

MUUCH KANAAN K'AAX COMMUNITY SURVEILLANCE NETWORK: TOWARDS THE CONSOLIDATION OF A VOLUNTARY COMMUNITY SUPPORT SCHEME TO STRENGTHEN THE CONSERVATION AND SURVEILLANCE OF THE BALA'AN K'AAX FLORA AND FAUNA PROTECTION AREA, QUINTANA ROO, MEXICO

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» Context and challenges

The Bala'an K'aax Flora and Fauna Protection Area (BKFFPA), administered by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), is located in the Mayan zone in the center of Quintana Roo and conserves 128,390 hectares of medium-sized forests and fauna representative of the tropical ecosystems of southern Mexico. In its area of influence (approximately 230,000 ha) there are 37 ejidos and an estimated population of 10,000 inhabitants. Even though CONANP began managing this natural area in 2005, the lack of operative personnel and the complex network of roads that cross the area, hamper adequate surveillance, increasing threats and environmental illicit acts on the site, including forest fires, poaching, extraction of wildlife, illegal logging

and land-use changes for agricultural activities. However, the presence of the ejidos surrounding the Protected Area (PA) can be an opportunity to reinforce surveillance and monitoring tasks, as they are located near the area and know the places where such illicit events occur. In the framework of the PA Strategic Plan 2015-2020, promoted by the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, within the operational axis of Community Surveillance, it was agreed to join efforts to promote and strengthen community surveillance committees through the creation of the Muuch Kanan K'aax Local Community Surveillance Network in order to reinforce the strategy of protection, management and conservation of the PA's biodiversity.

Beneficiaries

80 ejido brigade participants of the Network, through measures that strengthened their technical skills and personal development. In parallel, the population located in the 37 ejidos in the zone of influence of the PA.



Impacts



- ◆ Formation of a local community surveillance Network composed of 80 brigade members from 10 key ejidos, whose organizational and cooperation capacities were strengthened by increasing coordination for planning inspection and surveillance routes.
- ◆ Technical skills strengthened through workshops on fire management and firefighting, reducing time for control, forest fire eradication and affected areas.
- ◆ Strengthened capabilities in topics such as biodiversity, environmental legislation, biological monitoring, human development and the use of specialized equipment for inspection and surveillance.
- ◆ Through exchanges of experiences with national (Calakmul, Xcalak) and international (Belize, Guatemala) PAs, the member's knowledge was increased, and voluntary cooperation agreements were established, specifically between the BKFFPA and the Corozal Sustainable Future Initiative in Belize.
- ◆ The communication between the Network and the BKFFPA improved, homologating knowledge and consolidating an assertive dialogue.



Development and implementation of the Protected Area Strategic Plan

In 2014, a Strategic Plan was developed with the intention of knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the Protected Area, identifying the areas of intervention and drawing up a roadmap for the next five years, defined in operational axes, support axes and lines of action to be developed, allowing to identify the potential of allied ejidos to foster cooperation with the PA.

Enabling factors: Following a change in the direction of the PA, interest in supporting key communities to trigger community surveillance actions was reinforced. The interventions that CONANP staff already carried out and the economic support programs were decisive aspects.

Development of good community surveillance practices

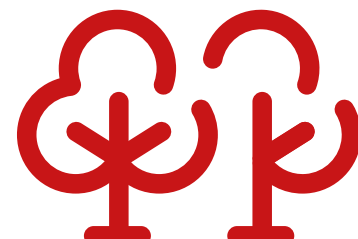
Since the participation of brigade members is voluntary, it was important to evaluate the viability and sustainability of this system and the feasibility of its institutionalization. Through a consultancy, the perceptions and motivations of the community brigades to carry out their activities were analyzed, together with an analysis of intra and inter-brigade social networks. This analysis was the basis for the PA to have a more defined intervention horizon.

Enabling factors: When the network was formed, trust among the community brigades increased and subsequently the preexistence of a Community Surveillance Program in Protected Areas in Mexico was relevant as the brigade members had a high level of awareness of the necessary tasks. The participation of brigades that incorporate other economic activities (e.g. beekeeping), increased the level of commitment towards the conservation of the PA.

Facilitation of participation spaces for setting up a surveillance network

Through the constructive dialogue with key ejidos in the area of influence, those interested in participating in inspection and surveillance actions have been identified. Thus, in 2014 through a participatory workshop, the Muuch Kannan K'aax Surveillance Network was formally established (which in Mayan language means "Together we take care of the forest"), composed of 80 brigades of 10 ejidos. Together they defined their Mission, Vision and the foundations of their organizational and operational structure, through a first action plan, in addition to generating an analysis to identify technical training and personal development needs.

Enabling factors: Several of these ejidos and their local residents have already had an important degree of rapprochement and work with the PA, raising the willingness and interest to participate in inspection and surveillance actions by recognizing the environmental services that the PA provides.



Despite the change in the direction of the PA and the lack of operational staff, having a Strategic Plan (1) helped to define inspection and surveillance priorities in key ejidos. Promoting the dialogue between the AP management and representatives of those ejidos (2), allowed leveling expectations, interests and aspirations, resulting in a solid commitment to voluntary collaboration. Being a voluntary community participation system, an analysis of its viability and sustainability (3) was key.

» Story

"Being part of a community brigade represents for me to take care of the environment, take care of the forest, the animals which live there and the ecosystems. I am not only a brigadist but also a beekeeper and therefore we understand that if we take care of the forest, we also take care of the bees that produce honey. That is why we conserve the forest, so the bees do not leave. The creation of the Community Surveillance Network has helped us a lot, because before we worked in a dispersed way and now we are 80



brigades who work as a team, we have better work standards that allow us to plan our actions, for example, to fight fires faster. The Project helped us a lot to improve our knowledge about the jungle, to get to know my teammates better, but also to communicate better with other brigades from other ejidos. I also feel better trained in using devices like GPS and sharing experiences with park rangers from other countries helped me learn about other ways of working. Bala'an K'aax is the place where we live and where our families, our children live, so we must conserve it for the future."

Ricardo Tun, Member of the community brigade of the Ejido Sabana San Francisco, and beekeeper.

