

» Context and challenges

In the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), the Ramón tree is one of the species with the highest abundance and distribution. Its seeds, known as "Ramón nut" or "Maya nut", are recognized for their nutritional and healing properties. Its unique taste makes the Maya nut a food with increasing consumption. The collection of this non-timber resource is a way of sustainable forest use without damaging the forest ecosystem. Both, the collection and the transformation into flour (to produce cookies, tortillas and drinks), are activities in which women are particularly involved. The use and commercialization of Ramón has the potential to generate income among the local population while promoting the protection of the forest. However, the difficulty in complying with environmental regulations, the lack of working capital,

poor social organization and limited technical capacity have prevented sustainable and profitable use in the past. Furthermore, productivity of Ramón in the forest depends on biotic and abiotic factors, so that its harvest is not always feasible. In this context, the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, together with the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) and in coordination with other actors such as NGOs, supported an income promotion initiative through a Value Chain approach to promote the sustainable use of this resource. As a result, the Ramón Seed Board (CdR) was formed and strengthened, composed of community producer organizations, support organizations and regulatory authorities.

Beneficiaries

Local communities in and around the protected areas of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Directly, more than 300 women and 10 Ramón seed producing organizations, which increased their income.



Impacts



- ◆ The Ramón Seed Board (CdR) today is composed of 10 Community producer organizations, and is strengthened at the organizational level, improving its local and national positioning and recognition, as a platform for coordination among actors, facilitating the involvement and empowerment of a significant number of women who have assumed leadership in the management and exploitation of Ramón seed in their communities.
- ◆ Through technical training and development of management plans, the potential area for exploitation was increased, benefiting more than 500 collectors.
- ◆ The CdR currently has a better infrastructure for processing and refining seeds (drying and collection cellar, industrial dryers, blower, mill, sealing machine for packaging flour), adding value to the product (e.g. the price at which fresh seeds were sold improved by 25% and that of dried seeds by 44%).
- ◆ In 2017, the CdR received its first organic group certification, which increased interest in the products at national and international level.



● Analysis for the use of the Ramón seed

With an initial analysis, work lines and areas of opportunity for the promotion of the Ramón seed value chain were visualized as a priority product. The mapping of the actors in the chain was key to identify and facilitate their inclusion.

Enabling factors: The experience of two community organizations, represented by women who were already harvesting and selling fresh and dried seed, allowed the understanding of the production and nutritional potential of Ramón seeds.

● ● ● Strengthening community organizations

The Board's community organization producer groups have been strengthened through training, exchanges of experience at national and international level, support, and technical, administrative and legal advice. To ensure sustainable management, it was crucial for the organizations to have management plans. The research on permanent sampling plots promoted by the Project helped plan harvesting and sales, since production is temporary and depends on environmental factors.

Enabling factors: The development of management plans with an integrated approach - including all non-timber products used by the communities- optimized the financial investment.

● ● ● ● ● Management to add value to the Product

The management and investment made by the community organizations facilitated a drying and collection center owned by all partner communities. For the proper use of the equipment, they receive support and technical advice from ACOFOP/FORESCOM, which train personnel for operation and maintenance. Additionally, a group organic certification has been achieved, that adds value to the product.

Enabling factors: Having a demand for dry product, ACOFOP gave land to build infrastructure in which the organizations managed the construction.

● ● Organization of the Ramón Seed Board (CdR)

In order to strengthen governance in decision-making on the sustainable use and commercialization of Ramón, the creation of the CdR was advised to facilitate dialogue and collaboration spaces between producer organizations, allowing the involvement and empowerment of more than 300 women from four community organizations.

Enabling factors: ACOFOP, a recognized entity, took up the challenge of leading the promotion of the value chain, from mapping the actors to setting up the Board.

● ● ● ● ● Integration of other organizations to the CdR

The CdR established a sense of confidence in the value chain, thus contributing to the positioning of the product and the Board itself, which led to the integration of six other community organizations and an increase in production and market presence.

Enabling factors: The interest, participation and experiences of managers of community organizations were key for the integration of other producers.

● ● ● ● ● Access to local, national and international markets

The joint work of the organizations allowed promoting the product, generating national and international interest. The integration of Ramón as food can increase the demand of the population. In this context, the Ministry of Education was approached in achieving the inclusion of the Ramón seeds in the menus of the schools in the region.

Enabling factors: Tastings, participation in fairs and congresses and radio promotion captured interest in natural and nutritious products.



To promote the Ramón seed VC, an initial analysis was carried out (1) that identified challenges and opportunities, as well as actors in the chain to organize them later in a Board (2), which was strengthened with technical advice, achieving the elaboration of Sustainable Management Plans (3). With the sum of more producer organizations (4), the management capacity was strengthened, facilitating the construction of a drying center and obtaining a group certification (5) achieving a price increase and a better positioning on local, national and international markets (6).

» Story

"In 2012, the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, ACOFOP and Rainforest Alliance, invited the communities that at that time used the seeds of the Ramón tree, with the purpose of organizing ourselves better. Through workshops, we were able to promote the value chain, from which we had many benefits, including the creation of a vision and mission. Over time, more organizations that also had Ramón in the region, as well as support organizations, were added, achieving the



promotion of Ramón seeds at local, national and international levels. Another benefit was the joint investment among all those involved, which helped us obtain the Ramón drying center, better trained personnel, achieve a better price and a greater participation of women. To ensure the future of the Selva Maya, it is very important that the state support us in renewing contracts. If in 25 years we have been able to work without knowing anything, now that we have learned to do it sustainably, we can contribute to the better future of other generations."

Magdalena Peralta, Vice-president of the Ramón Seed Board, OMYC, Uaxactún leader and Ramón seeds collector.

Find out more:
www.selvamaya.info

