

PROMOTERS OF INTEGRAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT AS MULTIPLYING AGENTS OF AGROECOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN THE MAYA BIOSPHERE RESERVE, PETÉN, GUATEMALA

» Context and challenges

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Within the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), the Buffer Zone (BZ) has been and is the area most affected by deforestation and unsustainable agricultural and cattle raising practices, mainly by large landowners and small-scale producers. Agricultural production is characterized by traditional practices and mostly self-consumption. Over time, biodiversity and ancestral knowledge have been lost, while the use of agrochemicals has increased, as has slash-and-burn to create new cultivation areas, degrading forests and soil. In terms of yield, monocultures are unprofitable, with low development expectations in the communities, which encourages families to move to extensive cattle ranching or sell their land to livestock landowners. In this context, the Pastoral Social, a non-profit organization, through the

Comisión de la Tierra, together with the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project have formed and accompanied since 2013 a series of promoters in integral rural development in the ZAM. The objective has been to sensitize, train and empower community representatives as agents of change, capable to transmit and promote agroecological proposals. The accompaniment has focused on developing an agroecological proposal so that productive systems (agricultural/cattle raising) move to different sustainable models more efficient in space and resources, thereby improving the living conditions of communities and their income and reducing the impact on forest and environmental resources.

Beneficiaries

Community representatives linked to parishes in the Pastoral Zone Riberas del Itz'á and Brisas del Mopan, equivalent to the Maya Biosphere Reserve Buffer Zone.



Impacts

- ◆ 70 graduated promoters of the training processes.
- ◆ More than 30 promoters carry out actions to replicate four agroecological models and promote social-ecological processes.
- ◆ After their training, 42 active promoters retain 286 hectares of forest in their plots.
- ◆ With the implementation of agroecological practices, burning after harvesting or to establish new agricultural areas has stopped.
- ◆ Promoter's reserve areas are now spaces for recreation, learning and awareness for other people.
- ◆ 30 Mixed Orchards and Integral Family Agricultural Systems, covering 26.2 hectares produce an average of 15 different species, which have improved food security of the families and diversified their income.



Methodological approach: training processes

In order to implement an agroecological community development proposal, three training models based on participatory methodologies have been promoted:

- ◆ Integral Rural Development Promoters Training: oriented towards agroecological production, rational management of natural resources and community organization.
- ◆ Train the Trainer Training: oriented to deepen and strengthen communication, knowledge transmission, leadership and community project management skills.
- ◆ Farmer Field School: aimed at strengthening and leveling knowledge and capacities in participatory silvopastoral and agroforestry systems, based on the experiences and lessons learned from the promoters in their respective territories and farms.

Enabling factors: The previous local work carried out by Pastoral Social, has helped to sensitize different actors in the territory and promote community interest in joining these formation processes. Graduate promoters raise awareness and invite other community members to participate in the schools.

Accompaniment and promotion of Agroecological Models and socio-environmental processes

Consolidation and maturation phase: The promoters are encouraged to lead processes of multiplication of agroecological models and promotion through workshops or meetings in their communities, accompanied by the technical team of Pastoral de la Tierra.

Enabling factors: Exchanges of experiences were key to empower them and give them confidence in their role as multipliers and community leaders. "Chain passes" are a methodology or practice in which the promoter delivers, seeds or breeding animals to members of their communities as a loan or donation, thus creating trust.

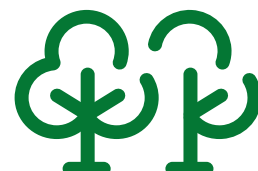


Implementation of a technical proposal: Agroecological Models

The technical proposal, transmitted through training processes and implemented by the promoters, consists of four agroecological models, often adapted to their reality.

- ◆ Family Mixed Orchard: intensive production of various plant species, mainly for food security purposes.
- ◆ Integral Family Agricultural System: integration of agricultural and livestock species in a simple way that can be done in backyards and/ or in family plots.
- ◆ Sustainable Agroforestry Systems: integration of fruit species and profit crops to areas of forests or guamiles already existing in the plots.
- ◆ Silvopastoral Systems: diversification of extensive livestock monoculture grazing systems towards more productive and intensive systems with forest and forage tree species.

Enabling factors: The implementation with species of animals and plants of use adapted to the climatic conditions of the territory, in the short and medium term, ensured success. The models built in a participatory manner with the producers based on the experiences and crops they were already producing were key to progress in implementation.



The training processes (1) are the basis for raising awareness and changing the mentality of future promoters, so that they can understand the approach and importance of the agroecological models they will implement in their plots (2). Once they begin to see results and progress on the plot, producers feel confident and able to start the promotion and multiplication (3) of these practices and processes with other members of their community.

» Story

Jose María Romero is a farmer, cattle breeder, beekeeper and promoter of Pastoral de la Tierra of the parish of Melchor de Mencos. Known as Chemita, in 2014 he graduated from the Integral Rural Development Promoters Training and four years later from the Farmer Field School in agroforestry systems. Since he started as a promoter, he has worked hard to develop more sustainable production and promote forest conservation among his family and neighbors. He has also been



responsible for disseminating beekeeping as an economically sustainable activity in harmony with the forest: "The forest represents wildlife and human life, where there are species that serve as food, medicine, protection and construction. Protecting the forest, its resources and biodiversity represents not only an economic value but all the services it provides. It is not correct that we think only of ourselves, we must carry out a sustainable agriculture for the present and future generations, we cannot live without forest and without nature. The first step that must be taken is to be convinced of the importance of the forest and that it can be produced sustainably."

