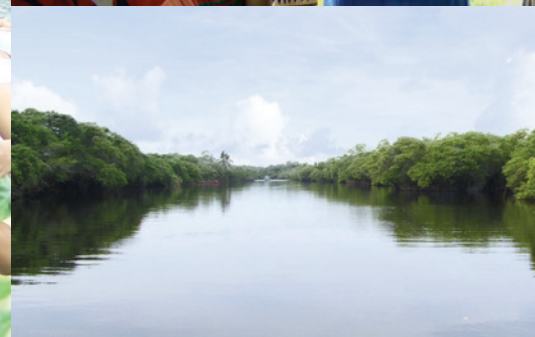




Alliances, Local Governance Model for Land Management



International Union for the Conservation of Nature
Regional Office for Mesoamerica and the Caribbean Initiative

Alliances, Local Governance Model for Land Management

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This is a publication of the project, Solidarity Alliances for Sustainable Land Management in Central America, executed by the IUCN with the support and generosity of the Government of Norway.



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- Citation:** Fresia Camacho (2012). Systematization Project on Solidarity Alliances for the Sustainable Management of Central America, Costa Rica. IUCN. p.
- ISBN:** 978-9968-938-59-4
- Systematization:** Centro de Comunicación Voces Nuestras
- Technical Review:** Ronald McCarthy
Gabriela Calderón
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- Cover photo:** IUCN Alliances project Team
- Document photos:** IUCN Alliances project Team
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Rodrigo Molina - Producciones La Traviesa
Fresia Camacho - Centro de Comunicación Voces Nuestras
Consortio Barra Santiago - El Salvador
- Design and printing:** Diseño Editorial • www.kikeytetey.com
- Available at:** IUCN Regional Office for Mesoamerica
P.O. Box 607-2050 Montes de Oca
Tel.: +506 2283 8449
Fax: +506 2283 8472
www.iucn.org/mesoamerica

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Presentation

Alliances resulted from a systematic effort to break away from traditional frameworks of project management, and instead create an implementation model where local people are the center and true protagonists in management of their ecosystems.

This project took place in the border zones of Panama and Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Costa Rica and El Salvador and Guatemala, highly biodiverse areas whose great natural wealth contrasts starkly with the conditions of poverty and vulnerability endured by the population. Alliances set out to strengthen local organizations and generate capacities to plan, promote and manage their territories, thus addressing the need for social groups to have greater participation as well as reduce conditions of poverty. The transboundary character of these areas has vital importance, not only in protecting ecosystems whose natural dynamics transcend administrative limits, but also in fostering social bonds as fellow Central Americans in communities of neighboring peoples belonging to different countries. Alliances was a good example of how people, guided by interest in conserving natural resources so as to improve their quality of life, can aspire to more peaceful, harmonious, democratic and integrated societies.

Though finalized in 2011, during the project's implementation the community and binational social platforms created realities

that have persisted, been consolidated and empowered and continue to produce results over time. The local governance model established through the process promoted by Alliances with local organizations, local leaders and different institutions impacted positively on biodiversity conservation in the border ecosystems, and very especially, on local and grassroots organization. This is what endures over time.

To capture this learning we decided to systematize the model—not to identify a recipe or formula, but to offer orientation about the essential elements that delineated the success demonstrated by Alliances.

This document describes the concepts and elements serving as theoretical and methodological foundation for our action. Through stories, we illustrate how the strategies, principles and values developed were applied as a means of clarifying how a model came to be constructed in the different geographic regions. These stories are narrated by the consortium members, as they saw it all and put it into practice.

IUCN is convinced that this path clearly reveals the importance of supporting local organizations in their processes of empowerment and capacity to influence. Both elements, “empowerment and generation of capacity,” are essential to build a more just, equitable, inclusive and caring society that values natural resources and uses them sustainably.

Dr. Grethel Aguilar
Regional Director Mesoamerica and Caribbean Initiative
International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

List of Acronyms

AAMVECONA:	Asociación de Amigos y Vecinos de la Costa y la Naturaleza de Panamá
ACOMUITA	Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas Bribris de Talamanca, Costa Rica
ADESBO	Alianza para el Desarrollo Sostenible del Archipiélago de Bocas del Toro, Panamá
ADITIBRI	Asociación de Desarrollo Integral del Territorio Indígena Bribris
ADITICA	Asociación de Desarrollo Integral del Territorio Indígena Cabécar
APPTA	Asociación de Pequeños Productores de Talamanca, Costa Rica
ARCAS	Centro de Rescate de Vida Silvestre
Alliances Project	Implemented by IUCN with Norwegian Cooperation
CBTC	Corredor Biológico Talamanca Caribe, Costa Rica
CCAD	Central American Commission on Environment and Development
CCSS	Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social
COCODES	Community Development Councils, Guatemala
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FUMSAMÍ	Fundación de Mujeres de San Miguelito, Nicaragua
FUNDAR	Fundación Amigos del Río San Juan, Nicaragua
FUNDEVERDE	Fundación Reserva Esperanza Verde, Nicaragua
GAC	Geographic Areas of Concentration
MARENA	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Nicaragua
MARN	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Guatemala
Microregión Ahuachapán Sur	Asociación Microregión Ahuachapán Sur, an initiative of four municipalities of Ahuachapán Sur: San Francisco Menéndez, San Pedro Puxtla, Jujutla and Guaymango, El Salvador
MINAET	Ministry of Environment, Energy and Telecommunications, Costa Rica
ORMA	IUCN Regional Office for Mesoamerica
PRESOL	Solid Residue Plan Costa Rica
RECICARIBE	Asociación de Reciclaje del Caribe, Costa Rica
SIAPAZ	Sistema Internacional de Áreas Protegidas para la Paz
UDT	Unión para el Desarrollo de Talamanca, Costa Rica
UICN	Unión Internacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza
UNAG	Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos de Nicaragua
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
UNED	Universidad Estatal a Distancia
UNES	Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña
UPOT	Unión de Pueblos Originarios Transfronterizos, Panamá y Costa Rica

Introduction

This document presents characteristics of the governance model developed by local alliances or intersectoral platforms—Alianza Bocas (Panama), Los Humedales and Unión para el Desarrollo de Talamanca (Costa Rica), Gaspar (Nicaragua), Barra de Santiago-El Imposible (El Salvador), and Alianza del Pacífico Sur Oriente (Guatemala)—in the frame of the Alliances Project promoted by IUCN-ORMA and Norwegian cooperation from 2004 to 2011. Despite the challenge presented by poverty and the vulnerability of the regions' ecosystems, this path generated an accumulation of knowledge that IUCN now places at your disposal with the understanding that while social processes cannot be duplicated, it is possible to compare and abstract a replicable model. This document is therefore not so much a systematization of the experience, as an effort to synthesize a proposal constructed in the back and forth between theory and practice, between the lessons, knowledge, and tensions resulting from the actions, the actions and the very model of Alliances.

The main lesson is well known and yet always new: to influence substantive decisions about environment and the life of communities, unity and working together are more efficient than working alone. The governance model we present integrates rationales, principles, values, organizational criteria, strategies, and tools, constructed and reconstructed over the course of the experience, and based on the viewpoints and practices of the protagonists.

To document the process and abstract the model we interviewed community leaders and representatives of nongovernmental organizations and municipalities in the territories where the project was carried out, as well as during work sessions with IUCN collaborators. We also reviewed systematizations, reports, and stories revealing the richness of the processes that fed this governance proposal, and endeavored to distill elements common to the different experiences, regardless of the particular conditions in which the six local border consortia or alliances develop. This document aims to be of use to the people, organizations, communities, and institutions out in front every day, facing the challenge of conserving natural resources adequately, improving people's lives, and achieving an efficient management of the environment. It is built upon the voices of the protagonists as they relate their experiences illustrating the model, and is thus narrated from the perspective of the first person plural.

The first chapter provides background on the project's development, while the second gives an overall idea of the governance model. The third chapter looks at the theoretical and methodological approach, the fourth at underlying values and principles, and the fifth at forms of organization developed in the different cases, and lessons about relations, functions, roles, decision making, and the social fabric. The sixth chapter explores how a common vision was cultivated from differing perspectives and procedures. The central tenets are accompanied by stories gathered on the ground amongst the protagonists of the local alliances.



Crossing the bridge between Panama and Costa Rica at the Guabito-Sixaola border

1. The Road Travelled



IUCN has been working for conservation in the Mesoamerican region since 1988, with the Norwegian government as its strategic ally in strengthening capacities of natural resource management and community ownership, and in various knowledge management initiatives. This fruitful synergy led to the initiation of a challenge requiring trust and valor: to generate a local work model fostering linkage between management of key ecosystems and political advocacy.

The Alliances Project arose in 1999 from a baseline study prepared in joint and participatory fashion by IUCN's members and technical team in three of the eight IUCN Geographic Areas of Concentration¹ with a transboundary scope: 1) the Caribbean coast in Talamanca (Costa Rica) and Bocas del Toro (Panama), comprising the lower basin of the Sixaola River, Changuinola and Guarumo, and the islands of Bocas del Toro; 2) the Pacific coast and lower basin of the Paz River between Guatemala and El Salvador, including Barra de Santiago, forested areas, la Barrona,

1 Geographic Areas of Concentration: Definition used by IUCN to delimit a geographic space of work making it possible to concentrate and integrate all of the IUCN components of action in order to attain important impacts on conservation, sustainable management of key ecosystems, and the quality of life of local populations. A series of criteria were established for selecting the Geographic Areas of Concentration to orient the definition of geographic areas, both national and regional. (2002)



San Carlos dock, Nicaragua

Monterrico, and Hawaii; and 3) the southwest section of the upper watershed of the San Juan River (Nicaragua and Costa Rica), with the lower basins of the Medio Queso, Zapote, Frío, Tepenaguazape, and Papaturo rivers, wetlands, and Solentiname Archipelago.

Based on the results of this study, in 2004 an agreement was signed to develop the “IUCN/NORAD-Mesoamerica Alliances Framework Program” for a five-year period (2004-2008). The objective was to establish alliances of local border groups in specific sites of Mesoamerica in order to influence local, national, and regional policies encouraging sustainable natural resource use.

The baseline study recognizes that the environmental situation of the region, and especially the areas selected, is not good compared to the rest of Latin America due to deforestation, pollution, and overexploitation of natural resources, with freshwater, coastal, and forest ecosystems most affected. It also points out that “Central America’s true wealth lies in its people, who do not have the quality of life they deserve in return for the efforts they make due to historical and structural reasons.” (IUCN, 2002, p. 12)

Some of the key challenging themes of this study (IUCN 2001) were the following:

- Improvement of people’s quality of life without affecting the natural resource base
- Community management of natural resources
- Water quality, quantity, and access
- Impact of populations on ecosystems (waste management, contamination)
- Environmental education and awareness
- Ecotourism

The objective defined was to link organizations involved in sustainable management of ecosystems and their goods and services in order to take action in the territory while influencing public policies. Strategies proposed in this first stage revolved around empowerment, governance, and knowledge.

From the start, Alliances was conceived as a path to the decentralization of decisions and resources. The challenge was to find a way for communities and their organizations to participate in and influence management of the territory they inhabit, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the ecosystems

and the population's quality of life. (IUCN, 2001) This would not be easy given the concentration of lands, the presence of large transnational corporations, the fragility, and government functioning that is often inefficient or focused on other priorities.

Insertion was partnered with IUCN member organizations present in the local territories, along with broader convocations made under the slogan, "For the People and the Environment," encouraging local actors to join and own the vision of Alliances. Gradually, local consortia or alliances were formed on both sides of the border, manager groups were established, and work was carried out in forging guiding values and identity. Likewise, the construction of joint plans nurtured a common vision and contributed to their application on the ground. Workshops and exchanges of experiences, both transboundary and with other consortia members, brought together knowledge and practices.

"This design signified the opportunity for participating organizations to affirm their rights, build capacities, learn, and share experiences at the same time as they succeeded in converging actions, strategies, and agendas." (Blanco, 2009, p. 7)

The second stage extension phase from January to June of 2009 centered on systematizing the accompaniment model of the Alliances Project and designing the consolidation proposal. Some of the recommendations were to "...strengthen the participation of indigenous populations, women, and youth in the

consortia; strengthen communication and influencing strategies; and ... investment in social capital..." (IUCN, 2009, p. 5)

Stage three (September 2009 to August 2011) was aimed toward "establishing and validating governance models for natural resource management and biodiversity conservation, especially in transboundary zones, and fostering livelihoods and local economies through access to green markets." (IUCN, 2009, p. 5) This phase was characterized by competitive funding for projects shared among several alliance partners, along with systematic efforts to attract new collaborators for the consortia.

According to the final evaluation report (Blanco, Bradford and Guharay, 2011), this process not only linked transparent and democratic local dynamics and platforms capable of planning and action, but influencing for improved environmental management and the promotion of environmentally friendly production. Another significant achievement was the empowerment and integration of women, youth, and indigenous populations in the platforms, and incorporation of their agendas in the common vision.

Along the way, a model of local governance was constructed with local organizations, leaders, and various institutions. That is what this document attempts to systematize and share here. The Alliances Project offers a key to generating significant advances by IUCN and other institutions and persons interested in driving more effective conservation and environmental management practices.



