

» Context and challenges

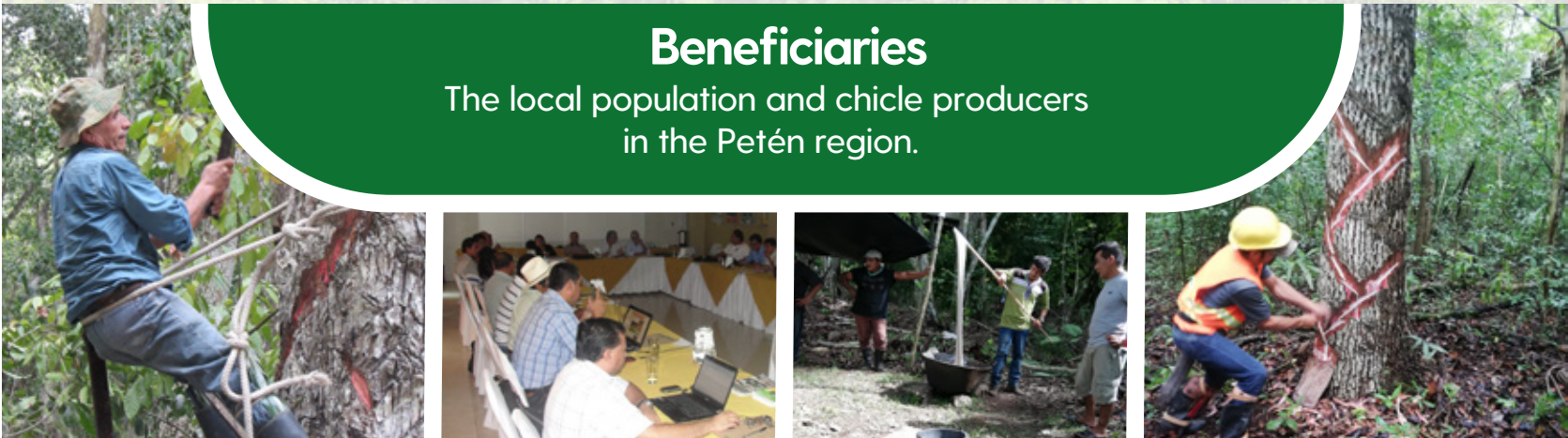
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The chicozapote (*Manilkara spp.*) is a tropical tree native to Mesoamerica, appreciated for its durable wood, its bark with medicinal properties, its edible fruits, but above all for its latex (commonly known as chicle), used as the basis to produce chewing gum. According to various sources, the Petén department, specifically the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), has one of the largest populations of Chicozapote in the world. In the past, latex extraction was one of the best paid productive activities in Guatemala. In order to regulate the use and commercialization of chicle and protect this species, Decree 99-96 of the Congress of the Republic was published in 1996. However, according to the analysis of the Environmental Justice Forum, it represents an obstacle, considering that over-regulation hinders proper product handling and the generation of benefits from latex

extraction. Additionally, high bureaucratic processes have led to conflicts with buyers, placing the region at a commercial disadvantage. The low chicle activity has reduced local jobs and marginalizing the sector. The Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, together with the counterpart, the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP), and partners, supported an analysis of the limitations to the chicle sector derived from Decree 99-96 through a participatory consultation process. The objective of this process was to propose changes that would facilitate the sustainable management of chicle. Through exchanges and training, the reactivation of the chicle activity as an economic alternative for the forest communities of Petén was promoted.

Beneficiaries

The local population and chicle producers in the Petén region.



Impacts

- ◆ Preparation of a proposal for the repeal of Decree 99-96 and a new proposal for a law that allows the use of chicle along with non-timber resources.
- ◆ Through the proposal decision makers were sensitized to the topic and relevance of adapting the Law.
- ◆ Through workshops, trainings, exchanges and development of teaching materials on good practices for the sustainable use of chicle, target producers improved practices that helped them meet the harvesting requirements requested by the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), as well as the FSC forest and organic certification.
- ◆ Through an exchange of experiences with the Chicza chicle consortium in Mexico, Petén producers have strengthened their knowledge of organizational aspects.
- ◆ The formalization of a contract with a German company represents an important step in the commercialization of the product and expands the producer's knowledge in matters of exportation.



