

## ***Executive Summary***

The project CAM-2241, CAM-00/114 - IUCN-NORAD Framework Program – Mesoamerica: **ALLIANZAS** have as planned, established six bi-national consortia, also called alliance, in three different geographical concentration areas (AGC); 1) Barra de Santiago in El Salvador and Costa del Sur en Guatemala; 2) El Gaspar at Río San Juan and Humedales in Costa Rica; as well as 3) Unión para el Desarrollo de Talamanca in Costa Rica and Alianzas-Bocas in Panama. Each Alliance is formed by a union of local groups, organisations and institutions. These new alliances have acquired varying degree of competence in relevant aspects for improving the conditions for threatened ecosystems as well as sustainable management of natural local resources.

The alliances have started planning and implementing interventions targeted to halt the activities harming the ecosystems and/or degrading the environment. By involving local, regional and national stakeholders these interventions are aimed at securing changes in the attitudes and behaviour of local users. As such the alliances represent important local social agents of change that may institutionalize the local socio-environmental agenda. The degree of maturity and real advances of each alliance depends primarily on the ability of the local leadership to meet the interests of the many groups and the dynamics within each alliance. The future strength of the alliances will to a large extent depend on how well these succeed in targeting issues of common concern and achieve quantitative and qualitative real changes. This will depend on further improvements of technical skills but also the groups' ability to compromise and include new groups sharing common concerns.

By implementing simple ecological and economical evaluation studies, the alliances have commenced monitoring some ecosystems. One small but illustrative example is the management and use of marine tortuous-eggs in La Barrona, Guatemala. 80 % of the eggs found on the beach by the local population are being sold in the markets, while 20 % is hatched and safely returned to the sea. In this way a threatened ecosystem is monitored, securing sustainability at the same time as the local family economies are improved. Sharing these kinds of successful examples among the alliances as inspiration and base for innovation, still remains as a task during the short time that remains of this project.

The alliances have been trained in technical and organisational skills in order to implement planned activities. The most dominant skill is seen in organising preparation of Annual Operational Plan (POA) and in preparing financial accounts. With respect to technical skills practical tools for improving the state of the ecosystems and improve the quality of life for the local population still remains to be strengthened further to become independent. The systems for handling information and managing natural resources exist, but considerably more efforts are required in order to reach significant impacts.

It is also observed that some alliances have participated in development and updating of public zoning plans for area use, but the participation varies among the alliances. Generally the alliances have worked with local government in the processes of preparing plans but the alliances in Talamanca and North Costa Rica have no plans within their strategy to influence at this level of the public authorities. Activities securing implementation of the approved "ordenanzas" remains to be initiated.

The policy for Equality of gender and Environment approved the Presidents of the Central American Region was planned to be implemented in the project. However, only in El Salvador, in the Alliance of

Barra de Santiago, has a successful model securing important changes both at local and national levels been established. This alliance has established cooperation with relevant national authorities and suggested changes in the legal framework that will have significant impact in every municipality in the country. The same model is being shared and developed with the sister Alliance in Costa Sur in Guatemala.

With in the other alliances the implementation of Equality of gender policy has mainly focused on increasing the participation of women in leadership positions. With the exception of the alliance in Nicaragua, where the ratio of women in leadership positions is only 13 %, the average share in the rest of the alliances is around 40%. The second approach has been to support productive projects that may improve the family income and involve women. However, the relevance, suitability and accountability of these projects are insufficient. Projects like traditional chicken coops, wood – efficient kitchen stoves, growing pepper and cultivating organic products have been supported. The two chicken coops visited (in Costa Rica and in El Salvador) have no ecological focus, are administratively weak, without consideration of profitability and no transparency in accounting or rules for how to distribute the profit. The El Salvador project is located on the property of one of the participating women, who also happens to be member in the alliance. The pepper cultivation has relevant ecological considerations and the group was more consolidated but the seeds were actually planted years ago with a loan from another organisation. The contribution from this project was to repay the loan for the women. Generally, with the amount of input provided, stronger accountability ought to have been visible by now. Such weaknesses may easily result in a negative impression concerning the objectives of the project both internally in the alliances and also among the local communities.

If an analysis is made of the real changes obtained in reduced degrading of critical ecosystems and real changes in the quality of life, being the objectives of the project, compared to the investments made, the conclusion is that the results are very costly. It may be argued that it takes time to form alliances among existing groups con different agendas, and to provide training in technical and administrative skills and form these to be effective units. However, many of these groups were already well ahead in ecological awareness and administratively operational. Five years of interventions ought to have been more effective. It may therefore be that primary focus on dialogue as well as lack of clear targets to be achieved has hampered the producing real impacts in ecosystems and poverty reduction. A clear baseline from the start, identifying critical ecosystems that needed attention, would have helped to focus the activities for better achieving the principal objective of the project.

The development objective of the project remains relevant due to the environmental, social and economical deficiencies that still exist in the areas of focus. The model of uniting local community-based groups that may continue interventions to save and strengthen vulnerable ecosystems effectively is found to be suitable. The model might be even more effective and sustainable if the arena for dialogue and interventions were less exclusive, but opened up for additional important social and economical actors. Examples would be involving investors that are developing projects in the area, the productive and commercial sector, benefitting from the current movement for increased corporate social responsibility. Without involving the economic and productive sector in the environmental agenda, changing the factors that are degrading the ecosystems will be very limited in impact. Likewise will the changes in the quality of life be minimal. So far the focus of the alliances has been to approach the authorities – principally for changing the legal framework and regulations. The resulting impact of group interventions in achieving the objectives will continue to be limited if the stronger actors in these remote areas where the authorities are weak continue to be excluded.

With respect to sustainability of the alliances it is important that capacity is developed to present its potentials as important environmental change agents in their area of influence and as such earn own income to cover its costs. The current focus is more directed and dependent on donors. The alliances should rather develop instruments of common interest that are valued in the community and that may finance continued monitoring, necessary interventions and communication of advances. In cooperation with IUCN the alliances have achieved recognition as serious and competent agents in environmental protection. There exist a few success stories in recovering and protecting vulnerable ecosystems, but not with sufficient recognition to achieve technical and economical self sufficiency.

Change in the attitudes of using and protecting natural resources is one of three elements observed that in the future will have an impact on poverty reduction. Secondly, greater awareness and attention directed towards protecting the sources and use of water will improve health and working capacities predominantly for poorer people. The increased environmental awareness and active initiatives to rescue and appreciate the continued existence of critically exposed ecosystems may provide basis for future income and improvement of life quality. However, the strategy for linking joint management of local natural resources with poverty reduction has not yet been developed.

The project has strengthened the self-confidence of participating indigenous people, both by being stronger when united in alliances and also by more being able to resolve their urgent important issues. This change may be seen predominantly in three areas; a) Revival of traditional practices in accessing and using natural resources necessary for survival (water, soil, food, shadow and cover); b) Generation of income in synchrony with sustainable agro-ecological use and environmental services; c) Managing, using and influencing policies for ecosystems in concordance with indigenous vision such as providing environmental services and/or co-management of protected areas. Incorporating also the strategic vision of indigenous people in participatory environmental management still remains to be done.

The proposed IUCN project plan for 2009 – 2012 has been revised but is found to more be a policy document than a project document. The issue of a baseline and indicators for measuring advances is not at all mentioned. Additional to this issue, a second condition for recommending continuation of the Alliance project is a development of a detailed description of targets for the project for reducing the degrading of the environment as well as reducing poverty, which may be assessed for acceptable relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. The regular follow-up should the focus on the degree to which the targets are being reached.