Training workshop, Barra Santiago-El Imposible Consortium, El Salvador

2. Alliances as Local Governance Model for Land Management

Critical review and collective reflection on this twelve-year experience have enabled us to extract the proposal of the Alliances governance model, organized in the following components for those interested in replicating the experience:

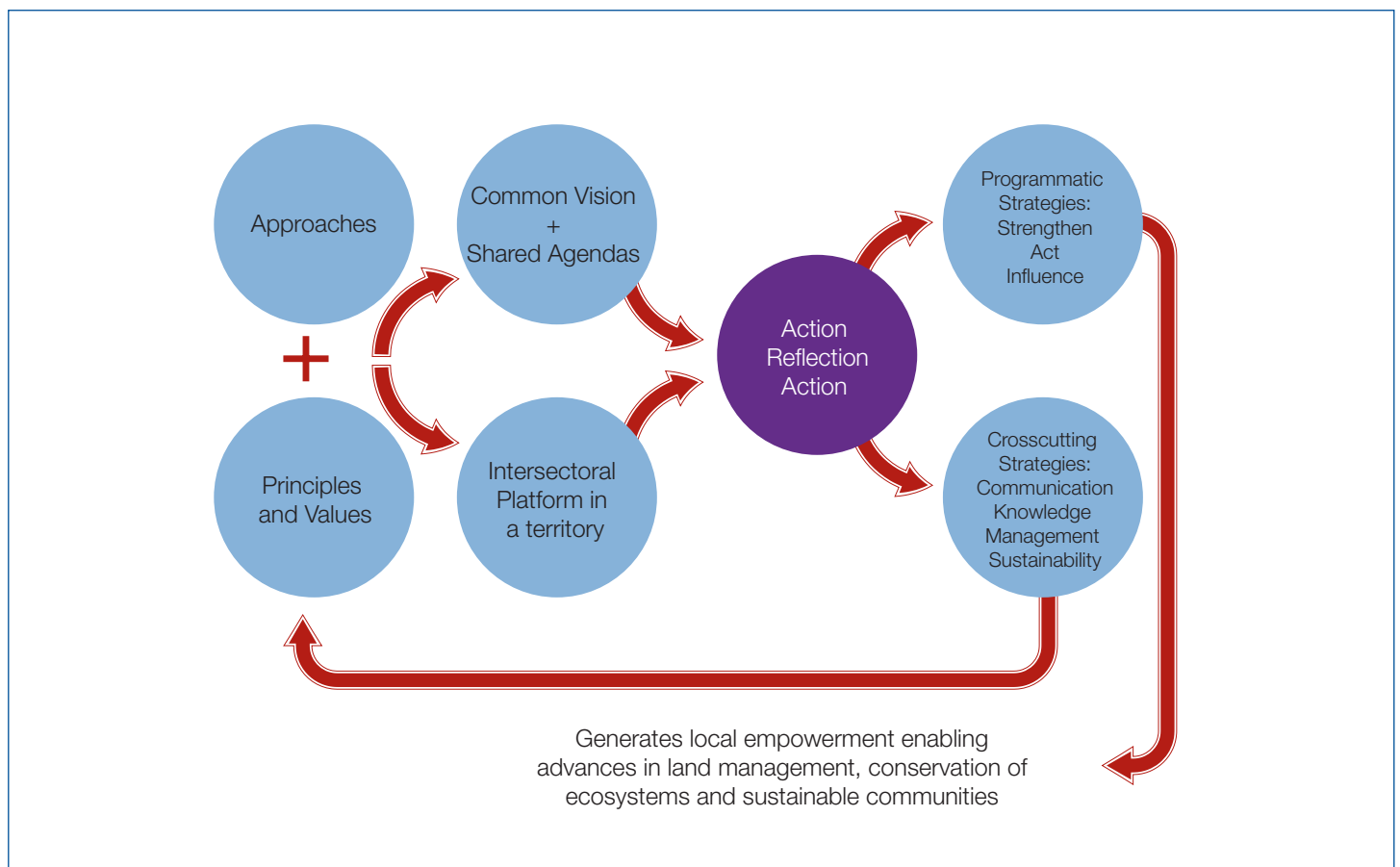
- The theoretical and methodological approaches on which the model is based
- Principles and values underlying the proposal

- The intersectoral proposal with respect to organizational aspects
- Construction of a common vision and work agendas
- Strategies, tools, and procedures enabling the vision to be carried out in practice

The diagram below is provided to further understanding of the proposal:

Diagram 1

Guide to Understanding the Proposal of the Governance Model





Juanita Baltodano of APPTA-UDT, Costa Rica

Defining the Environmental Governance Model

In this section we look at the overall vision of the governance model and key underlying concepts.

Unlike management models where land and its ecosystems are viewed as spheres where certain outside actors and public entities define strategies and policies, the *Alliances model* recognizes the diversity of social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics occurring in the territory and the diverse actors sustaining them. Based on this, joint action is fostered in the understanding that it is the communities' lack of power that must be tackled first so that conditions can change.

The object is more efficient territorial governance, aimed at creating more sustainable communities. Moving from isolated to joint work and alliances changes the correlation of forces, since having an assemblage of organizations fosters capacity to influence decisions and act in the territory. Hence, this proposal seeks to conserve ecosystems through direct actions, the generation of environmentally-friendly livelihoods, and political advocacy: through constructivism and social innovation. These concepts will be addressed in the section on theoretical and

methodological approaches. Here the focus is on what we understand by local alliances or consortia as model of local governance grounded in experience.

Alliance: Local platform for linking efforts among different stakeholders, community organizations, nongovernmental entities, and representatives of the public or private sector, based on willingness to reflect and act together around common objectives.

Governance: "Environmental governance is defined as the assemblage of institutions and processes, formal and informal, including organizational norms and values, behaviors, and modalities. Through those processes, citizenry, organizations, different social movements, and different interest groups link their interests, mediate their differences, and exercise their rights and obligations concerning access to and use of natural resources." (Gutierrez and Siles, sf, p. 131)

Disaggregating, environmental governance is thus a social, cultural, and economic dynamic.

In a specific territory there is a diversity of stakeholders that includes institutions, communities, organizations, social movements, and businesses, all with their own organizational forms, interests, aspirations, and needs.

All these stakeholders generate different processes and actions, both formal and informal, in order to exercise their rights and obligations concerning access to, management, and use of natural resources by assuming or rejecting norms and values established or not by the State; many times there are tensions and contradictions among these practices.

As Imbach confirms (2008, p. 1), "Territories are managed by the people who use them in accordance with different types of rights (owners, extractors, and government authorities with mandate over the territory, such as those who manage protected areas, among others). These people and their organizations are the main cause of problems for the territory's sustainability. At the same time, they are the only solution to those problems."

Territory: "Geographic space (terrestrial, aquatic, marine or any combination) delimited based on some criterion." (Imbach, 2008, p. 6)

The *Alliances model of local governance* aims to give meaning and synergy to this dynamic through:

- Linkage in an integrating and inclusive fabric around the objective of environmental management
- Recognition of the possibility of generating sustainable arrangements acceptable to the different stakeholders
- Participation in decision making
- Convergence and negotiation to mediate differences and advance toward sustainability with respect to natural resource management, based on consensuated norms and values

- Sensitization, information, and awareness of the population about environmental and social challenges
- Actions rooted in the territory, ranging from community practices to participation in forums and global events
- Certainty that change is possible thanks to the different complementary contributions
- The purpose is to achieve sustainable communities.

Regeneration of the social fabric is possible thanks to *the alliance*, and this contributes one of the elements that make the local governance model viable. Its strengthening and cohesion are conditions for the model to continue prospering. The result of joint work is not the sum of individual work, since working in alliance multiplies knowledge and contacts, provides complementary capacities, capacities, and empowers effort. Ties transcend the formal dimension and are woven at the subjective and affective level. (Alvarado, s.f.)

In the exercise of territorial governance, we understand power as the capacity to influence the outcome of events. In reference to the use and conservation of natural resources, power can be conceived as the capacity to influence decisions about natural resource use and administration so that these are aimed toward biodiversity conservation and sustainable communities. According to Gutierrez and Siles (s.f.), *the alliance* is a space for citizenship-building and equity.

One of the main virtues of local alliances is that they become a bridge to bring communities closer to institutionality and foster understanding. Says Tono (Antonio Estrada), mayor of the community of La Barrona in Guatemala: "The consortium has facilitated communication with municipal and national authorities. It has supported getting authorities to come and listen to the needs of the communities; it has brought us closer to the Government. We have been grateful for that opportunity." (Interview, June 2012)

Moreover, the experience of twin alliances located on both sides of the border in Geographic Areas of Concentration with common ecosystems offers potential for constructing local transboundary agendas through dialogue among local actors, thus establishing another bridge of communication.



Artisanal fishermen in La Barrona, Guatemala

3. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches



Bridge in San Francisco Menéndez, El Salvador, swept away during Tropical Storm 12E

This section deals with the theoretical and methodological pillars of the governance model:

- the relation between fighting poverty and conserving biodiversity;
- ecosystems and sustainable communities;
- territories and local governance;
- and social innovation and local alliances.

Some of these proposals were clear from the start of the Project, others were adopted as questions and challenges arose. In the

process of forming the consortia, key concepts were clarified and approaches and premises were found and adjusted through action/reflection in order to improve the development of the local alliances.

Addressing the situation in a holistic manner requires flexibility to identify conceptual and methodological needs. This is a proposal under permanent construction, which is possible in an organization like the IUCN whose flexible and horizontal dynamics allow for working hypotheses that are constantly evolving through dialogue with the setting and practice, based on systematic reflection.

3.1. Point of Departure: Poverty and Ecosystem Threats Go Hand in Hand

One of the challenges in the Alliances Project was to comprehend the relation between sustainable development, conservation, and poverty. One need only look at our territories to see that the primacy of the economic, the separate treatment of conservation and poverty reduction, and top-down policies constructed on desktops have damaged the environment and quality of life of people in poor communities.

Sustainable development: Improvement in the quality of human life while caring for the carrying capacities that support ecosystems. (IUCN/UNDP/WWF 1991)

Conservation: The protection, care, management, and maintenance of ecosystems, habitats, wildlife species and populations, within or outside their environment, in order to safeguard natural conditions for their long-term permanence.

The regions where we promoted the Alliances Project were a vivid sample of non-existent or erroneous policies: they had fragile ecosystems and indigenous, *campesino*, fishing, and grazing communities, mostly poor, coexisting with wetlands and protected areas, as well as species in danger of extinction such as turtles or manatees, located in border zones (IUCN, 2009). Several had tourism development.

During the Project, experience translated into comprehension of the logic of poverty: drawing closer to the day-to-day life of the communities and grasping how they see themselves in the world and how they relate to one another, to public officials and nongovernmental organizations, and to nature, in order to find out their interests and needs.

The IUCN publication, *Paisajes, pueblos y poder* (2008) takes up a World Bank proposal in which the dimensions of poverty are:

- lack of natural, human, financial, physical and/or social resources



Provider of laundry services, San Juan River, Nicaragua

- lack of power to influence living conditions, expressed in equitable access to resources, fragility or irresponsibility of public administrations, and inequitable legal systems
- vulnerability resulting from economic crises, natural disasters, and social crises.

According to this work, to tackle poverty opportunities to grow must be provided, as well as fostering empowerment and increasing security through adequate risk management and strategies for dealing with natural phenomenon. Our priority in the Alliances Project was empowerment. Also, a great deal of consideration was given to incorporating gender perspective in the poverty reduction strategies due to the issue of women's access to resources, because their way of relating to the environment is expressed differently, and because they are often responsible for the family economy.

Alliances proposed this exercise as political practice, as an action for influencing decisions in specific geographic areas and with the citizenry. This allowed social actors to take ownership of the model.

3.2. Point of Arrival: Conservation of Ecosystems and Sustainable Communities

The ecosystem vision inherent to IUCN actions helped in dealing with different dynamics in the territory. Under this vision, conservation and sustainable use are linked through integrated management of soil, water and living resources, to achieve a management balance enabling the existence of sustainable communities and fair and equitable sharing of the benefits generated from use of the natural resources.

Ecosystem: “Dynamic complement of communities of plants, animals, and microorganisms with their biotic environment, interacting as a functional unit.” (Convention on Biological Diversity, article 2, according to Widevoxhel, 2008)

The IUCN Ecosystem Management Commission developed an operating guide to apply the ecosystem approach in the Alliances Project (Windevoxhel, 2008). This contains the following general orientations:

1. Focus on functional relations and processes within the ecosystems
2. Emphasize equitable sharing of benefits
3. Use adaptable management practices
4. Carry out management actions at a scale suited to the problem being worked on. Includes, as appropriate, decentralization to the lowest level
5. Ensure intersectoral cooperation

The guide supported the Project’s basic strategy, and was applied in communities with special conditions due to their particular social and environmental features and geographic location. This was pointed out by Olman Varela of the IUCN-Alliances team (interview, May 2012): “The complexity of managing a border territory is greater because there is less technological development, less institutional presence, and lower educational level.”

On the other hand, the landscape approach was also helpful for understanding that “territorial processes take place at



Members of FUMSAMI-EI Gaspar, Nicaragua

different scales (farm, community, microwatershed, municipality, watershed, region, country, and global), wherein each level has particular stakeholders and specific relevant processes of lesser importance to other levels.” (Imbach, 2008, p 2) Landscapes with different land uses are superimposed within the territory: cultural, economic, and conservation landscapes, and also institutional landscapes that can include other geographic spheres.

“Landscape: Assemblage of different types of ecosystems under different management structured in a unique and differentiated form which is found in a certain geographic space. It includes natural wild ecosystems, natural ecosystems under extraction, cultivated ecosystems, and constructed ecosystems.” (Imbach, 2008, p. 6)

This approach made it possible for the strategies developed to also consider institutional, national and regional dynamics impacting on the specific territories. Through the transboundary commissions, advocacy strategies incorporated not just local but national and binational actions.



Boys in a boat at the San Carlos dock, Nicaragua

Along the way we came to understand that healthy ecosystems are only possible if there are sustainable communities with socio-environmental awareness, capable of achieving a health relation between ecology and equity, and able to define decisions and actions in a coordinated manner with future vision.

Sustainable communities work in a united and aware way for their health and prosperity, caring for the ecosystems with which they relate, equity, and fostering a green economy. (Yeats, 2001)

To invest in sustainable communities it was necessary to target livelihoods by carrying out projects—often pilot experiences—to advance environmentally friendly productive undertakings. We also needed to improve and promote existing initiatives to make them ecologically sustainable.

Livelihoods refers to the way in which people earn a living, and in a broader sense, the way in which they contribute to wellbeing, both spiritual and esthetic, and generate opportunities to choose.

A livelihood encompasses the capacities, resources and activities required for a way of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can withstand shocks and tensions and recover, as well as maintain or improve its capacities and resources, both now and in the future, to the extent that it does not deteriorate the natural resource base. (IUCN, 2008)

This vision rises above the solely anthropocentric in that it includes the intimate relation between people's life and the ecosystems (Alvarado, sf).

