based on sex and age. [5]

Finally, if the political, economic and social changes necessary to achieve the SDGs depended on

women's participation in decision-making, Paraguay is making only very gradual process toward women's incorporation: in 2000, the share of seats held by women in the nation's parliament and local governments was 2.5%; in 2017, that rate grew to 11% in parliament and to 13.75% if local governments are included. Meanwhile, the percentage of women that occupy managerial positions grew from 34.6% in 2007 to 38.7% in 2015. [6]

Other data that illustrates the social reality includes the Palma ratio, which in Paraguay is 4.2 [7] (the wealthiest 10% receive as a proportion of total income more than quadruple that of the poorest 40% of the population). Meanwhile, regarding the distribution of expenses in the National General Budget for 2016, for purposes and functions, Gs. 1.525 trillion is assigned to National Security Services versus Gs. 85.132 billion assigned to Ecology and Environment; [8] the budget for the environment is equal to 5.6% of military spending.

In any case, beyond the participation of women as proactive actors—or as victims—of the productive model, the State's commitment to achieving SDG 15.2 is observable in a country that lacks official data on deforestation, but that registers a rate of deforestation that we estimate to be approximately 300,000 hectares per year from 2004 to the present. [9]

The country has reported to the United Nations the required data

according to indicators established to monitor progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. This includes the following figures:

- Forest area as a proportion of the total land area: 2000: 48.75% (19,368,000 has) / 2015: 38.57% (15,323,000 has)
- Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type: 2000: 24.5% / 2015: 24.5% (no change)
- Net change in forest area: 2010: -8.25 / 2015: -9.60

The advance of genetically modified monocultures in the eastern region displaced traditional livestock production in the country to the western region, an extensive subtropical plain 1.09 million km<sup>2</sup> in size known as the Paraguayan Chaco. The increase in cattle ranching in the Paraguayan Chaco has fueled unprecedented rates of deforestation. The Chaco ecosystems are deeply affected by extractive industry activity and the increasing concentration of land, with serious impacts on biodiversity and especially on the local population, as 15 indigenous groups reside in the Chaco, [10] comprising 48% of the country's total indigenous population (117,150 people); [11] this includes groups that maintain voluntary isolation.

## 4. Analysis of progress and challenges regarding SDG 15.2

In April of 2017, in New York, national authorities received effusive congratulations from U.S. economist Jeffrey Sachs, who expressed “admiration for Paraguay for its commitment and progress toward implementing the 2030 Agenda.” [12] However, the first meeting organized by the Ministry of Foreign Relations with members of the private sector and civil society to include them in the effort to achieve the SDGs was held only recently in 2018. [13] Civil society, on the other hand, does discuss these issues. An example is the debate process carried out by peasant and indigenous women in the

Departments of Caaguazú and Caazapá from January to April of 2018, in which successive concerns were raised about the impact of monoculture tree plantations near their communities, the impact of fumigations and pressure for land exerted by large landowners. Paraguayan authorities appear to ignore all of these concerns.

In 2017, the Ministry of Foreign Relations signed two agreements. The first was a convention with the UNDP on “Support for Inter-Institutional Coordination of the SDGs” that established the hiring of an operational secretary and envisaged the use of a computing

platform developed by the Management Systems for Governance (SIGOB), which would serve as a basic tool for measuring the implementation of the SDGs. The second was an agreement with FAO regarding “the strengthening of capacities for measurement and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals in the countries of South America” that involved coordinated work with Paraguay’s General Directorate of Statistics, Surveys and Censuses (DGSEC).

At no point were civil society organizations called on in order to involve them in the process of implementation of actions aimed at



achieving the SDGs. Only the creation of the “Alliance for Sustainable Development” is known, an initiative of the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF Paraguay) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) billed as an “important alliance between government, private businesses, producers, civil society organizations and international cooperation that will work to promote the adoption of more sustainable production practices.” In addition to the aforementioned entities, the “Alliance” includes the U.S. Embassy, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Minerva Foods, the Trust for Inclusive Rural Development (Fideicomiso para el Desarrollo Rural Inclusivo or FIDEI), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS),

Cooperativa Neuland, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Association of Municipalities of Central Chaco (Asociación de Municipios del Chaco Central). [14] As can be seen, it includes no farmers’ organization or group of representatives of indigenous peoples or women, the chief victims of unsustainable production.

Since the year 2000, Paraguay has been receiving incentives to get involved in tree monocultures. The German Development Bank (KFD), in association with Paraguay’s Ministry of Agriculture and with financing from KFD and GIZ, [15] backed some 17,000 small farmers in the eastern region, investing nearly 20 million Euros. Forestry and agroforestry were key components of the project, which

focused on four areas: native forest management, reforestation, agroforestry and forest nurseries. What they defined as “reforestation” involved the establishment of plantations of native and/or exotic tree species, and the largest share of the incentives for forest management were in reality dedicated to the establishment of tree plantations; approximately 70% of the parcels involved—some 2,500 hectares in total—were planted with exotic species, 50% of which was eucalyptus. [16]

In 2013, KFD, through its subsidiary, DEG, invested 25 million Euros in the company PAYCO S.A. (Paraguay Agricultural Corporation), [17] obtaining 15.8% of its shares. This investment attracted significant criticisms from the Food



Soy is planted on indigenous and campesino land. **Luis Wagner**

International Network (FIAN), among others. [18] PAYCO implements forestry, agriculture and livestock projects on more than 144,000 hectares in 11 sites around Paraguay, distributed throughout seven departments. [19] It is also one of Paraguay's main producers of genetically modified soybeans, which, as stated previously, is not only a key driver of deforestation in Paraguay, but also associated with a range of other environmental and social problems, including land conflicts. One of the eucalyptus plantations established by PAYCO is found on Estancia Lomas (Lomas Farm) in San Pedro, a department marked by particularly violent conflicts over land. [20]

