

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COOPERATION: THE STRATEGIC COORDINATION GROUP (GEC), A STEERING AND INCIDENCE PLATFORM FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE SELVA MAYA

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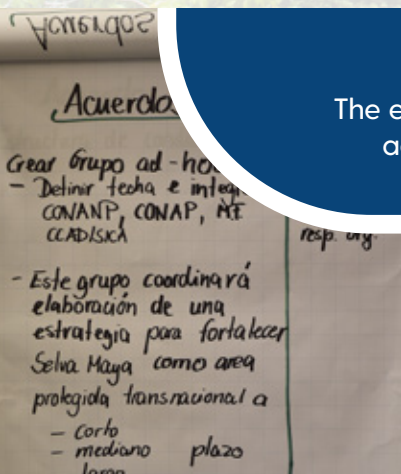
» Context and challenges

The Selva Maya refers to a region of tropical forest shared by the countries of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico, which, due to its geographical extension (more than ten million hectares of forest), is the largest continuous forest massif in Mesomerica, whose connectivity is favored through a system of protected areas covering more than four million hectares. A relevant feature is that some of these protected areas share not only border boundaries between two countries, but share threats including forest fires or timber and wildlife trafficking. This feature provokes the need to improve measures to strengthen environmental governance in the region through coordinated actions that increase the impact of operations to reduce threats that ensure the conservation

and sustainable use of natural resources in these three countries. With the objective of improving management, coordination and cooperation at a regional level more effectively, the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, provided technical advice on the development and implementation of a collaboration and environmental governance platform called Strategic Coordination Group of the Selva Maya (GEC) with the intention of facilitating the rapprochement between the parties responsible for the management of protected areas in the three countries, thus promoting a vision of a more integrated and connected Selva Maya linked to the population and promoting its well-being.

Beneficiaries

The environmental institutions responsible for the management and administration of the protected areas of the three countries.



Impacts



- ◆ Since the creation of the GEC (2015), various executive working meetings have been held on a rotating basis in the three countries, improving the consultation and decision-making for the management, scope for coordination and cooperation between the parties responsible for the management of protected areas, including the conceptualization and development of the document "Integral Strategy Selva Maya 2030".
- ◆ The intervention has led to greater recognition of this coordination platform, as it is referred to and taken into account in other initiatives for the conservation and sustainable development of the region.
- ◆ The link with the Operative Coordination Group (GOC) formed by directors and deputy directors of protected areas allows the exchange of ideas and reflections on the challenges and attention to threats in the region.



Attention for the coordination in the Selva Maya

As part of the formal launch of phase II of the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, the "Tri-national Strategic Workshop" took place in Mexico City in May 2015. At the workshop, environmental authorities from the three countries, including the Mexican National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), the Guatemalan National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP), the Belizean Forest Department (FD) and the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD)/ Central American Integration System (SICA)), reflected on the challenges to achieve a more effective coordination to conserve the natural and cultural wealth of this transboundary ecosystem, and recognized the need to promote a coordinated mechanism to achieve concrete collaboration agreements that favor the generation of wider spaces for dialogue under more effective trilateral coordination.

Enabling factors: Since 2012, the Project had promoted the efforts of regional technical cooperation through different actions, including the exchange of experiences at a technical and operational level, which identified the need for better management and coordination between the parties.

GEC Operating Mechanism

In 2016, with the intention of defining an articulated operation and operation mechanism, feasible and realistic, the Internal Regulation of Operation was drawn up, which remain in place and contribute to strengthen the internal structure of the Group through a co-responsibility scheme for adequate participation, driving and decision making. To balance responsibilities in all three countries, the Presidency is Pro Tempore rotating yearly.

Enabling factors: Previous interventions in the territory had already defined some operational structures of collaboration between protected areas of the Selva Maya.

Formation of the GEC and signature of Chicanná Agreements

In July of the same year, a first regional follow up workshop was held in Calakmul, Mexico, which triggered the creation of the GEC, being visualized as an entity of technical and political support and coordination for the development and implementation of an integral tri-national strategy (Belize-Guatemala-Mexico) for the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the Selva Maya. To formalize this commitment and define a road map for the following years, the "Declaration of Chicanná" was signed, a voluntary instrument expressing the commitment of the parties to join forces in favor of more effective cooperation at the regional level.

Enabling factors: The interest and technical - political will of the members of the GEC were important, while institutional support at a political level facilitated maintaining the frequency of working meetings.

Selva Maya Integral Strategy: adding multilevel efforts

Following up on the Chicanná Agreements, the "Integral Strategy Selva Maya 2030" for sustainable development in the Selva Maya has been promoted since 2017 in a joint effort with the "Selva Maya Protection of Natural Resources" Project implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which allowed giving greater visibility and integration to this region. The elaboration process included a series of participatory workshops of a technical and strategic nature in the three countries, which contributed to the definition of lines of work for consensual and articulated intervention for the conservation of this region. This instrument is in the final revision process (October 2019).

Enabling factors: The expansion of the participation of actors with different visions, interests and aspirations, enriched the instrument.

The Tri-national Strategic Workshop (1) allowed to generate a first reflection on challenges to improve management in the Selva Maya; the Declaration of Chicanná (2) reaffirmed the interest and will of the parties responsible for the management of protected areas, visualizing that common challenges can be addressed in a comprehensive manner. The Internal Regulation (3) shaped a functional and operational structure of participation. All this allowed the Integral Strategy "Selva Maya 2030" (4) to be developed on a solid basis of collaboration and trust within the Group.

» Story

"Due to its nature and structure, the GEC platform allows an adaptive management of the Selva Maya Project in coordination with colleagues from other countries, in an environment of trust, with a genuine interest and willingness to collaborate. This has facilitated the achievement of the proposed objectives, with visible benefits in the operation of the protected areas involved and the communities that inhabit them."



Cristopher González Baca, CONANP, Mexico.

"As an advocacy platform, the GEC offers the three countries the opportunity to jointly access, technical advice through international cooperation. With the support of the Project the conditions have been created and the administrative entities of the protected areas in each country have been designed in such a way that coordination and joint cooperation are strengthened, which has given way to the generation and implementation of other projects to consolidate the conservation and sustainable use of the Selva Maya."



Marvin Martínez, CONAP, Guatemala.