3.3. Territories and Local Management

Mexican eco-ethnologist Victor Toledo, at the Ecology Institute of the Autonomous University of Mexico, agrees that sustainability will only be possible hand in hand with the communities that inhabit the territories. Toledo summarizes these approaches in the following premises, which were helpful to synthesize findings from practice and orient management in the territory. The premises were collected in an internal document of the Alliances Project (Toledo, 2007).

PREMISE 1: That management is constructed, not in the abstract, but in actual, particular and objective spaces of the territories; that is, a territorialized political practice is carried out given that this occurs in a specific space with the people who inhabit it.

PREMISE 2. That territorial management is done by social conglomerates (not political parties or governments, nor companies and corporations) through initiatives, projects or movements of multi-social character, meaning by organized nuclei comprised of different social actors or agents (inhabitants or users of a certain territory) and who, while not belonging to the territory, nevertheless are connected with it through flows of information, money, social services, education, and technology.

PREMISE 3. That management is promoted to benefit, maintain, and increase social control by inhabitants or local or territorial users of a certain territory over the natural and social processes that affect them, the only way of ensuring the quality of life and wellbeing of local and regional civil societies.

PREMISE 4: That territorial management is specifically constructed in an inclusive (not exclusive) manner through the orchestration of abilities, knowledge, and roles transcending individual beliefs, ideologies, histories, and occupations, as well as through rational, objective, and respectful discussion, dissolution of differences, and complementarity of visions and viewpoints.

These premises were fundamental guides in the construction of the *Alliances* since in a certain way they synthesize the aspiration of the land management model.

Toledo's first premise became one of the initial lessons of the experience. Each territory had its particular limitations and potentialities. The contexts—the relations between the actors



Planting livelihoods, Sandra Ramirez of Microregion Ahuachupán Sur, El Salvador

and between national and local dynamics—were changing. This made it possible to contend with the complexity of the experiences and their particular rhythms, and revealed the challenge of accompanying with a spirit of flexibility and alertness in order to catalyze the necessary changes.

Also, advances were made in local objectives that had not been possible through the isolated practice of government agencies. Forming local alliances and sitting members down at the same table activated a series of dynamics that would not otherwise have been possible.

The third premise became a linking kingpin of the proposal, wherein empowerment is the path for generating autonomy of action and breaking away from patterns of paternalism and authoritarian chieftainship. In its first stage of execution the Project focused on strengthening the capacities of groups and organizations to share their knowledge and obtain the tools necessary for influencing. Becoming empowered for action was the *leitmotif* of the entire process.

The fourth premise constituted a basic guide for dealing with political differences, diverse interests, and lack of experience in conciliation. Systematic work was vital to lay the foundations for dialogue and transparency in collective dynamics and a culture



UDT members Jose Luis Rodríguez and Adelina López, CBTC, Costa Rica

of respect. Different *alliances* agree that this culture has been crucial for multisectoral platforms to coexist, regardless of differences of opinion or even political allegiance, especially during electoral periods when these factors come into play.

3.4. Social Innovation and Local Alliances

Along the way we learned that it is in open and flexible spaces where innovative formulas can come together to strengthen *local alliances* and their capacity to influence.

To develop new models for territorial management it was necessary to have a very clear horizon and a willingness to learn by doing in a creative dynamic. (IUCN, 2001) Making use of constructivist theory, we fostered learning spaces where, based on their own knowledge and experiences, people could engage in dialogue with other knowledge and projects and

with their own environment to formulate individual and collective syntheses which in turn provided input for the management models.

We verified that social innovation is possible through the promotion of conditions and methodologies that permit the flow of creativity in search of answers to problems not solved through rational thought. Control and rigid structures do not foster social innovation. Some of the approaches and behaviors that do, are:

- The vision of process and its primacy over specific products and projects
- The long-range vision, which transcends an attachment to operating plans and activism
- The inclusion of viewpoints and perspectives
- Opening lightly structured spaces giving local leaders margin for invention and proposal, along with the understanding that errors are part of the learning process

In addition, systematic attention must be paid to knowledge management, systematization, and socialization of practices through networks to advance knowledge, as well as sharing and replication of innovative models.



San Miguelito wetlands, Niaragua

A critical vision of the challenges of sustainable development and the ecosystem approach, in tandem with the principle of social innovation, constituted a fundamental axis of support for land management.

In sum, these approaches were integrated into the reflection-action-reflection process in the three border territories, so it is

important to think of them as theoretical and methodological support to an intense experience for IUCN collaborators and communities, wherein models represent referential frames that interplay with practice. Readers can choose the one that resonates with their own experience and that of the community.



Feliciana Jaen, Women's Network / Bocas Alliance, Panama

4. Principles and Values



Félix de León, AAMVECONA / Bocas Alliance, Panama

Principles and values guide action and relations at the strategic and methodological level in consonance with conceptual approaches. From the start, the Project proposed a series of principles set in motion on the basis of experience and dialogue between action and reflection. They refer to:

- empowerment and social mobilization;
- construction of a common agenda;
- collaborative work and social articulation;
- learning in the alliances;
- and transparency,
- democracy,
- and legitimacy.

4.1. Empowerment and Social Mobilization

The point of departure is the willingness of organizations and groups to participate in constructing an alliance based on recognition and self-recognition of their capacity for action in

the territories. Willingness brings knowledge and local volunteer work, a necessary input for the functioning of any project and which is in turn the foundation for the empowerment and autonomy that generates responsibility and commitment.

Protagonism can be achieved thanks to the amalgam of different capacities and strengths, as well as synergies created between organizations that are strong, and others that are less consolidated. Protagonism is synonymous with leadership; it has to do with positioning our own agendas, with the possibility of influencing decisions that concern us at the local and national level, and with the way communities recognize leadership.

How to move forward in diversifying the social fabric, in self-management and influencing decisions? Empowerment has two movements: inward, strengthening the social fabric, fostering capacities and constructing the intersectoral platform; and outward, to become a political actor in the public sphere through advocacy. This has various implications in the practice of forging alliances:

- For the alliance itself: Carry out actions for strengthening identity, relations, management systems, and capacity of action in alliance.
- Inclusion: Systematically address equity and conscientious integration at all levels of the groups and initiatives of vulnerable sectors.

- Social control of resource users in the territory: Think and do together in relation to management of land and its key ecosystems, based on the conviction that this lies within our grasp. This results in attention to risks, and capacity for learning to swim against the current in threat-filled territories—in essence, to advocacy strategies.
- Visibility: Develop strategies for positioning *the alliance* as referent for environmental management of the territory.

4.2. From Special Interests to a Shared Vision

The model of local governance makes it possible to move from individual approaches to the construction of a holistic vision that integrates environmental, cultural, economic, and social components through an ecosystem approach.

- As the starting point, each group, organization, and institution brings its own agenda. One of the initial exercises is to find out each one's interests, aspirations, and needs.
- Later, attention is focused on the territory where all of these initiatives are being carried out; its environmental, social, cultural, and economic complexity are understood in a new way.
- Further on, actors identify common interests based on dialogue, listening, respect, patience, participation, and horizontal interaction. This broader outlook with environmental management as the kingpin lays the foundations for acceptance and encourages intersectoral work.

The common vision integrates different agendas of the sectors while maintaining flexibility in order to take advantage of opportunities.

Common interests and shared vision arise from the relation between a more global reading and individual outlooks. “The breadth of the common horizon that is constructed makes it possible for different organizations to join,” indicates Ronald McCarthy, coordinator of the Alliances Project. (Interview, April 2012) He adds that the joint vision requires participants to stop thinking small and think as a region: “The joint agenda is not the sum of individual agendas. Individual organizations are able to take on this joint agenda.”

Defense of Territories and Culture

In Bocas del Toro, Panama, the native population of Ngöbe, Naso and Bribri peoples is the majority. Even so, when the Bocas Alliance first arose the organizations did not recognize themselves as such. The Naso were in a particularly fragile situation since their leaders were divided. The integration of Fundación Naso in the Alliance triggered certain processes.

Entry into the consortium allowed the Naso to participate in various forums, raise their banner and publicize the threat posed by a variety of megaprojects. Those voices resonated in the community itself, making it possible to elect the Naso king from a vision of unity.

The consortium began to accompany the agenda of the native peoples in forums and in the national network of those affected by dams and mining, as well as in other spaces. “We participate in marches with all sectors of society. In times of conflict we made resolutions rejecting repression. Pressure from companies is very strong, these are huge interests. It makes for a lot of tension, to be working on a development model and have these types of threats come along,” said Mitzela Dávila, coordinator of the consortium.

Once in the framework of the consortium and binational spheres, organizations of native peoples discovered the need for recognition. Provided opportunity to share experiences and dialogue, Costa Rica's Bribri and Cabecar and Panama's Ngöbe and Naso were able to clarify and reaffirm that the notion of political boundaries was alien to the thinking of their communities and to historical relations of co-existence and trade. They found many threats to life in their territories, especially from hydroelectric and mining megaprojects. “These exchanges helped us reconstruct and value that [shared] history. We began to link the authorities of the different peoples. Being in Alliances has made it possible for us to advance this process of unity, harmony, linkage; to see some alternatives and solutions allowing us to move ahead as peoples,” recounts Felix Sanchez, of Fundación Naso.

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As complement, with its project on extractive and energy industries in Mesoamerica, IUCN helped raise the “*Agenda of Transboundary Peoples for Defense of Culture and Territory*”. In this same process, a new organization of transboundary peoples was established (Unión de Pueblos Originarios Transfronterizos-UPOT), which enabled the twinning of previously isolated communities.

Advocacy could now be better focused: “We have talked with legislative deputies to find out their positions; to support our Naso and Ngöbe brothers, give them ideas, letters, reactions. To support them in influencing their deputies and governments. And the same thing here,” says Marina López, of ACOMUITA, in Talamanca.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- We’ve been able to strengthen autonomy and governance in our people.
- We have reaffirmed that our peoples have very beautiful cultures, richness. “I’ve been able to go to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua. The most important project we’ve been able to launch is how to preserve our cultures,” notes Felix.
- Share experiences and not duplicate efforts. It’s not about competing or taking the limelight.
- The whole process of forming UPOT served to become repositioned in the consortium and in the public arena.
- The common agenda made it possible to move from a reactive attitude to a proactive attitude.

The native peoples are very clear that by defending their territories they are defending their culture and Mother Earth: “May unity be the point in common for advancing what we want to give our sons and daughters. If we don’t unite we’ll disappear. We have been robbed and we will continue to be robbed. If we don’t watch out we’ll lose even our soul. Unity, to defend our Mother Nature,” concludes Felix Sanchez.

4.3. Open Doors, Collaborative Work, and Social Linkage

Toledo’s second premise inspires this principle: the Alliance’s capacity of action and thought is possible thanks to “flows of information, money, social services, education, and technology. Sustainable environmental management is only possible through multi-social, complex, inclusive, and diverse platforms based on territories.” (Cisneros, 2008, page 1)

- The participation of initiatives, projects, or movements of multi-social character is fostered. Diversity makes the alliance more complex, but also enriched in its power of action and influencing decisions.
- Since each organization has its own collaborative dynamics, it is linked in different ways to other networks and forums and promotes collaboration with other entities such as programs and universities.
- For their work in common, alliances put aside beliefs and ideologies, political allegiances and personal histories in order to keep these from affecting respect, placing the good of the communities and ecosystems above private interests.
- Equitable participation must be ensured; in decisions and resources for strengthening and outreach, the weakest organizations are given priority.

4.4. Shared Learning: Being and Doing from the Alliance is a Pathway for Learning

The exercise of knowing one another, recognizing one another, constructing a common vision, acting in the territory, and reflecting on action is a learning process in itself. *The alliance* is possible because there is capacity and prior experience, and a willingness to learn together. Learning is a condition for innovation.

This principle is expressed in practical ways: generously sharing what each knows, and dialogue linking local knowledge and experts’ knowledge. On this path, making a place for systematization, monitoring, and evaluation is crucial.

4.5. Transparency, Democracy and Legitimacy

Different aspects contribute to the legitimacy of the platform in the *Alliances model*. Coherence between discourse and practice nurtures trust within the alliance and the organizations, and outside, in the communities and regions.

Credibility arises from being anchored in the territory, the track record of the leaders of the consortium or local platform, careful attention to organizational processes, fostering of participatory democracy, and, hopefully, consensus in decision making, focused especially on:

- The process for selecting those who represent the organizations
- Setting up open and clear decision-making spaces (assemblies, boards or coordination teams). The representatives make decisions in the name of their organizations, so communication and feedback mechanisms need to be established integrating the groups' needs and visions.
- Systematic socialization of the work's advances and decisions in terms of both actions and resource management
- Ethical management of resources linked with accountability to the communities and the organizations, and no deviation of funds

Debate and collective reflection also become tools for ensuring coherence between the organizations' interests and the common interest. The shared vision is manifested in agreements and plans that require follow-up and adjustment as monitoring and control mechanisms.

Shared Vision is a Powerful Driver

Unión para el Desarrollo de Talamanca (UDT) is a development group located in Talamanca, one of the most biodiverse and culturally rich areas in Costa Rica.

On the indigenous reserves, the ancestral production system is agro-ecological. Cacao is the kingpin, and since it requires shade, is accompanied by timber and fruit trees such as orange, lemon, peach palm, *mamón*, and *sapodilla*, along with pineapple, yams, and ñampí. Caring for cacao farms means caring for cultural tradition and food security, and therefore economic independence. Cacao is the sacred drink," says Walter Rodríguez, of APPTA.

Most of the farms belong to women. Here women bequeath the land to women. "We women are known to be more caring. We work with the little children planting banana and cacao, harvesting. Men and women work together. If the couple breaks up, the man leaves and the woman stays put with her parcel." (ACOMUITA, group interview)

In thinking about development in Talamanca, there is recognition of the opportunity agro-ecological parcels offer. When work began on formulating a common vision, one of the key questions was where to place resources so they would impact on conservation and strengthening of the social fabric, on communities' livelihoods. "Different organizations participated in the visualization of the Talamanca development model," states Rosa Bustillos, of the Talamanca Caribbean Biological Corridor group.

The strategic crosscutting themes in this model are environment and cultural development. The vision of conservation and production focuses on promoting "non-monoculture productive units where there can be a main activity combined with others, where biodiversity is part of production... where improvement in quality of life is tied to conservation." (Meoño, 2008b, p. 41 and 45) The model includes strengthening of agroforestry systems, development of comprehensive projects of agricultural and livestock production with cacao, banana and plantain farms, trails for tours, strengthening of productive chains, and networks of community tourism.

