

# PROMOTION OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE FOR CONSERVATION THROUGH THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT (CMDRS), MEXICO

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## » Context and challenges

Calakmul is the youngest municipality in the Mexican state of Campeche, where more than 60% of its area is part of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve (CBR), administered by the National Commission of Protected Natural Areas (CONANP). In the remaining 40% of the territory, 84 communities reside, that exert pressure on the resources of the protected area due to a strong agricultural and forestry tradition as a means of subsistence. The main dilemma for local development has been the struggle between conservation and exploitation of natural resources. More recently, efforts have been made to promote sustainable production practices, to promote territorial planning instruments that organize access to resources, and to manage agreements between stakeholders interested in adopting a sustainable vision of

development. For all the above, Calakmul has a governance space in place: The Municipal Council for Sustainable Rural Development (CMDRS), in which governmental, sectoral and territorial representatives participate. Its objective is to support the municipal government in the orientation and procurement of local development, for which it is essential to promote social dialogue among the actors. In this context, the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, in cooperation with the CBR, promoted the strengthening of representation and organization capacities of the CMDRS, to increase cooperation and dialogue among local actors in order to maintain social incidence on the protection of the CBR and the sustainable use of natural resources.

## Beneficiaries

Directly, 34 representatives of the most important productive sectors of the municipality. Indirectly, 28,000 inhabitants of the municipality who are represented in this participation space.



## Impacts

- ◆ Cooperation and territorial representation among the productive sectors is strengthened by the ongoing work of the CMDRS, which has become an indispensable space for consultation and decision-making regarding rural development, forestry and environment in Calakmul.
- ◆ Civil society organizations are better coordinated and have a greater impact on the well-being of communities.
- ◆ CONANP's presence in the CMDRS has allowed for the development projects in Calakmul to adopt a vision of sustainability and protection of the protected area.
- ◆ The CMDRS Assembly meets regularly and continuously with a high level of participation of representatives, influencing the public policy decisions in the Municipality of Calakmul.



## CMDRS Diagnosis

An analysis of the operation of the CMDRS was conducted, which allowed to detect areas of opportunity in the leadership of the Board of Directors, as well as in the participation and representation mechanisms. An Organizational Manual on the operation of the Assembly was designed, the Internal Regulations were updated to improve participation and decision-making, and the councilors were gradually trained. This has strengthened the leadership, dialogue and consensus skills of social representatives; raised awareness of democratic participation and created conditions for social dialogue for the protection of natural resources.

**Enabling factors:** The interest of the municipal authorities and the historical presence of the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve Directorate were key to strengthening this space of representation and increasing the environmental awareness of local actors.

## Accompanying the steering of the multi-stakeholder municipal dialogue process

The presence of CONANP and GIZ in the CMDRS has increased awareness of sustainability in sectoral projects. Their presence began as an organizational strengthening strategy and became a cooperation mechanism for the sustainable use of natural resources among community representatives, civil society and federal, state, and municipal governments.

**Enabling factors:** The joint coordination between CONANP and GIZ generated a space of trust and credibility in the Council, favoring assertive and effective dialogues.

## Technical assistance to the CMDRS

In order to support the strategic activities of the CMDRS, permanent assistance was promoted, which proved to be an important resource to strengthen the Assembly leadership, organization, advisors training, monitoring, and fulfillment of agreements. The link between the technical advisor and the social representatives created effective communication bridges with civil society institutions and organizations.

**Enabling factors:** Given its temporary nature, the presence of the Technical Advisor was a strategy for cooperation and not a measure to substitute the responsibilities of local actors.

## Leadership strengthening

An effective and well represented organization can influence the processes of planning and decision-making on local development. In this sense, the Council members and former Council members play an important role in the region having been empowered through their work in the CMDRS. This is proven by the fact that they are taken into account in the processes of consultation and elaboration of municipal development plans, as well as in most of the municipality public order issues.

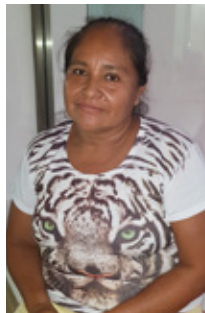
**Enabling factors:** The transparency in which the representatives' election processes have been carried out has strengthened local leadership.



The initial diagnosis allowed the understanding of strengths and weaknesses of the CMDRS (1). In a second step, various local influential actors could coexist and engage in dialogues to discuss matters of public interest (2), go through an organizational ordering process, update the rules of participation and train advisors in processes of participation and democratic decision-making (3). After several years, the intervention involved an accompaniment to the leaderships developed in this process, including women, indigenous people and community authorities (4).

## Story

"In any position that I have been lucky enough to be appointed, I always tell my colleagues that I don't offer them anything, because I have nothing; what I do have is a great heart to support those who speak to me to find some solution to their problems or to visit and confront the authorities and give them support to the solutions of my female colleagues. When I was proposed to be a woman's councilor, I was the only known candidate in the region, a defining factor to be chosen. The Council is like the heart of the



municipality, because it is where things get approved and disapproved. Sometimes we cannot achieve everything, but we must take advantage of the opportunities to influence in favor of women, children, older adults. Women are here, and they put one here to defend those who cannot come. It doesn't cost me anything to get up early the day there is a meeting, get ready and arrive half an hour before the Council meeting begins, because if I accepted something, it is to comply."

**Olga Asensio Torres, Councilor of the Women's Committee of the CMDRS.**

