

Context and challenges

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The Forest Department (FD) was established in the 1920s with the overarching responsibility to oversee the sustainable management of Belize's forest estate and the resources therein, the administration and management of protected areas (PA) and the management of wildlife for present and future generations. However, the FD has experienced considerable change over the last two decades. Some of the most significant changes have been the decrease of timber stock, thereby reducing the Department's revenue generating capacity and the major damage caused by the bark beetle infestation in the country's pine forests. At another level of changes are the technological advances that have also propelled the FD to

evolve to meet the challenges that follow the changes caused by the pressure on the forest resources. Having recognized these changes and the need to adapt the management, the FD, in 2015 decided to conduct an institutional review to analyze the existing organizational structure and identify areas for organizational improvement. This process as well as the subsequent development of a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF), setting priorities and anticipated results for the next five years (2019-2023) was supported by the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project.

Beneficiaries

Directly, the staff of the Forest Department. Indirectly, stakeholders and actors across the country which participated in the review process and the development of the Strategic Action Plan and the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.



Impacts

- ◆ Today, the FD has an improved positioning in relation to other public institutions.
- ◆ Leadership positions in key areas of the FD have been identified and the institution has a more strategic vision for the future and a common work agenda.
- ◆ Measures are established that allow the identification of best practices for the operation of the Forest Department.
- ◆ Confidence among staff is strengthened and cooperation within the FD improved.
- ◆ The FD staff are more aware of their shortcomings and are willing to work with the limited resources available to them.



Implementation of an Institutional Assessment

Through a participatory process led by two consultants (one international and one national specialist) an institutional assessment of the FD was carried out. Through an extensive and intensive consultation process the FD and stakeholders across the country were interviewed and participated in various stakeholder consultation workshops during which they presented, analysed and discussed their needs and visions of/for the FD. An extensive report was compiled outlining the mandate of the FD based on the current legislation and funding as well as the current operational (institutional) structure including tasks and shortcomings of each department (programme) and recommendations. Once the report was presented, the FD reviewed the report and its feedback was incorporated into the final result.

Enabling factors: The FD and its leadership were open to the analysis and had identified the need for change. In this regard, the consultants had full support and a clear mandate to conduct interviews and workshops in which opinions were voiced openly from the Chief Forest Officer.

Developing a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

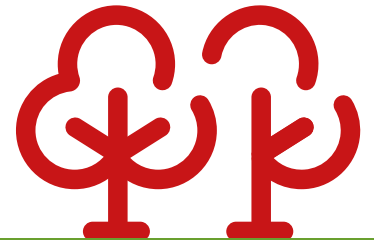
Based on the SAP a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF) was developed. The objective of this Framework is the tracking of the process in the future implementation of the tool and included the founding of a group of staff responsible for the monitoring and evaluation. The process was led by a team of two consultants (one regional and one national) in coordination with a liaison officer the FD had appointed. A Workplan to develop the Framework was established by the consultants and one two-day workshop was conducted where the SAP was reviewed, and indicators formulated. After the workshop the consultants compiled the MEF for the FD to review before its finalization.

Enabling factors: By the time the Framework was developed, the FD staff were already acquainted with the consultants and the participatory process, and had full ownership of the process. Therefore, participation was high and active, enabling a rapid and effective development.

Strategic Action Plan (SAP)

Taking the Institutional Assessment as a basis, a five-year Strategy and Action Plan (SAP) for the FD was developed in participatory workshops. The process was led by a team of two consultants (one regional and one national) in coordination with a liaison officer the FD had appointed. In order to define the strategic objectives and the action plan, two two-day workshops with the FD staff were conducted within three months. After each workshop the consultants compiled the results for the review of the FD before the next meeting. The result was a Strategy for the FD including a five-year plan with concrete and reachable objectives.

Enabling factors: The participatory workshops allowed the FD staff to engage fully in the entire process garnering support and ownership of the process and the resulting documents.



The Institutional Assessment (1) forms the basis for the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) and the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. In this sense, the development of the Strategic Action Plan (2) can be understood as the second step that can continue while the implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (3) begins.

Story

"Every institution which has a legal mandate to carry out national actions in service to its country should be guided by a Strategy. This is vital for good governance, reporting and accountability. The Forest Department Strategy is an important strategic planning tool which aims to guide the Department in the next five years in various strategic areas, in forest management, protected areas and wildlife management, institutional and partnership development and especially in its



contribution to the Selva Maya Region. It has great promise given the vested interest by the Governments of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico. It remains central in our culture, traditions and our conservation goals. It is without a doubt that in order for us to be successful in implementing our plans for the Selva Maya/Maya Forest, we need to continue to be strategic in involving our local communities who are the primary beneficiaries but also who significantly impact and alter the Selva Maya. As we move forward, the future of the Maya Forest lies in our hands and it is a task we take on without hesitation."

Wilber Sabido, Chief Forest Officer, Forest Department.