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Clarity about the development model was the engine behind prioritizing, coordinating, publicizing efforts and nurturing a long-term process with strategic vision. Many of the non-reimbursable funds that came from the Alliances Project and resources from other allied institutions have helped foster this strategy of conservation and livelihoods revolving around cacao. “Thanks to UDT it was possible to legitimize and validate this ancestral form of production,” says Walter Rodríguez, of APPTA.

Activities have been executed according to the needs that surfaced while developing a common strategy, including rehabilitation of parcels, planting cacao and fruit trees with different organizations, training and sharing experiences in organic production, preparation of organic chocolate, crafts, promotional materials, and rural community tourism. Support has also been provided for creating microenterprises such as artisanal chocolate-making, investigations and publications about the region, purchase of machinery for productive activities, tourism promotion plans, participation in fairs, and the organization of environmental festivals.

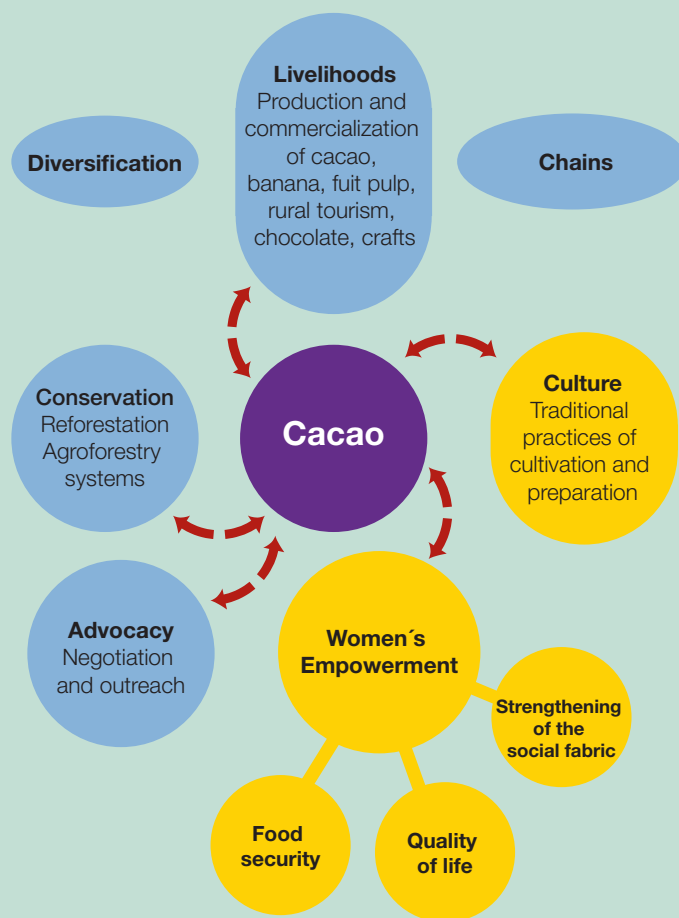
The social fabric has become more tight-knit, as organizations felt identified by and respected for their special characteristics and participants were trained in follow-up on management of the plans.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- Having a common vision allows each organization to tie in based on its particular practice.
- Sustainable production has an environmental component, and social, economic, cultural and gender components. Unlike conventional models, these things are not separate.
- Productive chains and joint work nourish trust, foster processes, and strengthen the organizations.

The following figure illustrates how this common vision has been instilled in the UDT:

Shared Vision in the UDT



For APPTA and ACOMUITA it has been a great achievement. “The members’ parcels improve, more income is generated, and as a result the women’s quality of life keeps improving. We learned to administer funds. We’ve also been an example for other women and other women’s groups. Thanks to the path we’ve taken, that vision of women participating for a common good expands.”

Cultivating a shared vision from the standpoint of the different organizations and finding the threads that hold the fabric together, like cacao, empowers resources and the local alliance.



Meeting of the Gaspar Consortium, in San Carlos, Nicaragua

5. An Intersectoral Platform



Panoramic view of Isla Colon, Bocas del Toro, Panama

In this section we examine organizational elements that can contribute in the process of forming and consolidating a *local alliance*. Essentially, we can say that more than anything else, an alliance is the sum of different specific efforts and desires toward the construction of a common dream or vision.

Making this local governance model viable requires a whole range of agreements, tools, procedures, behaviors, and decisions woven as time passes, and formed into organizational structures and cultures. Alliances were mapped out in different ways in the territories, as expressed in the names they adopted: “union,” “alliance,” and “consortium”.

“The method for making *the alliances* has been reconstructive, dialogic, and recursive. The method reconstructs local organizational development through a dialogue geared to agreements and tasks, which recursively or cyclically harks back to evaluations and lessons from the experiences, based on collectively planned activities executed in a cooperative manner between two or more partners.” (Alvarado, sf, 4) Along this same path of constructing a joint vision and practice, one learns how to make alliances. Learn from the journey, correct errors. Learn by doing.

5.1. A Broad Integration

The integration of actors is different in each context. The most important criteria for selection are an affinity with environmental and social objectives, and a systematic presence in the territory. En route to constructing *the alliance*, new members will join in and some may even leave if unable to fit into the collective dynamic. To the extent possible, *the alliance* should be broad and intersectoral and ensure the presence of community organizations without which it has no meaning.

Efforts are made to encourage the participation of all key stakeholders, as well as diversity, equilibrium and equity, maintaining a balance between the strongest and smallest of partners. In all cases the fundamental idea is to build on what exists. Any intervention in the territory should be based on mapping prior linkage initiatives, examining them critically, and enriching them. The decision to create different structures or strengthen those that exist should be made with the local actors.

The traditional leaderships that concentrate power are challenged. In *the Alliances* new leaderships were introduced according to sectors and themes, which resulted in the emergence of women, youth, environmentalists, and fisher folk, each in their own field leading the process through dialogue, resonating with a theme of the agenda. “For example, in the case of Guatemala: Tono [Antonio Estrada, of the COCODES in La Barrona] is passionate about riversides, management of the Paz River basin, and cattle raising, this last being something he shares with Adrián González, who also works with youth. Don Antonio [Corado, in the village of Los Cerritos] is passionate about reforestation, so each person deals with his or her area,” explains Isabel Morales, coordinator of the Pacífico Sur Oriente alliance. (Interview, June 2012)

Regardless of their particular form of participation, the integration of representatives from the municipalities and other government agencies is essential to move advocacy processes forward and prepare regulatory instruments. This is not an easy relation to negotiate as it is affected by political, personal, and even economic factors. In some consortia municipalities are integrated in the coordinating committee and assembly, with voice and vote, and in others they have been allies, with their role centered on advising and collaboration.

“The consortium has enabled us to move closer to the population, to say, ‘we’re here to collaborate.’ In the consortium

I learned to be another fighter for the environment. From a Government position we began to drive actions. I changed, the government changed, the entities I manage, the mayor, the municipal council. The consortium gives us approaches and tools that we transfer to the Government, and we share it in policies,” declares Francisco Rodriguez, chief of the Social Outreach Department of the Municipality of San Francisco Meléndez, El Salvador. (Interview, July 2012)

“Union is key for developing and optimizing resources. Sometimes the mayors’ offices are involved in a theme and civil society is involved in the same one, each on their own. There’s a need for a vision of optimizing resources, sitting down with each other, sharing ideas,” states Carlos Armando Cabrera, Mayor of San Pedro Puxla, El Salvador. (Interview, July 2012)

Understanding institutionality as something heterogeneous, recognizing the different interests, the specific agendas, and establishing particular agreements makes it possible to move processes forward. Otherwise, establishing a confrontational relation with state and municipal institutions narrows the field of action and local influence.

In all of the cases, people come first. Respectful, proactive and creative people, whether in grassroots collectives or government, make a vital difference in the process and outcomes. As explained by Juan Carlos Barrantes, of Unión para el Desarrollo de Talamanca (UDT), “[it] depends on people, because at the institutional level there can be a person really committed to the process and then someone else comes along and doesn’t pick up the ball, and that’s the end of that. It depends more on people than organizations. That people be clear and committed. People connected to a process they can relate to in a way that goes beyond a salary. Being in something that they like to do, that’s the important part.”

The alliance is horizontal in that it integrates actors from the community and municipality, but is also vertical since it is linked with national institutions, both governmental and civil society, having local offices. The more participation there is of representatives from organizations with presence in the capital, the greater the capacity for advocacy and linkage in decisions that transcend the specific territory, but also affect it.

Strength from Diversity: Gaspar Consortium

The nine-year-old Gaspar Consortium has twenty-three, highly diverse members. The organizational model they designed has energized the environmental agenda of the San Carlos, San Miguelito, El Castillo, and San Juan municipalities in Nicaragua.

Participating as full partners are a fishermen's association, Unión de Pescadores del Río San Juan; an artisan cooperative, Cooperativa de Artesanos de Solentiname; environmental organizations such as Fundeverde and Fundación del Río; nongovernmental organizations working on women's agendas, such as Fundación de Mujeres de San Miguelito; the youth councils of two municipalities; the tourism chambers, a university, and mayor's offices.

In the first circle of action are the community organizations and mayors' offices. At the second level are allies and State institutions addressing different agendas, in some cases with environmental themes. All are united by the vision and objectives.

Leadership is highly prized. "It is more important than the economy; it keeps the machine alive, a coordination group with desire, spirit and resolve, to tell us what's going on." The board works with an overall vision, but alongside are groups and institutions that take responsibility for promoting certain themes or campaigns. These dynamics broaden capacity for action, leading coordinator Renato Badilla to compare the consortium to an octopus: "The ones who move as consortium are the facilitator and the board, who make decisions and follow up, but each tentacle does its own thing."

Since different organizations specialize in different areas, there are possibilities for driving parallel agendas. For example, FUNDAR, FUNSAMI and the town halls follow up on the formation of women's recycling groups; MARENA together with the environmental organizations deals with reforestation and care of protected areas; UNAG promotes sustainable production systems on farms and the Chamber of Tourism sustainable tourism agendas, and so on successively. In each action it is important to ask who can influence best. The octopus never stops moving. But each organization also collaborates with the rest, because there is a basic principle: reciprocity. "For an environmental activity where the municipality has a budget, they administer it, we come in as local entity, and young people join in as well. The municipality does the report and accountability



Leonel Ubau, Coordinator of the Gaspar Consortium, Nicaragua

to the consortium, but we all participate," explains FUNSAMI's María Argueta.

Recommendations:

- Make important decisions in the board to avoid affecting consortium unity. Even when there are people pushing parallel agendas, like the tourism network or women's network, it is advantageous for policy and management decisions to be made with consideration by the board.
- The role of facilitation is vital, and it is important for it to be a team that encourages virtual and face-to-face communication.
- Make and respect bylaws so that the rules of the game are clear.
- Coordinate based on the combined sum of wills, not impositions.
- Motivate its members.
- Avoid partiality.

The capacity to reach agreement and execute in a decentralized manner is what empowers the local governance model of the Gaspar Consortium.



Panoramic view entering San Carlos de Nicaragua by boat

5.2. Suitable and Adaptable Structures

Observing how work in the **local alliances** was structured, we see it has generally been made up of assemblies, boards, or coordinating committees; one or several people or organizations with the role of facilitating and motivating; an administrating organization; and commissions or networks that operationalize strategies or lines of action, along with partners and allies. (Blanco, 2009)

The political and operating structure should help define participation based on criteria of trust. Looking more closely, we realize there are different organizational and personal arrangements that have made it possible to energize local governance depending on their history, needs, and particularities. In the *Alliances model*, such arrangements have included the following:

- In areas where the social fabric is highly tenuous with practically no established presence of nongovernmental organizations, a core driver was activated made up of key people with leadership in processes and local organizations, who were responsible for galvanizing linkage with the support of various grassroots groups and public institutions.

- In other cases, an NGO with leadership in the territory assumes a linking role, providing technical accompaniment for the multisectoral platform.
- In territories with different groupings and consolidated NGOs and the active participation of the municipality, greater horizontality and democracy have been achieved.

These organizational arrangements demonstrate the need to find useful formulas for each situation, in order to nurture local synergies that become consolidated as the social fabric is strengthened.

There are also different types of agreements for “dividing up the work” in the frame of *local Alliances*. For example, in Los Humedales (Costa Rica), the mechanism has been to prioritize areas and organizations interested in working in the fields of production, aqueducts, and reforestation. (Blanco, 2009) According to the Final Evaluation (Blanco and others, 2011), there is also a tendency for community-based organizations to focus on livelihoods agendas, while conservation NGOs aim more towards advocacy.

Bocas Alliance: Ownerless, Open and Democratic

The province of Bocas del Toro is located at the northwest edge of Panama, on the border with Costa Rica. As an archipelago just off the coast, the zone attracts tourism and real estate development. On the continent, the indigenous population is the majority, formed of the Ngobe, Naso and Teribe. The Bocas Alliance arose in this territory in 2004.

The story began earlier, at the end of the 1990s and beginning of 2000 with the management plan for Bastimentos Island and the creation of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of the Archipelago of Bocas del Toro (ADESBO). Both experiences were based on linking different stakeholders and fed formation of the Alliance. When the process began they were studying coalition theory, which says that a coalition must be ownerless, open, and democratic. That was the base, the point of departure for the Alliance. Other organizations were invited to join the alliance with ADESBO. Onshore areas were less articulated than the island, posing challenges for its strengthening.

The pathway of the Boca Alliance demonstrates a great deal of learning and two clearly differentiated stages. In the first, organizations were convoked to form a consortium and together design a plan for environmental management of the province. These were more global projects, with more resources. Each organization sent in its needs and based on that information an agenda was prepared and resources distributed. Even when there were work commissions, no integration of the organizations' dynamics was achieved.

Of the forty organizations that banded together, some saw the Alliance as a source of financing and sought to position their own agenda in order to obtain more resources regardless of how this might affect their to allies' agendas.

IUCN's proposal for the second stage was different. Instead of financing a consortium plan, there would be a small operations fund and competitive funding for projects under the condition that projects be presented in concert way by at least three partners.