In 2014, the government began a series of measures promoting forest plantations:

- Decree 2285/2014, whereby forest programs and enterprises that enable and encourage sustainable land use and the promotion of biomass production for energy and cellulose are declared to be in the national interest. [21]
- Decree 3050/2015, which ordered the implementation of programs within the framework of the National Reforestation Plan and entrusted Oscar Vicente

Scavone Rivas, a financial and commercial partner of the president, with the task of coordinating said programs. [22]

Both decrees initiated in Paraguay incentives for "the generation of biomass for energy." National demand for biomass has reached 10 million tons per year, while the supply is less than 3 million tons per year. The majority of this demand comes from agro-export companies that use it to dry soy and other grains in silos. [23]

In early 2017, with the backing of FAO, Paraguay presented the PROEZA project to the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Over the next 10 years, the project aims to plant 25,000 ha of exotic tree monocultures, including eucalyptus, for biomass production on land belonging to 30,000 peasant families at a rate of 0.8 hectares per farm in 64 districts in the eastern region. [24] After an initial rejection, the GCF finally approved financing to allow the project to go forward in 2018. The financing approved was 25 million dollars, non-refundable, plus another 50 million offered in credit to medium-sized farms through the Development Finance Agency (Agencia Financiera de Desarrollo or AFD).

It should be emphasized that FAO's promotion of this initiative is nothing less than the promotion of tree monocultures for the

production of firewood, and that this promotion implies a giant subsidy to the soybean industry, which is simply obscene in light of the current government's swift attack on Paraguay's last remaining forests and celebration of the expansion of soybean and meat production. It should be recalled that less than a month before PROEZA was presented to the GCF, President Cartes revoked a 13-year-old moratorium on deforestation, [25] granting so-called landowners explicit permission to eliminate natural forests, and, if they so desire, replace them with tree monocultures. Cartes cut down 2 million trees on his own private property in October of 2017, [26] protecting himself with the decree.

Meanwhile, the PROEZA project is a way of incorporating peasant work into the value chain of the soybean sector, which may reduce resistance by peasants and indigenous peoples to this productive model. In successive meetings by indigenous peoples and peasant communities, reports have been given on the impact of the loss of water resources in the communities as a result of eucalyptus monocultures, as well as pressure on communities to move forward with these plantations exerted by the State as well as companies, cooperatives and other private sector actors; coercive forms of "stimulus" include price promises, bribes for moving and threats.

Small-scale farmers grow many different varieties of corn. HEÑÓI

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The adoption of measures aimed at reversing environmental destruction and gender inequality is a necessary and urgent task in a country with the conditions of inequality possessed by Paraguay. The agreements related to the SDGs, such as the establishment of conventions and the creation of job posts in relevant entities, are thus worth celebrating. However, on the contrary, the public policies adopted to achieve an effective halting of deforestation and sustainable forest management favor a hegemonic economic sector—the agro-export sector—with its unsustainable practices that affect the poorest populations,

especially peasant and indigenous communities and women and girls.

Therefore, it is reasonable to recommend that the Paraguayan government listen to the recommendations already made by UN Rapporteurs Victoria Tauli Corpuz (Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), Hilal Elver (Rapporteur on the Right to Food) and Urmila Bhoola (Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery), who expressed in their respective reports in 2015 and 2017 concern over the situation of vulnerability, lack of legal protections and poverty experienced by indigenous

peoples, peasants and other groups in rural areas of Paraguay.

Additionally, the Paraguayan state is advised to support the UN declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, both at the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. This declaration would be an important and necessary evolution of international law, and moreover, it is of enormous importance for rural populations in Paraguay, who are affected on a daily basis by systematic discrimination and violations of their individual and/or collective human rights.

Paraguayan participants of the Women2030 project. **HEÑÓI**



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- [7] <https://www.5dias.com.py/ndice-de-palma-mejor-que-el-gini-para-medir-la-desigualdad/>
- [8] Ley 5554/2016 “Que aprueba el Presupuesto General de la Nación para el Ejercicio Fiscal 2016”, Artículo 3°. Available at: <http://www.hacienda.gov.py>
- [9] The NGO Guyra Paraguay monitors the deforestation of the Gran Chaco and reported a total of 181,028 hectares deforested in the region in 2017. Data available at: <http://guyra.org.py/informe-deforestacion-2017/>
- [10] Nivacle, Enlhet Norte, Enxet Sur, Angaité, Guaraní Occidental, Sanapaná, Guaraní Ñandéva, Ayoreo, Toba Maskoy, Qom, Ybytoso, Maká, Manjui, Guaná. Tomaráho
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- [21] <http://www.gacetaoficial.gov.py/list.php?tipo=2&page=10>
- [22] [http://www.presidencia.gov.py/archivos/documentos/DECRETO3050\\_1xj5eyv.pdf](http://www.presidencia.gov.py/archivos/documentos/DECRETO3050_1xj5eyv.pdf)
- [23] <http://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/suplementos/abc-rural/produccion-de-eucaliptos-para-reforestacion-1214335.html>
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- [25] Decree 7702/17, which modifies the provisions of “Forest” Law 422/73 “Forestal,” primarily Art. 42, which established the obligation to maintain a legal reserve of natural forests, and Art. 6, which established the obligation to maintain protective forests. The new decree eases rules for deforestation.
- [26] <http://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/economia/horacio-cartes-tumbo-dos-millones-de-arboles-de-su-estancia-en-un-mes-1649785.html>



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