

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THE BALA'AN K'AAX FLORA AND FAUNA PROTECTION AREA, MEXICO

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Context and challenges

The Bala'an K'aax Flora and Fauna Protection Area (BKFFPA) administered by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) was decreed in 2005 and covers an area of 128,390 hectares. It is located in the municipality of José María Morelos, Quintana Roo and has 37 neighboring ejidos, of which 28 belong to Quintana Roo, three to Campeche and six to Yucatán. The northern and southern part of the protected area are under strong pressure from mechanized agricultural activities and extensive livestock farming. Irregular settlements also represent a major threat to the balance of the ecosystem, as so does the sale of land to people from other regions of the country with productive practices that intensify land-use changes. Only some

communities in the municipality of José María Morelos have experience of sustainable use that is compatible with the conservation purposes of the Protected Area (PA), which are part of a protection and containment of threats belt. In view of this situation, and in line with CONANP, the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project has identified the need to strengthen the processes and tools for producing useful information for territorial planning and, the need to strengthen awareness processes and local capacity building through workshops or forums, to promote the sustainable use of natural resources and contribute to reducing the accelerated change in the use of agricultural land and livestock.

Beneficiaries

Directly, 250 persons who have three territorial ordinances promoted by the project, and 450 ejidatarios from nine ejidos, who attended awareness-raising workshops during their ejido assemblies. The indirect beneficiaries were around 1,800 people living in in these communities.



Impacts

- ◆ Through the design and implementation of the tool “Guide for the development of Community Territorial Planning (CTP) for Quintana Roo”, the construction processes of three CTPs of adjacent ejidos of the BKFFPA are strengthened, allowing the organization of possible uses of the land in the community.
- ◆ A land-use diagnosis was also prepared, with information from the 37 ejidos adjacent to the BKFFPA, which allowed knowing the threats and opportunities for this PA.
- ◆ In terms of awareness-raising and disseminating information on the sustainable use of resources, an exchange of experiences with the agricultural authorities of the neighboring ejidos (2017); a forum on traditional knowledge and sustainable land-use in coordination with the Intercultural Mayan University of Quintana Roo (2018); as well as community workshops for strengthening the capacities of the ejidos adjacent to the BKFFPA (2018 and 2019) were held.



● Generation of strategic information on planning

In order to better operationalize the processes of information generation on land use in ejidos and communities, and to achieve the construction of strong, comparable and homologated CTP, the "Guide for the elaboration of Community Territorial Planning for Quintana Roo" was developed. This tool provided more specific criteria to guide and facilitate the work on the contents of the CTP. The implementation of the Guide in ejidos adjacent to the BKFFPA, allowed to generate adaptations to this territorial planning tool

Enabling factors: The active participation and involvement of technical firms providing territorial planning services was key in sharing experiences and knowledge on ejido planning.



● ● Diagnosis of land-use

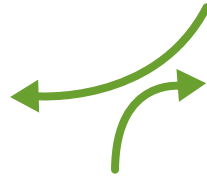
A second step was to conduct a detailed analysis of land-use in all communities adjacent to the BKFFPA, leading to findings of high relevance for conservation purposes, including: increasing pressure on the PA through land sales and rapid land use changes for extensive livestock farming and mechanized agriculture; gradual reduction of ejidos engaged in low environmental impact forestry and agricultural activities such as traditional milpa, beekeeping and non-timber forest activities; and absence of local governance spaces.

Enabling factors: The participation of specialists and researchers from higher education institutions in the region contributed to the understanding of challenges and opportunities for improved territorial planning.

● ● ● Awareness-raising of ejidatarios in ejidos alongside the BKFFPA

Workshops with ejido assemblies of nine neighboring communities of the PA with different land-use, have encouraged reflection on the importance of living together with a PA and the contribution of communities to its protection, including rights and obligations for the management of the territory. Graphic information was provided on climate change in the communities and the possible negative effects of not changing current consumption models by improving production practices in line with conservation in the area of influence of the PA.

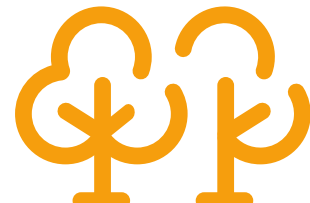
Enabling factors: Conducting the workshops in the ejido assemblies ensured the broad participation of the ejidatarios and promoted joint reflection on productive options with less impact such as silvopastoral agroforestry systems.



● ● ● ● Contribution of the communities to the protection of BKFFPA

To support the management of the natural protected area, CONANP has managed to involve local communities in surveillance, fire-fighting and monitoring activities. These successful experiences of territorial management occur in the part closest to the municipal capital of José María Morelos, where a network of community brigades for surveillance, monitoring and beekeeping has been consolidated as part of a unique working model organized with the CONANP.

Enabling factors: The community work and the consolidation of resource competition carried out by CONANP has strengthened the brigade network.



The intervention has a logical sequence that began with the strengthening of the Community's territorial planning processes through a Guide and its implementation in key ejidos (1); the diagnosis of land-use allowed characterizing in detail the formal and/or traditional land-use for productive use, conservation and /or preservation of natural resources (2); continuing with the detection of strengths and weaknesses of the PA management and awareness of ejidatarios (3), culminating in reflection processes derived from community surveillance activities for better territorial management (4).

» Story

"Being next to the protected area gives many benefits to those of us who live from bees and land, from which we also get air and water. Sadly, we also see people coming from other places to extract the wealth of the mountain without giving anything back. Our communities are not forbidden to cut wood, make coal, but they do ask us for many procedures that we cannot fulfill; on the other hand,



outsiders are not being watched and take advantage of what we take care of. Something must be done, at least we are already voluntarily taking care of the forest because we feel it belongs to us, but we need others to do so and have the support of the government. Thanks to the awareness-raising workshops, I was able to better understand what the threats in the region are and how we are linked to the natural protected area."

Eduardo Morales, Commissioner of the ejido 18 de Marzo.

Find out more:
www.selvamaya.info