A pause was made to take stock at an assembly in early 2010 with a change in dynamics aimed at strategies and processes. "We realized that if we addressed the issue of water, water was in all of the communities and we'll all benefit, and likewise

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Mitzela Dávila, Bocas Alliance, Panama

5.3. Horizontal and Candid Relations of Solidarity

Establishing of relations of trust and mutual knowledge begins to foster collaboration and sharing capacities. In terms of synergy, broader proposals and new undertakings and proposals can be made and greater responsibilities assumed thanks to complementary capacities.

It is essential to cultivate solidarity, horizontality, respect for differences, and timely attention to conflicts in an open and transparent manner, leaving the political bandwagon and religious affiliations to one side. Ties are strengthened by carrying out exercises to visualize shared identity, and systematically reframing that vision helps strengthen ties.

There are unmistakable risks to be avoided. For example, NGOs or public institutions without a clear presence in the territory can impose agendas that may not fit local needs. Other risks are posed by previously established patterns of cronyism, or that different levels of maturity in the participating groups and organizations will lead to inequality in participation and benefit sharing. Dealing with all this requires a clear strategy aimed at fostering open and democratic participation and positive leaderships.

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with solid waste, crafts and other themes. We realized that we are all benefited and can make better use of resources when we stake on a common vision. That was when the birth of the decision was made to create networks,” says Mitzela Dávila, coordinator of the Alliance.

The themes taken from the agenda were those that resonated most within the community organizations: community tourism, native peoples, women, and youth. Integrating the networks allowed all of the organizations to see the alliance as a means of working together, not just a proposal. The projects were focused on networking and impacted more on the organizations. Each network expanded, incorporated other groups not in the consortium, and generated more participation. Organizations that were only there for the money left or disintegrated. Women in the indigenous communities joined the women’s network.

The networks are relatively autonomous and “have the organizational and political backing of the consortium.” (Acuña, 2011a, p. 8) Through the network it is possible to

obtain financing, generate administrative capacities, share experiences, and conduct appraisals.

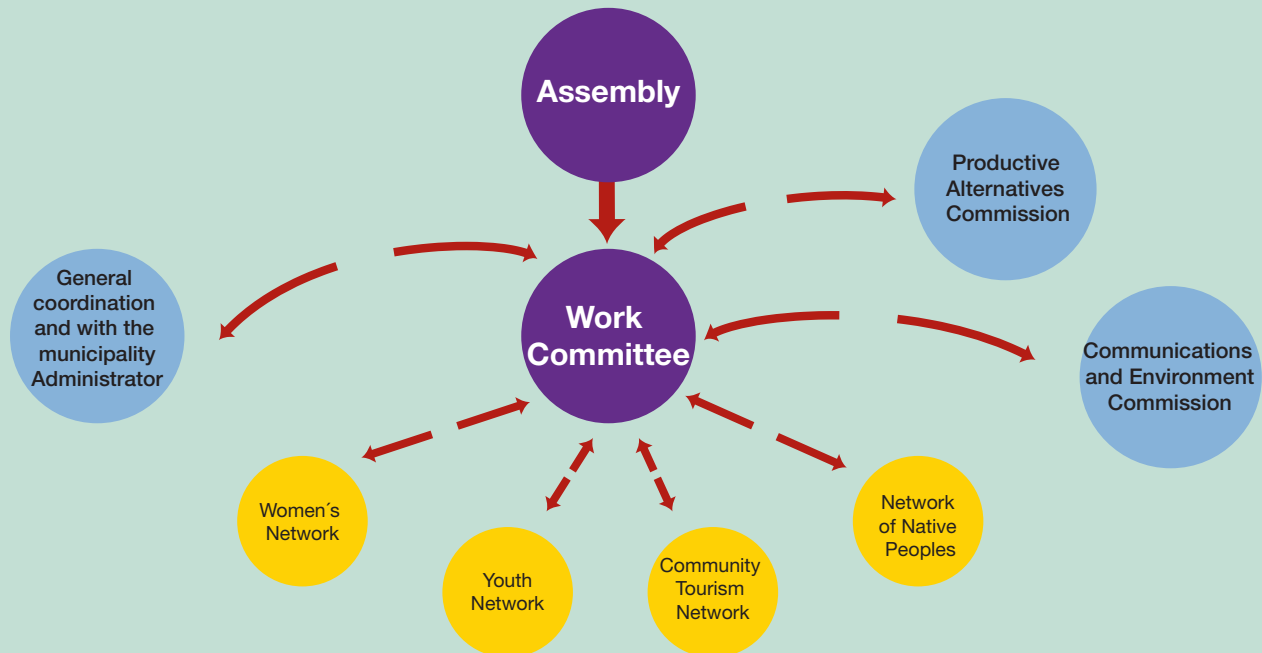
At the political level, with the establishment of the networks a big difference could be felt in the assemblies, conflicts declined, and members of the working committee were elected unanimously.

Recommendations:

- Watch out for paternalism and cronyism.
- The attraction for participating in the platform should be the common vision, not special interests.
- Define consensuated cross-cutting themes.
- Elect women and men leaders in an open and democratic fashion, not hand-picked.

Today the Bocas Alliance is the only organization that brings together more than 20 organizations working on conservation in the province, and is recognized as such by all. It is the driver for keeping Bocas green.

The Bocas Alliance’s organizational chart is shown below as an example:





Community of Cara Sucia, San Francisco de Méndez, El Salvador

5.4. Efficient and Transparent Administration

Administration is very delicate; done well it can contribute to legitimacy, but if deficient can foster mistrust. Some recommendations in this sense are to:

- Establish mechanisms of control and accompaniment
- Train in budgeting tools, accounting, and management
- Decentralize resources to the lowest possible level. In this case, often the administering organization, which is the one with the most experience in this area, should accompany and tutor local groups that are administering funds.
- The consortium should do efficient and transparent reporting to the organizations themselves and if possible to communities

“Rigid formality like the type established in regulations and plans is needed as a point of departure, but it’s necessary to keep the balance required for processes to energize,” says Ronald McCarthy. (Interview, April 2012)

It is also very important to convoke participation toward achieving a common dream, not to solve specific economic needs, and “not give the idea we’ve come to pass out money. It’s about joining forces and bolstering each other’s work in order to do things better. There’s an economic contribution, but the Project doesn’t put up everything,” explains Mitzela Dávila, coordinator of the Bocas Alliance. (Interview, April 2012)



Rosa Emilia Cruz, making crafts from solid residues, UDT, Costa Rica

5.5. Guided Planning and Flexible Execution

The application of planning, monitoring and evaluation should be flexible since many factors are beyond control. “It’s a challenge dealing with all the different institutional and community rhythms. The only constant is the territory.” (Blanco, op cit, p 65) In the dynamic of influencing decisions, more than a plan written in stone, what is needed is a very clear horizon, a willingness to move with the context, opportunities, and threats so as to be able to generate advances as you go along. On the way, Time after time, rigid plans required modifications along the way due to one setback or another, from changes in mayors to tropical storms. Lack of understanding about the breadth of the agendas often meant that annual operating plans could not be executed exactly as written. “This was something we learned as we went along,” says Olman Varela, of the IUCN-Alliances team. (Interview, May 2012) As a result, it’s a good idea for plans to include a risk assessment. They should also define the role each organization plays.

The Power of Youth

Emmanuel Sandoval

The municipality of San Miguelito de San Carlos in Nicaragua has a young population: 60% of its inhabitants are 16 to 30 years old.

In 2006 we decided to join together with a vision: meeting the needs and demands of youth. Our affiliations ranged from environmentalism, to the church, to political parties, but we united as young people. Law 392 had already been passed, mandating that municipalities set up the Office for Attention to Youth and the Municipal Youth Council, but in San Miguelito there was none of this.

In 2007 we formed the Youth Council with eleven organizations, a number that grew rapidly. The Gaspar Consortium supported our initiative from the start, through Fundación Del Río, and then in 2008 accepted us as full-fledged members.

The first task was to prepare the youth agenda, a document with our plan for youth for submission to the municipal authorities. It was based on an appraisal that generated seven core areas of work: labor insertion, education, environment, culture, sports, and the social component, each a frame for lines of action.

Since municipal elections were taking place in 2008, we brought our youth agenda and the plan explaining how we wanted the 4% of the legally mandated budget to be invested. It was a solid proposal. A public event was held and the mayoral candidates for the different political parties signed an act in which they pledged to:

- Set up the municipal office for youth
- For the coordinating position, hire the person elected at a broad assembly of youth
- Institutionalize the Municipal Youth Council
- Allocate a budget

In her first month after taking office (in 2009), mayor-elect Ana Clemencia Ávalos convoked the Youth Council. We asked her to let us choose the person who would coordinate the Office, and she agreed. There were sixteen candidates, and I won. She respected the Council’s decision, hired me, opened the office, and assigned a budget.

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That support has allowed us to develop various youth movements: Guardabarranco, which deals with the environment, reforestation, environmental education and more; Alexis Arguello, for sports; Promotoría Solidaria for social work and housing construction; Herederos de la Paz, which does schools and health centers. We have the network of social communicators and the Leonel Rugama Cultural Movement, culture promoters who teach dancing, singing, poetry, and sociodrama.

All of the work is volunteer. There are around 9000 of us in the municipality. At the beginning there were just 400-500. We have a youth board, coordination; in all of our work we promote women's rights; the ratio of women's participation is 50/50.

We carry out a consultation on the municipal budget each year. We go to the communities to consult the entire population through an assembly to find out what projects they think should be invested in. Now the directors of the Municipal Youth Council are working in the mayor's office. We took over the municipality and half the people working in the mayor's office are young leaders.

We have already executed 90% of the plan in five years. The consortium itself provided funding for us to construct the 2013-2016 plan.

Recommendations:

- Promote generational change-over, help set up the youth platform, start preparing them; training and raising the awareness of youth generates an enormous force for moving forward
- Have clarity that we are defending our rights as people
- Construct the youth agenda in a participatory manner



Enmanuel Sandoval, Municipal Youth Council, San Miguelito, Nicaragua

- Learning how to influence, do projects and negotiate, all of this gives us autonomy, it gives us wings
- Participating in the consortium as a broader space made for a more level road in the construction of the youth agenda

Youth empowerment is key to social transformation: with their energy and creative spirit, young people are capable of innovating and generating movements that would not be possible otherwise.



Sandra Ramírez, Ahuachapán Sur Microregion, El Salvador

5.6. Inclusive Strategies

Inclusion cuts across both structure and the different work strategies, and it is vital to foster full participation of community groups and their protagonism.

Often organizational cultures reproduce established patterns of excluding the weakest sectors, controlling leaderships, and vertical structures. Because of their cultural vision, empowerment of indigenous peoples, communities, and native peoples is vital to the defense and sustainable use of natural diversity and resources. Special care is required to attend initiatives of indigenous women and youth. (Blanco and others, 2011)

In addition, breaking patterns of exclusion due to gender requires gender awareness and training in the different entities, and not only with women.

“When Alliances arose it was born from a conservation vision, but when the consortia saw the need to be more inclusive, the perspective on action and approaches to work opened up. In short, young people worked on their agenda, women, productivity, there was the need to open up a perspective beyond conservation *per se*. And not just the themes, but approaches based on a more horizontal conception, and this

The Office for Women, a Replicable Model

When the municipality of San Francisco Menéndez came into the consortium we already had the Women’s Secretariat. This office was set up with the technical team of the mayor’s office, the support of the mayor, his wife and the councilwomen. With the budget that was also approved, a center for training and medical consultation was established for the communities. To galvanize the work, women leaders were designated in the communities to serve as referents.

The steps:

- A proposal for a strategic plan was formulated based on an appraisal.
- The proposal was presented to the Council and approved.
- Pressure was applied to get a budget established.
- Support was sought from the Gender Unit of the Ministry of Environment.
- The model was put into action.

When we entered the consortium we brought the accumulated experience of two years of work. With the decisive support of the Ahuachapán Sur Microregion, we thought about replicating the process in the four municipalities making up the consortium.

A women’s forum was carried out in each municipality, where awareness-raising was begun so they would get involved in the process. Then we had meetings where the women’s panel was formed in each municipality. Afterwards, we created the micro regional panel where each municipality would be represented by three women. We also set up women’s institutions, the Salvadoran Institute for Women’s Development, Spanish cooperation, FAO. We also trained in the municipalities.

In 2011 we organized community and regional meetings and established the plan and the agenda with the women, which was incorporated in the consortium agenda. People told us we were dreaming for too much. Women were integrated in the board of the consortium.

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Advocacy done at the national level brought results: a reform was approved in the Municipal Code mandating that every municipality have a women's unit. Currently there are four women's associations, one per municipality, with a total of 6000 women. We succeeded in getting them to create the offices for women in the four mayor's offices.

But the story doesn't end there. In Guatemala's Pacífico Sur Oriente Consortium they wanted to make a space in the municipality for women. The consortium approved holding an exchange with Francisco Menéndez in El Salvador.

Five women leaders selected in each community met with representatives of the Office for Women in El Salvador. They shared their experience, learned from the process and about mechanisms to construct policy on women. Based on this exchange an ordinance was prepared promoting creation of the first Office for Women in Guatemala. Months later, that experience was replicated in all of the municipalities at the national level in Guatemala.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- The Women's Secretariat should go further. Look at violence, mistreatment, women's rights, single mothers, human trafficking, sex education, the whole range of problems. There needs to be an appraisal, a strategy.
- Selection of the person that coordinates the office should be done in accordance with a technical and human profile of determination, responsibility, and sensitivity. When the election is based on political criteria, for example, the wife of the mayor or the councilwomen, it tends to influence the administration. These people can be a support, but not the ones responsible.
- A budget should be established for the operation of the Women's Unit.
- Attention to women's issues should not have a political tinge.
- For women the theme of livelihoods is crucial. Trainings have to address this need.

The theme of gender began to be addressed in the municipal arena. Through this initiative, a space was opened for women throughout the country.

helped energize the networks," comments Ronald McCarthy. (Interview, April 2012)

In the 2009 systematization and evaluation we conducted an analysis to identify who was being excluded from decision making in a more structural way. This helped to design mechanisms so that these groups could become incorporated. One of these mechanisms was networking, proposed by the Bocas consortium. The sectoral and thematic networks have proven to be an effective tool for including the agendas and perspectives of vulnerable sectors in the exercise of the alliance. The networks are horizontal and open ways of linking part of the local consortium around interests. Also, the people who coordinate the networks become a part of coordination or the board of directors.

