

complemented by 18 performance indicators on responses such as financing, science, education and capacity. These were trialled by all Parties (193 countries and the European Union) in 2010 within the Performance Review and Assessment of Implementation System project (<http://www.unccd.int/prais>). COP10 established an ad hoc working group to continue developing and refining the indicators.

The COP expressed clear intentions to continue strengthening its scientific engagement. Although conscious of the unfavourable economic climate numerous Parties voiced support to establish a new intergovernmental scientific panel on desertification, land degradation and drought, or land and soils more broadly. The G-77/China, the African Group, Central and Eastern European States, and other numerous developing and emerging economies were behind the calls. The United States and EU, however, shared the view that the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) could integrate these issues. It is clear there is still scope for better definition of the UNCCD's scientific needs and the gaps in existing mechanisms. An ad hoc working group on scientific advice was established.

The Korean hosts announced the Changwon Initiative, which could lead to an agreement on a global target towards zero net land degradation. In the manner of the 2010 biodiversity target it would aim to generate commitment for a 'land-degradation neutral world' by 2030 (<http://www.unccd.int/cop/officialdocs/cop10/pdf/inf8eng.pdf>). The UNCCD COP10 also saw progress towards a long-called-for initiative on land economics. The Economics of Land Degradation initiative kicked off with major support from Germany. This study intends to do for land degradation what The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity has for biodiversity and ecosystem services (and the Stern Report for climate change)—support better understanding of the cost of inaction versus the cost of action on the issue.

Despite ongoing challenges to the Convention, the focus on scientific engagement, the progress made in evidence-based management and the extensive efforts to move beyond process and into implementation are all positive signs. The challenge now is for the UNCCD to deliver on this promise.

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A new Strategic Plan for the conservation of the Andean cat

The Andean cat *Leopardus jacobita* is the most threatened felid in the Americas. It occurs only in the high Andes

of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru and the northern Patagonian steppe in Argentina, and there are none in captivity. The Andean Cat Alliance (AGA, from its Spanish name Alianza Gato Andino; <http://www.gatoandino.org>) is an international and interdisciplinary network that aspires to achieve the conservation and long-term maintenance of Andean cat populations and its habitat, in harmony with local communities.

Although this species is considered one of the lesser known cats, the research carried out by AGA since its creation, in 1999, thanks to the support of the Wildlife Conservation Network (<http://www.wildnet.org>), has considerably increased the understanding of the natural history and conservation status of the Andean cat. We now know that even in high-quality Andean cat habitat the isolated and highly fragmented populations of this species have very low densities, harbour extremely reduced genetic diversity, and appear to be strictly associated with rocky areas and cliffs, the habitat of the cat's main prey the mountain vizcacha *Lagidium viscacia*. A distribution model of suitable habitat for the Andean cat has been developed. This highlights the most important regions for its conservation and the areas where survey efforts are still needed. Additionally, AGA's awareness programme has produced a number of conservation education tools that have been delivered to over 2,000 students and hundreds of adults in 139 villages, promoting environmental education in the most remote areas of the high Andes.

The newly-released Strategic Plan for the species (<http://www.gatoandino.org/en/publicaciones.asp>), developed following an assessment of the conservation actions taken by AGA members over the last 10 years and the collective knowledge they produced, launches a new phase for AGA and consolidates all conservation efforts under one Plan. Habitat loss and degradation have been identified as primary conservation threats, followed by hunting of the cats and their prey. For each of the threats the Strategic Plan provides a list of indicators that permit the recognition of the studies required to understand how the threat is affecting Andean cat populations, and the actions required for mitigation.

To guide conservation actions AGA's primary goals include completing the identification of the distribution and genetic structure of Andean cat populations and increasing ecological understanding, especially of habitat and spatial requirements. Simultaneously, AGA plans to continue environmental education and community participation activities, focusing on the creation of a favourable environment for developing conservation actions, and will strengthen its cross-border efforts to promote environmental management actions that protect critical populations of Andean cats and their role in ecological processes in natural ecosystems.

AGA's Strategic Plan reaffirms the commitment of its members to continue with these efforts. Furthermore, the Plan will provide a framework for other conservationists to protect the biodiversity of the high Andes, and a model of a highly coordinated, inclusive initiative for wildlife conservation. The implementation of this Plan will not only contribute to conservation of the Andean cat but also to the

protection of many other species that share its habitat and face similar threats.

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