Law proposal development

Through a consultancy supported by the Project and carried out by the Forum of Environmental Justice, an extensive review and discussion of the Decree 99-96 was carried out, involving various key actors, including the productive sector, ACOFOP, NGOs and regulatory bodies (CONAP, National Chicle Council, Single Union of Chicle producers and Woodworkers). The result was an updated, agreed upon and validated law proposal.

Enabling factors: Recognizing the historical relevance of the chicle activity, both productive and economic, enabled the actors to have an objective discussion on the proposed Law.

Communication for the repeal of the law

The approval of a new law initiative to promote and strengthen the chicle activity depends on the support of key actors, particularly the deputies. In this sense, it was important to offer them accurate and easily understandable information. ACOFOP contacted the Association of Chicleros of Alta Verapaz which, with the intention of continuing the activity, had a rapprochement with the local deputies of their department to support the repeal. Likewise, visits were made to Congress to reach an agreement with the federal deputies and a common front.

Enabling factors: The ACOFOP involvement allowed maintaining a regional leadership to operate a political advocacy plan.

Capacity building for latex utilization

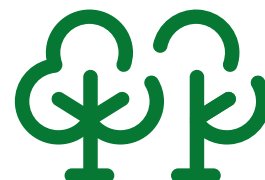
Although the use of chicle is stalled by Decree 99-96, reducing benefits to the producer, during the intervention period of the Project, exchanges of experiences between experienced and young producers were supported. This allowed to strengthen capacities for good practices of chicle use, and knowledge of older chicle producers was rescued to be transmitted to the new generations. The exchange in Mexico, which included a visit to the Chicza company, allowed to get to know other forms of organization.

Enabling factors: Chicle companies that promote sustainable harvesting practices and have well-defined markets, have been instrumental in motivating Petén producers with their organization forms.

Market research

With the objective of not losing the benefits of the chicle use, due to the limitations of the law, the search for markets and the formalization of contracts was of the utmost importance. This can also contribute to obtaining better arguments for a new law, as a growing demand for the product is noted. Through efforts made at different levels, in 2018 the formalization of a contract with a German company was achieved.

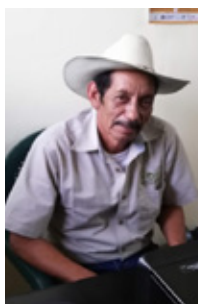
Enabling factors: The growing interest in the United States and Europe for natural and organic products motivates Petén's chicle groups to renew the activity with greater determination.



In order to reactivate the chicle activity, Law 99-96 was analyzed and concluded that it disadvantages the sector. Based on this, a proposal for a law was developed in a participatory and consensual manner (1) with actors from the productive sector, government and support institutions. To repeal the previous law and propose a new one (2), that would enable sustainable use, ACOFOP led a political advocacy plan in 2018. Additionally, it was sought to strengthen the activity through exchanges (3) and market research (4).

» Story

"The Selva Maya has been very important for my family, since it has provided us with resources such as the latex of chicozapote. Its use since the 1950s brought us daily support and enabled the development of many families not only in Petén, but also in the neighboring departments of Verapaces. Thanks to this resource, many of us were able to study and provide study to our children. During the development of the project, the alliance and coordination between ACOFOP and the German Cooperation / GIZ was strategic, to involve actors and



promote the modification of the chicle law, seeking the benefit of future generations and the sustainability of the resource. Looking ahead, the following steps are: continue strengthening organizations, follow up on repeal of the law and demonstrate the contribution of chicle activity to climate change through technical studies. With these actions, it will be more likely to obtain the endorsement of the State to approve the extensions of the concession contracts."

Don Jorge Sosa, Chicle producer in his youth and non-timber technician at ACOFOP/ FORESCOM, founding partner of the AFISAP concession and shareholder who served as the first president of business development at FORESCOM.