Capacity building for these populations through training and sharing experiences fosters equitable participation of youth, women, and the indigenous in trainings, structures, and decisions, also contributing to authentic democracy.

The selection of projects focused on livelihoods encourages ownership of the project by grassroots groups, and even the inclusion of more organizations.

Another inclusive operational mechanism for bringing the consortium closer to community groups is the figure of motivators or facilitators in municipalities, who intermediate with the *alliance* coordinator group

The creation and approval of municipal ordinances contributing to the establishment of municipal offices with specific populations such as women and young people made it possible to scale up the work and attend the agendas drawn up by these sectors. It was also a very effective mechanism for incorporating groups in the consortium.



San Miguel wetland, Nicaragua

6. Construction of a Common Vision and Work Agendas



Members of the Pacífico Sur Oriente Consortium, Guatemala

Looking back we can see the elements that helped generate a common vision from the diversity of organizations that came together, each with its own agenda. There are some basic recommendations that arise from the actions, and the main components of the common vision and work agendas:

- Focalized territories: Jointly mark out the territory where governance is to be generated with all participating actors. Focalize on territorial units that are manageable in terms of mobilization and access.
- Existing initiatives and processes: take initiatives and processes already underway as the starting point and strengthen them, incorporating their protagonists in the construction of *the alliance*. This was evident in interviews with local leaders, who see this process in the frame of an even greater path dating further back in the history of their communities and regions. “I’m an agricultural engineer and since ’85 I’ve been working on themes connected with the productive sector and natural resource use. In the ‘90s we had already been in a SIAPAZ project that integrated Fundación del Río, Fundación Verde, FUNSAM and others.... and then in a binational PROCUENCA project that left an entire mapping, a lot of information. What the Gaspar Consortium does is use the platform and the

Alliances Project in order to strengthen agendas we’ve been working on: ecosystem management, degradation problems, poor use of soils with chemicals, aggressive agriculture, contamination of water sources, unequal human development...” explains Leonel Ubau, coordinator of the Gaspar Consortium, Nicaragua. (Interview, May 2012)

- Strategic vision of the territory: Open up people’s perspective about their territory through appraisals, landscape and stakeholder mapping, livelihoods, ecosystems, conflicts, and different opportunities and needs
- Linkage of spheres of interest: Tie work to spheres of interest according to sectoral agendas (women, indigenous, youth) or theme (community tourism, fishing, agro-ecology). Other themes of interest to several members are placed on the agenda, thanks to the solidarity and robustness of the whole. (Gabriela Calderón, personal notes)
- Cultural approach: In this effort, it is necessary to include the cultural perspective of the indigenous communities and their holistic vision of the land and that everything is connected. Taking into account themes of collective interest due to their importance in the territory, such as land ordering, waste management and reduction of vulnerability, helps focus action.

The project found itself with organizations whose history was clearly geared toward conservation, and the challenge was how to incorporate other groups which did not have this theme as their foundation. This required deepening the analysis and observing that the problems they were working on went beyond the limits of their action: the ecosystem approach helped measure causes. “For example,” explains Ronald McCarthy, “the about-face of eminently production-oriented organizations that switched to doing production with a sustainable approach. The same thing happened with the indigenous rights defense organizations that saw the benefits of being in a platform that revolves around environmental management but touches on multiple approaches in a comprehensive way that aims at livelihoods and environment. This opened up the agenda again.”

An Example: Agenda of the Bocas Alliance	
Crosscutting Themes	Land Ordering
	Waste Management
Specific Agendas	Community Tourism
	Gender Inclusion
	Productive Groups
	Native Peoples: water and advocacy on behalf of the territory
	Strengthening of the organizations and the Alliance

Along the way **the alliances** try to put into practice a capacity for juggling between agendas, situational changes, and opportunities and threats that arise in the setting. Sometimes conditions foster the development of one theme or another. Developing this capacity for juggling and transformation of the situation is an antidote to the frustration produced by difficulties in the influencing process and actions. When there are conflictive policies, such as the promotion of pineapple or mining or the dry canal in Guatemala, having a flexible agenda makes it possible to gauge forces and figure out how to approach the themes in different sets of circumstances. In fact, sometimes doing nothing at all is a strategy for advancing agendas. Flowing like water.

The Call of Paz River

Located at the mouth of Paz River are the municipalities of San Francisco Menéndez, in El Salvador, and Moyuta y Chiquimulilla, in Guatemala. Both share the river as border, connecting vessel, source of life, and headache.

Every year during the rainy season the river overflows its banks. Each storm wipes out the roads and communities are cut off. “A drop of water falling in the northern zone of Guatemala or El Salvador ends up here; this has a huge impact on the population. Degradation, lack of trees, soil use, contamination, fishing with grenades, it’s all part of the problem that ends up impacting on us,” says Francisco Rodriguez, at the Municipality of San Francisco Menéndez.

For this reason, the basic focus of work in the Barra Santiago-El Imposible Consortium, in El Salvador, is water, risk management, and climate change, a complex issue that requires work at many levels. Clearly, the problems of the Paz River will be better attended when a basin authority is established to address the situation in an overall way. But local work cannot be put off: generating a new culture of adaptation to the conditions in which people live. Equally, linkage and political advocacy, education, awareness-raising and the development of projects that foster communities’ sustainability are key actions.

One advantage in El Salvador is that the municipalities are an active part of the consortium and value its input. “Organized civil society has the right to decide about its development, express opinion, interact with mayors’ offices,” states Carlos Cabrera, mayor of San Pedro Puxla and president of the association of municipalities of the Ahuachapán Sur microregion. This factor has contributed to the development of a strong influencing strategy around establishing policies that improve administration of the Paz river basin.

Formation of the Transboundary Commission made it possible to expand perspective and management. In September 2009, the consortium had in place an appraisal, the Paz River Charter, the Code of Conduct for Management of Shared Waters, and an environmental management plan for the entire watershed, elements that configure a binational agenda for the transboundary commission made up of two

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consortia (Acuña, 2011). It was also armed for advocacy thanks to workshops reinforcing training: meetings with legislative deputies, forums, and active participation in the construction of the Paz River Management Plan, an initiative of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development. This last failed to be approved due to the lack of political will stemming from government concerns about national sovereignty. Paz River is a water resource whose limits are constantly changing, which generates tensions between the countries. As a result, the plan could not be implemented, and the consortia's aims for work in this area were frustrated.

While there is still a long way to go in this sense, the theme has been positioned on the national agenda. Most importantly, an important synergy has been forged among the peoples and mayors on both sides of the river, thanks to local Alliances.

Various initiatives are joining in, aiming for a new culture of protection for nature and support for food security: halt deforestation on riversides and in mangroves, use of eco-stoves to reduce fuel wood consumption, promotion of sylvipastoral systems and a nursery run by an association of municipalities providing trees to reforest watersheds, promotion of organic farming, and others.

In addition, staff at the four municipalities of the Ahuachapán Sur microregion were trained in planning methodologies for adaptation to climate change. These were applied in a community through the implementation of an adaptation demonstration model and the installation of fuel-efficient wood-burning stoves and energy forestry. Management of climate change was also integrated as key theme in the strategic plan of the Ahuachapán Sur Microregion.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- Intersectoral collaboration is a vital factor in addressing risk management and climate change.
- The consortium enabled this horizontal dialogue among communities and authorities: it serves as mediator. Ensure representativeness and communication with communities.
- The role of authorities, particularly national, can play a collaborative or obstructing role in processes. This is a critical factor due to changes in local and legislative governments, and therefore demands constant dialogue. To



Francisco Rodríguez, mayor's office of San Francisco Menéndez, Barra Santiago-El Imposible Consortium, El Salvador

illustrate, the initial achievement of formulating the Paz River Management Plan was thwarted after the elections.

- The most important decisions in a binational watershed are beyond the control of local actors, and intensive advocacy work is required in other arenas (national and international). Nevertheless, local-level participation is vital and must be fostered.

Editor's note: *Something has changed in this region since the birth of the transboundary alliances. There is a moment during this interview that will be engraved forever in my memory: seated at the table are don Narciso, mayor of San Francisco Menéndez, El Salvador, and Tono, responsible for the COCODE in the village of La Barrona, Guatemala, talking about challenges in dealing with the situation of the river and combining their energies to change things, energies now being transformed through collaboration. The Paz River, which always generates so many problems, is now contributing to their union. Tono confirms this, saying, "If it weren't for the existence of the local alliances, this dialogue would not have been possible."*



Talamanca, Costa Rica

7. The How: Tools, Strategies, and Procedures



Almirante-Bocas del Toro district, Panama

Seeing experience in perspective makes it possible to conclude that empowerment is a complex process that involves recognizing oneself as actor, strengthening capacities, planning action, doing work in the territory, dialoguing with authorities and influencing policies, and reflecting on political circumstances and environmental, cultural and economic challenges. On one hand it has to do with strengthening the groups' and organizations' capacities to act and interact with their surroundings, and on the other, with addressing the needs arising from linkage.

We observed that there are programmatic strategies related with the direction of the local alliances for governance:

- strengthen the social fabric,
- action in the area of livelihoods and conservation,
- and influencing public policies.

There are also crosscutting strategies without which the **governance model** would not be possible: communication, sustainability, and knowledge management.



Bernardo Chilín, La Barrona community, Pacífico Sur Oriente Consortium, Guatemala

7.1. Strategies for Strengthening the Social Fabric

Participation in the platform, putting oneself with one's peers and recognizing oneself as such generates a catalyzing process that has to do with self-esteem and capacity building: "by telling my story I learn from myself." It is necessary to foster this process of learning from and about oneself on the part of actors in the territory, since the system we have is so disintegrating that people are there and don't know one another.

Combining reflection and a reading of the circumstances and context with action is key for empowerment. Planning exercises make it possible to discern, address, and prioritize the different needs collectively, then bring them into practice and go back and evaluate. This process of action-reflection-action turns into an ownership of the territory, making the social fabric stronger and denser.

All of the areas of alliance activities (advocacy, productive and conservation projects; project administration, formulation, and management; species monitoring; communication; systematization; planning-monitoring-evaluation; and others) often require training or sharing of experiences so that organizations can make use of the tools, abilities, and knowledge necessary.

Guatemala: Union Born of Tempests

The Guatemala Consortium has gone through great changes triggered by both setting and internal conditions. "Originally it was formed of environmental organizations that are mostly IUCN members, including the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the University of San Carlos. They do a lot of work in the region, but they're headquartered in Guatemala City." (Acuña, 2011e, p. 11) There were excellent initiatives in turtle conservation, reforestation, and productive chaining, among others, but local and community participation was weak.

After the evaluation of the program's first stage, it was concluded that responsibility needed to be handed over to community organizations, with no sponsorship from nongovernmental organizations. These groups decided to take on the task, and with this, stage two began in 2010. The consortium was working on a restructuring process, forming a board of directors and defining roles and functions.

In late May of 2010, tropical storm Agatha left 172 deaths in its wake. That same year, four more disasters followed as the hurricane season entered in full, wreaking considerable damage to crops, barnyard fowl, cows, and goats. Communities were cut off and without electricity, cell phones were dead, many were homeless, bridges were down.

The turtle nursery in La Barrona disappeared completely, triggering the response capacity of the consortium. All the way from the coasts to the hilltops, communities began to report in about their needs. The first priority was to get stranded people out. Twenty youths stepped up from CHIQUIJOVEN, one of the consortium groups, along with many more people who joined in. "With the lists we had, food and supplies were sent over. As consortium, we placed radio announcements. A fellow consortium member that works in national media had been able to call for help of specific types. Local radio stations played a fundamental role, and the other media also, with the network of community correspondents," said Isabel Morales, coordinator of the **alliance**.

With the information, the consortium put together a more formal document it called "The Post Agatha Report," laying out needs, which was shared with institutions as a mechanism for requesting emergency support. The figure of the consortium began to become known among

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the communities and institutions. “We went to the capital to negotiate with the ministries. They sent us back to the departmental units with references and letters, and also phoned from the capital. We came recommended. The process was made easier. For us it was ironic, but perfect, that it took natural disasters to shake us up as an organization, along with the change in government and in the Alliances program. It was a storm on all sides,” asserts Isabel Morales, consortium coordinator. Storms brought about the consortium’s empowerment of its territory.

Arrangements were made for each critical situation. For the consortium’s work, the turtle nursery was reconstructed, technical assistance was obtained for sick livestock, synergy was forged with the project *Un techo para mi país* (providing housing), and more. The consortium coordination body was legitimized as an efficient mediator between communities and institutions. “Now they come looking for us,” states Adrián González, consortium youth member.

Since then the organization and work roles have taken hold: the nongovernmental organizations provide advising and the government institutions collaborate in legal matters and facilitate resources.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- Make use of the capacities of every individual in the consortium.
- Bottom up (from the local to the national and regional) is the most effective way of making a consortium.
- Strengthen local leadership and its representation before the media.
- Make frequent visits to the media and keep an inventory of local media, and national as well if possible.
- “Little by little I realized that it was a question of sketching a line here, a line there, and the picture is gradually filled in with color. Nowadays all of the communities carry out at least one conservation action,” explains Isabel Morales.
- We learned that during disasters, we all serve as correspondents, as reporters and sources.

The great lesson for the consortium Sur Oriente de Guatemala: tackling difficult situations in a proactive way and fostering each one’s skills and strengths is part of the path to a new environmental governance.



Regional meeting of young peoples involved in the IUCN-Alliances Project, Solentiname, Nicaragua

Ownership of new knowledge and tools leads to autonomy, self-management capacity, awareness, influencing capacity, greater leadership, sustainability of the initiatives, ownership of the experiences, and better environmental governance, and in turn helps organizations take an active part in decision making, in reflections, and in joint action.

Exchange of experiences has been shown essential to foster lessons among peers that could be easily replicated in the other local alliances. Visits to other experiences and horizontal collaboration are crucial to empowerment.

Asymmetries in the needs of groups and organizations and the frequent integration of new actors make designing and carrying out a strengthening plan difficult. Making an inventory of needs and defining priorities can help clarify the route to take. The search for alliances with government offices, universities, and institutes is a key strategy for expanding training possibilities.

Such formation can often have a multiplier effect in the territory, as indicated in this case of the women of ACOMUJITA in the indigenous territory of Talamanca: “We have learned a lot. And now we had an experience of giving workshops to other women’s groups of Gavilán Canta that aren’t in UDT. Now they too are strengthened with their project that we helped them prepare.”



Luz María Villalobos, El Valle Women's Association, Los Humedales Alliance, Costa Rica

7.2. Strategies for Acting in the Territory, Conservation, and Livelihoods

Developing conservation and livelihoods projects makes it possible to integrate vulnerable populations, exercise models of the solidarity economy, and demonstrate short and medium term achievements closer to people's everyday life. These projects are often part of the agendas of women and the indigenous, but young people have incorporated them in their proposals even though youth groups are focusing on advocacy.

Projects for care and monitoring of species, planting trees, closing garbage dumps, recycling, attention to a protected area, or environmental education have resonance in the communities, help increase environmental awareness, link the local agenda, and generate demonstration models. "Working with sea turtles and associated ecosystems has been very useful for mobilizing the population and creating awareness about the importance of conserving natural resources for the wellbeing of human beings." (Blanco and others, 2011, p 20) There is enormous wealth

Pepper as the Push: Out of the Shell and Flying

There are small livelihood and conservation initiatives that make all the difference in the existence of communities and in the situation of their women. Los Humedales Alliance works in the cantons of Los Chiles, Guatuso, and Upala, on Costa Rica's northern border with Nicaragua. This is the story of the pepper production project that won competitive funding during the second stage of the Alliances program.

Luz

My name is Luz Marina Villalobos Montero. I am president of the group Asociación del Valle. Before I never used to go anywhere and didn't like to talk to anyone. I was a frightened little mouse, I didn't talk. People didn't recognize me when they saw me at meetings, a woman leader. Sometimes I don't even recognize myself, I'm so changed now.

Trinidad

We decided to form a group to improve family livelihood. Working in the field is hard, wages are low. The man is the one who brings in income. There's nothing nicer than for us women to be self-sufficient. Many of us are heads of household. The group is ten years old, one more in the Los Humedales Alliance. At the start we did some things, but they didn't work out. Then doña Luz was made a member of the board and started to explain the group's needs better.

Pedro

At the beginning of **Alliances** the program didn't include productive activities. For the second stage, most of our organizations asked to include activities that would generate resources in harmony with nature. Competitive funds were set up. In the case of El Valle, it was doña Luz's group, the one with pepper. In Los Humedales she kept on emphasizing that, since we didn't even know what pepper was. It wasn't until we did the exchange of experiences that we found out. Two or three groups from each consortium had to participate in the competitive funding. That was when we decided to send in the pepper project and we won.

Liliana

We started out with the IUCN's donation of 200 plants for each of us. Thanks to the joint project, those of us with more experience were able to help other groups, Asociación de Jazmines and the cooperative COOPELLANOAZUL. We taught

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them how to plant, tying, formation, posts, everything. We can use the chainsaw, the scythe, the pump; we can do what men can. We are persistent, we're more stubborn, there we go and we did it. Happy, fulfilled, proud, for our fellow women and for myself. We showed that that old thing of staying at home taking care of the kids, that's over... we broke out of the stereotype. Before we used to learn from the men, who were the ones who knew about farming. Now they learn from us.

Pedro and Marlene

Pepper is a crop with a good market, an excellent price, family labor, and doesn't cause the destruction of natural resources. Pepper is grown under regulated shade, *poró* stakes help the environment. Depending on how densely you plant, you can also grow beans, sweet peppers and plantain. It requires fertilizer and organic works well.

With **Alliances** we set up an agreement with the Propica company for guaranteed purchase of our pepper production and they give us technical advising. Now for sure we're getting ahead. In the future we want to generate employment for the community. We're flying high, we went from the bottom up, broke out of the shell and flew, with pepper as the push. Now we're advisers on organic fertilizer to children at the primary school, at the high school. And even at the university.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- Trainings have been incredibly useful, in both accounting and production.
- Because of the greater solidarity toward one another, we see ourselves as a group, we're a family.
- My husband gives me help. If the dishes need to be washed, he helps; yesterday he took me to the site of the association and when I got home he had the house clean. My husband is putting on the apron.
- Just meet for specific things, to do something specific, an exchange or an experience on a farm where people go, learn, and come put it into practice.

The women at Asociación Femenina del Valle close the interview saying: "Nowadays, the community respects us more. We lead a more dignified life. We've learned that nobody is better than anyone else. Some people need more time to learn something, others just take off. We all have our own kernel of intelligence." There may be some fifty-odd organized women's groups in this zone.

in the diversity of proposals arising from the communities on caring for nature. Encouraging these small initiatives opens potential for social innovation. Conservation projects should not add the extra burden of their costs to communities already in conditions of poverty, which is why we recommend combining conservation with livelihood projects that generate benefits.

Projects that include environmental education generate new cultures, consciousness, and practices in relation to nature. Whether aimed at reducing contamination, recycling, or caring for species, educational work done in high schools and primary schools has a multiplier effect since children and young people take charge of educating their parents. Art and fun activities are powerful vehicles for communicating the need to change practices.

In the story of *Alliances* are experiences, both successful and frustrating, that have left many lessons about the kind of initiatives that can be sustainable.

One of the success factors is for projects to be rooted in the local culture, economy, and conditions. It is useful to ask, "What are the drivers of the local economy in which the experience can be inserted so that something is triggered?" People in the communities deal with survival and day-to-day life by having a great deal of sensitivity and drawing closer together, so it is essential that projects don't fail. In the initiatives of women and the indigenous, particularly, the meaning of money is different; sharing backyard products, for example, can be a strategy for the domestic economy. Work dynamics often combine raising children and attending the parcel, with participation in



Juan Carlos Barrantes, Agroecology Unit, CBTC-UDT, Costa Rica

group projects,” points out Jesus Cisneros, coordinator of the IUCN-Mesoamerica Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. (Interview, May 2012) To illustrate, the women of San Miguelito, in Nicaragua, trade fish. Every day they buy fresh fish and carry it in their basket to sell. Day after day they live from hand to mouth in subsistence economies. Their group (Fundación de Mujeres de San Miguelito) programmed a revolving fund of micro loans to purchase more fish, mobilizing more resources so they can increase sales. This has been an ideal proposal, a perfect fit with their local culture.

Some learnings and recommendations gleaned from practice:

- Reinforcing processes that already exist in the communities is more sustainable than trying to develop new proposals.
- Productive projects take time to become consolidated and require accompaniment.
- Giving a workshop on an artisanal technique or buying equipment or infrastructure is not enough. If there is no accompaniment to attend group processes, investments may be lost.

An Opportunity for Large-Scale Influencing: Residue Management in Talamanca

Juan Carlos Barrantes and Rosa Bustillo, Corredor Biológico Talamanca Caribe (UDT)

Adequate management of solid residues is vital for both human health and ecosystems. Until a few years ago the situation in Talamanca was critical. There was no good municipal system, collection coverage was insufficient, operating costs for final disposal were high since waste had to be transported to the canton of Limón; and the population had little awareness about the issue of solid residue management. (Calderón, 2010)

In 1999, local organization Recicaribe started up a recycling program, but struggled with operation and management deficiencies. “Since 2000, in Corredor Biológico we had been working on a program called ‘Talamanca Recycling for Life’—environmental education and waste management in schools—with no visible effects because we didn’t manage links in the residue management chain,” explains Rosa Bustillo.

In 2008, Recicaribe went through severe crisis with problems in commercialization and marketing products, and ultimately collapsed, losing credibility with users on the coast. “We were extremely concerned in Corredor and UDT. Corredor’s board approved a decision to take on residue management, and in August 2009 we went into operating the chain,” says Juan Carlos Barrantes, program coordinator.

We rolled up our sleeves and went to work. The challenge was to increase the volumes collected to make the process efficient and effective and thus ensure the program’s sustainability. In 2010 we reached breakeven point, able to cover operational expenses. We studied alternatives for giving value added to the service and generated a certificate for users validating their participation in the program. Today companies, institutions and residents call up to find out how they can join. We are present throughout the canton of Talamanca, where there is access to indigenous territories, the coast and the Sixaola valley, with schools, businesses and tourism. We have been able to set

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up collection points in certain communities where people sort the recycled material and we pick it up.

Alongside this process, with UDT we have worked on political advocacy, in 2008-2009 insisting that the first residue management strategy be devised in the canton. We organized exchanges of experience and with funds from Alliances we hired a person to facilitate. This permitted a certain influencing at the political level since the municipality, tourism chamber, and organizations in the indigenous territory joined in. That got the theme on the agenda and gave us greater clarity. At the beginning relations with the municipality were very difficult since we had a corrupt mayor. When he left, things started to get easier.

When the national solid residue plan arose in mid-2010 we formed the commission on comprehensive solid residue management with the Health and Environment ministries, municipality of Talamanca, Social Security Administration, Federation of Development Associations, University for Distance Learning (UNED), and other entities, for a total of 19 organizations. We picked up on what had been done on the strategy again, and got the municipality to approve a budget to complete the resources needed for the plan (50%); this complemented the contribution of the Alliances program.

The plan was presented to the mayor and municipal council in the 2010-2011 period, and was approved. The same commission prepared and presented the regulations, which were also approved in the council and published in the official government newspaper with resources from the municipality, giving us a framework of operation for comprehensive management.

Corredor Biológico Talamanca Caribe, its member organizations, and the Alliance are the ones positioned. They keep us a in the limelight and allow us to have relations and alliances with all kinds of political, commercial, and community sectors, which is key from the environmental, advocacy and social standpoint.

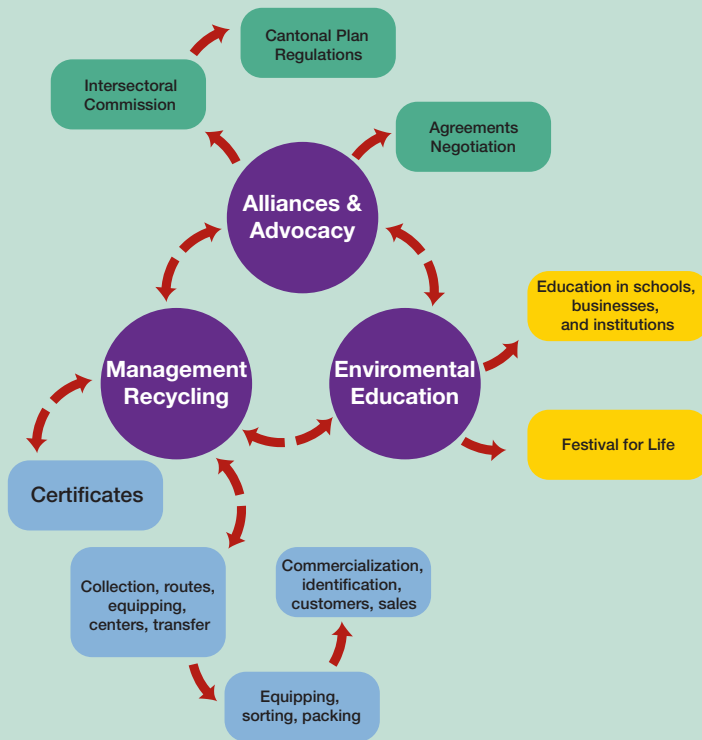


Training on making crafts from residues, CBTC, Talamanca, Costa Rica

- Promoting green businesses with the youth population can help demonstrate the economic viability of environmental sustainability and support poverty reduction. (Blanco and others, 2011)
- Very specific projects tend to focalize work.
- Some keys to selecting themes and projects: contribute to food security; community tourism; productive diversification
- Setting up competitive funds helps democratize access to resources, generates possibilities for joint work, points out the need for focusing the agenda, and allows other organizations to develop administrative capacities. (IUCN, 2011)
- Joint projects constructed and executed by several members of the Alliance strengthen the social fabric and trust.

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Solid Residue Management Chain:



Lessons and Recommendations:

- Alliances are essential for obtaining many necessary things: machinery, financing for the cantonal plan, setting up the environmental management office in the municipality, political agreements, approval of policies, and more.
- Business direction and development in high-priority themes, such as residue management, is key for covering operational costs.

- In the “reduce, reuse and recycle” strategy, education is fundamental to promote reduction: through environmental education the heart and mind are sensitized first in order to achieve changes in behavior.
- Greater impact is obtained by comprehensively tackling all of the links in the chain of solid residue management, regardless of whether it is a single institution that takes on the entire process, or different actors working together.
- Plans to address broad and complicated issues should be conceived and constructed from local entities so that conditions in each territory are met.
- Recovery of recyclable residues reduces the amount of waste sent to the dump and the cost of its management, while for the organization that manages it, simultaneously generates income giving the process sustainability.
- Take advantage of political junctures and circumstances favorable for the development of broader and more effective actions (e.g., laws, national-level residue management plan, change in municipal council).
- Working with all sectors of the population (age, gender and cultures, economic sectors) assures results.
- Local political will assists in achieving successful arrangements for residue management.
- The combination of all these elements generates a sustainable solid residue management process.” (Calderón, 2010)

The Talamanca experience in residue management is one of the most successful of its kind today and is visited by different communities interested in learning more about the recycling system and management plan. Alliances allowed us to position the theme. It has been a process of very quick consolidation with tangible results.



La Barrona, Guatemala

Unafraid of Politics

The Los Humedales Alliance was developed in Costa Rica's northern zone cantons of Upala, Los Chiles, and Guatuso. From the onset the characteristic feature of this alliance lay in its integration of grassroots groups: women, *campesinos*, retired educators, water administration boards, and artisans groups.

In the first stage the alliance fought hard to protect water sources and ecosystems in area wetlands, an environmental agenda effort that municipalities failed to echo. Influencing for policies harmonious with nature was difficult and the Alliance was a voice crying in the wilderness. However, there were some positive outcomes from this period.

One was that environment was integrated with production and positioned as a development theme. In itself, the alliance's linkage with this development paradigm for the north border territory was an achievement. Another outcome was the binational element, which responds to a vision of the actors that had been cooperating beforehand.

At that moment local authorities did not want to become involved in a development proposal that would exceed traditional parameters in the exercise of power. They were focused on solving challenges related to roads, bridges and infrastructure, with no vision or intention of generating more comprehensive development processes. Los Humedales generated a critical spirit from grassroots leaderships regarding management by local authorities: "We saw that they should have been the most important allies in this process, but in practice it didn't interest them," said Wilson Campos, current vice-mayor of Guatuso.

"We realized that if we wanted real change we had to get into the institutions, look for stronger protagonism, stop being afraid of getting involved in politics," says Arturo Cantón, current coordinator of the Alliance.

These consortium leaders along with the *campesino* platform, another important space for linkage, pushed the proposal of

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7.3. Strategies for Influencing Public Policies

Generating changes in land management to foster sustainable communities with resources for their development and able to address and manage vulnerability requires linking together diverse strategies for influencing public policies. When we speak of influencing we refer to the relation between alliances, management of the territory, and politics.

Advocacy is what puts the local alliance's strength to the test. It is in that tension with the setting and the rest of the social, political, and economic actors where the local alliance will succeed in positioning itself. To have more political power the alliances need to become mobilizing social movements. (Blanco and others, 2011) Advocacy is learned by doing, by putting into practice the Alliance's own capacities, contacts, and ability to play the game.

Different influencing strategies have been used in the course of this path, with positive outcomes concerning governances for species protection and protected areas, youth and women's offices, land ordering and waste management plans, and regulations and policies. Actions focused more on structural issues, such as the establishment of an authority for the watershed of the Paz River between Guatemala and El Salvador, have encountered greater difficulties.

The relation between the consortium and public institutionality, especially mayors, is another success factor. The receptivity of mayors' offices and state agencies and their participation in the consortium as member or ally is vital to facilitating processes. Participation by the consultation, convergence and advisory entities of ministries and local governments is also important as it helps leverage agendas within institutions. Likewise, the relation can be a highly delicate factor of risk when there is a change in mayors and public officials.

In two alliances strategies have been developed to place people inside institutionality, whether as candidates for public posts, as in the case of Los Humedales (Costa Rica), or by fostering linkage between thematic offices.

A special attitude is needed in order to achieve changes. It requires persistent and systematic effort, being constantly on the alert to identify and take advantage of opportunities, and breadth and flexibility to keep from getting burnt out. As they say in all of the consortia, you need to be a little pigheaded.

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change as electoral agenda; a new model of governance, citizenship building, the population's responsibility in development management, co-responsibility with the State, and cooperation.

"In both Los Chiles and Guatuso, we participated in the last electoral campaign. And we won! Now the three mayors work like triplets: Abelino, Alejandro and Álvaro work as one. They're up front, supporting to the max," says Arturo.

Some of the former leaders of the alliance now play vital roles in local power. Wilson Campos is in charge of the development plan for the north-north zone (the three cantons). Arturo Cantón is advisor to the mayor of Los Chiles in environmental themes and member of the Water Resources and Environment commissions. Xinia Montero, president of the Santa Fe women's group, was coordinator of Los Humedales Alliance and now works in the Development Unit of the Guatuso municipality.

In this year and half since the change in government, the focus has been on resolving the economic precariousness of these municipalities, getting the house in order, and generating conditions to attend these strategic areas.

"Now we're involved in designing the ten-year development plan for the north-north zone with the three municipalities and all of the vital forces. Los Humedales is participating from the start as one more element of the commission responsible. Forty workshops have been held in the three cantons just to put together a skeleton plan, mission, vision, and strategic areas. If we're able to generate a highly participatory process, this would be a first factor for the sustainability of the process. Cohesion and commitment from the community leadership," stresses Wilson Campos. This effort will be upheld in the local political sphere in municipal agreements that give political support to local decisions. The grassroots leaders themselves are in charge of including the environmental agenda.

The Platform and the Alliance have resented the fact that their main leaders are assuming political responsibilities in local government, and have been in a passive phase because the leaders' exit was so abrupt. "Now we're going to get into re-strengthening of the two platforms because there is a social force residing in each that has been incorporated in the strategic planning. The development vision and the platforms close the circle. Recover the agendas, include them in the planning with the linkage of the subjects once again so they make up an entity that will be called the

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‘Territorial Development Council,’ the main mechanism of social participation in the new proposal,” explains Wilson.

Lessons and Recommendations:

- Politics is an arena of dispute about development models, and the relevance of whether or not to get involved in electoral processes needs to be assessed.
- Taking formal power makes it possible for agendas to be scaled up.
- It is necessary to allow oneself to be guided by the vision and adjust strategies to opportunities as they arise.

The women and men leading the Los Humedales Alliance were the catalysts of the process turning local empowerment into public policy.



North Zone Youth meeting

Specific agendas have helped expand capacity for impact, especially when they turn into municipal policy as in the case of the youth and women’s offices in Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

Other elements necessary for influencing strategies are:

- Agendas and objectives clearly aimed toward the desired change
- A combination of awareness-raising actions for decision makers and the population
- A broad and mobilized social base
- A communication strategy that helps position the theme

- Becoming familiar with laws, regulations, and national and local policies that influence land management, and learning how to assess the political climate
- Connecting local transboundary monitoring and assessment actions with changes in local policies and proposals for alternatives
- Creating transboundary commissions made up of different social actors “who emphasize common problems over country frontiers and come together to look for solutions, facilitate work on borders, and enable actions that would not be possible if connected only with government sectors.” (IUCN, 2011, page 57)
- Youth participation from the very start of the influencing strategies nurtures the sustainability of the processes.

7.4. Strategies for the Sustainability of Local Alliances and Environmental Management Processes in the Territory

Sustainability of alliances and their processes exists where there is capacity to plan and execute, knowledge of weaknesses and strengths, and where all this helps maintain the dynamic over time, transcending ties with other institutions.

Examining the dynamics that developed, we see many advances contributing to sustainability: empowerment of the communities, and especially of women, youth, and the indigenous as key stakeholders in environmental management and their mobilization to defend the possibility of living in sustainable communities. This is the backbone of the sustainability process.

The existence of a clear vision, improved capacities to formulate proposals and do environmental management, synergies with different actors, and capacity of financial management with different inputs are all elements contributing to the sustainability of the consortium.

Ties with third parties are important for expanding the resource base and influences. From a common vision, each space of each organization has an entire national and international network of relations. The **local alliance's** capacity for action can be greatly expanded by making a map of stakeholders and taking it into consideration when strategies and plans are being established. Juan Carlos Barrantes explains, "Within UDT, each actor has its own network of ties. For example, APPTA [Talamanca Association of Small Producers] created the Costa Rican Chamber of Fine Chocolate, and that gives them a lot of allies. Each organization has synergies that can help advance the work." (Interview, May 2012)

Different initiatives are possible through collaboration between actors in the *alliance* and public institutions. An example from Guatemala's Pacifico Sur Oriente Consortium "During Easter Week they participated in beach clean-ups without having consortium resources and funding was obtained through the ties of the communities, of the municipalities, and we contributed a day of monitoring and the Ministry of Environment gave the t-shirts and caps. Based on this exercise and as follow-up, they have an environmental education project, a beach clean-up. They're working on a proposal for mangrove reforestation and

Advocacy to Transform: Municipal Ordinances

Yetsebel Serrano, Jossio Guillén,
Isaías Aguilar, Mitzela Dávila

Panama Verde has maintained a presence in the province of Bocas del Toro for over 20 years. Currently there are twelve groups that work on recycling, waste, and clean-up in different communities.

We requested entry into the Bocas Alliance, which was approved in 2006 because they saw we had the same objectives: conservation, leadership, and the integration of youth.

The consortium was a trampoline for reaching more young people. We were able to convoke more church, high school, sports, and other youth groups. With the Bocas Alliance there was more outreach and contact with other processes in the region, such as "Pact for Life" and "Water and Youth". We kept on doing reforestation, beach clean-ups, awareness-raising in high schools for environmental conservation, youth camps, trainings, ecological signage, and other activities. Now we have 400 organized young people throughout the province. Panama Verde was strengthened with its integration in the consortium.

In 2010 we participated in several workshops on how to do political advocacy and create local governances. That was how we made the plan to construct ordinances in the province of Bocas del Toro.

Youth have been marginalized from politics in Panama. We saw the need to open a space in municipalities to set up the office for youth. "The reasons why the ordinance and secretariat were chosen as vital elements of the solution are that:

- The ordinance has a legal action, in that it is the most important action the municipality can approve.
- Once approved, an ordinance is more difficult to revoke than a municipal agreement.
- The secretariat of youth would make it possible to designate a young person with technical capacity to be the one responsible, inside the municipality, for linking youth participation on behalf of local development." (Segura, sf, p. 6)

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With the support of an engineer and lawyer, we created a draft document at meetings and workshops. This was new to us; we didn't have any knowledge of the legal aspect. They gave us tips. We formed a consultative committee.

We received communication workshops. We had already talked with the mayor, so it was no surprise when we arrived with the document. Since they had some background about our work in the province, two of the three mayors were receptive.

Now we felt like we had more support in the political component. It will serve as a reference. Other institutions are going to see this experience which is new at the national level. Politics is not just about going and voting, there are problems in society that fall to us to deal with.

Lessons and Recommendations for advocacy:

- Make a map of actors and get people with influence to intercede with mayors.
- Publicize the proposal through radio stations and social networks.
- Meet with different actors to promote the ordinance.
- Replicate knowledge about political advocacy acquired in workshops.
- Get advising from professionals.
- Make use of the consortium's reputation and recognition. (Segura, sf)

Our calling card is always the consortium. Actually, the support of all of the networks, the admiration, the relations. They know what we're doing for people and the environment, and they have trust. We go hand in hand. Bocas del Toro has assumed national leadership in this area.

generating new microenterprises for recycling." (IUCN, 2011b, p. 4)

"Leadership is basic, it's more important than the economy. Keeping the machine alive, a coordination group with the desire, spirit, and willingness to tell us what's going on. The little plan made with minimal things, meetings, representations, collecting money, the electronic bulletin," says Leonel Ubau. (Interview, May 2012) The existence of consolidated organizations in the consortium helps in following up on work. Without such support, very weak organizations have much more difficulty managing the process and the alliance.

"For IUCN, the challenge from the start was to promote territorial alliances as autonomous spaces, key partners that could carry out different projects together. Promoting the consortia, their agendas, their work, respecting their protagonism," explains Ronald McCarthy. (Interview, April 2012)

Financial support is possible when the alliances have recognition and are key stakeholders, when the processes are legitimate. Aiming for self-management from the start encourages autonomy. Some keys in this direction are:

- Volunteer work
- Membership quotas
- Payment of overhead to the alliance by the organizations responsible for project execution
- Preparing project portfolios and negotiating them with different sources of cooperation
- Having the legal status to negotiate projects collectively

7.5. Participatory Communication Strategies

Communication is crucial in building an alliance for local governance, so more than communication products we speak of strategies that include different media and products. The design of these strategies was participatory in the consortia, with different lines contributed:



Workshop on Communication for Advocacy, IUCN-Alliances Project, Guatemala-El Salvador

- **Internal communication:** Communication within the consortium nurtures the sense of identity and belonging and enables transparency, flow of information, and support for processes employing face-to-face and virtual tools such as mobile telephones, e-mail and meetings. To do this it is necessary to identify communication problems within the consortium, vertical flows (between institutions and the consortium) or horizontal flows (between the representatives, as well as their relation with their organizations) in order to provide the proper attention.
- **Outreach and positioning:** Through news and other promotional products, communication aims at recognition of the *Alliance* as key actor in local dynamics by mass media and the people who make decisions.
- **With the communities:** Communication makes it possible to carry out environmental education and foster a new level of awareness through the use of media and face-to-face activities that generate participation in and collaboration with the processes.
- In the advocacy strategies, communication makes it possible to put priority themes on the public agenda and provide key information, thus influencing public decisions.

Recommendations:

- Pay attention to the use of communication media (TV, radio, press, virtual). Whether through one's own programs, web pages and Facebook sites or in alliance with journalists and local media, work in this area was intense. Success depends on how systematically the follow-up is done.
- Make use of the capacities and abilities some consortium members have in this field.
- Strengthen the communication skills of the organizations, establishing networks of the organizations' spokespersons or news correspondents.
- Seek alliances with national media in order to position advocacy agendas in broader spheres.

7.6. Strategies for Knowledge Management

In itself, the alliance is a forum of reflection since it integrates diverse viewpoints about managing territories, which fosters practical and realistic management. Appropriation of new knowledge is neither linear nor uniform, since the conditions of each group and organization are different.

A risk in local dynamics is falling into activism and not ensuring either space or time for the action-reflection-action exercise to be a pathway to learning. It's even a good idea to create a system for recording and learning as a way to share experiences systematically.

Exchanging experiences is the most valued method to share local knowledge, as we indicated in the section on strengthening. According to Wilfrido and Griselda at the mayoral office in San Miguelito de Nicaragua: "Sharing experiences in Costa Rica and with the people in the rest of the consortia in 2010 united us more and made us see things more clearly... The same is true from having seen how women assume the work of recycling. Here, the municipality has now approved an association and there are 20 women working. The whole issue of waste helped us with projecting profiles of the future. In waste recycling we now have a machine to break up glass. You learn by doing, when you aren't watching it's hard to learn." The power of replication is very great, because conditions in the communities are quite similar.

Recommendations

- Share techniques, knowledge, information about the context and community, contacts, and methodologies of the different organizations in the *alliance*.
- Put experts in contact with people in the communities and value both types of knowledge, for example, in the field of species monitoring and agro-ecological cultivation
- Guarantee conditions for systematization and socialization of lessons, not only with people in the platform of alliances, but other key stakeholders at institutional, political, economic, and other levels. Systematization and investigation help



San Miguelito Wetland, Nicaragua

strengthen leaderships and position the *consortium* as key stakeholder in local governance. In addition, it collaborates in sustainability and is a superior way of sharing lessons.

- Establishing agreements with academic and research institutions helps advance management of specialized knowledge, such as that required for species monitoring, appraisals, and readings of the context, which in turn generates inputs for decision making and advocacy.

A key lesson in the process of local alliances is that training processes should not be homogeneous; the needs of each platform and its members at a given moment should be addressed.

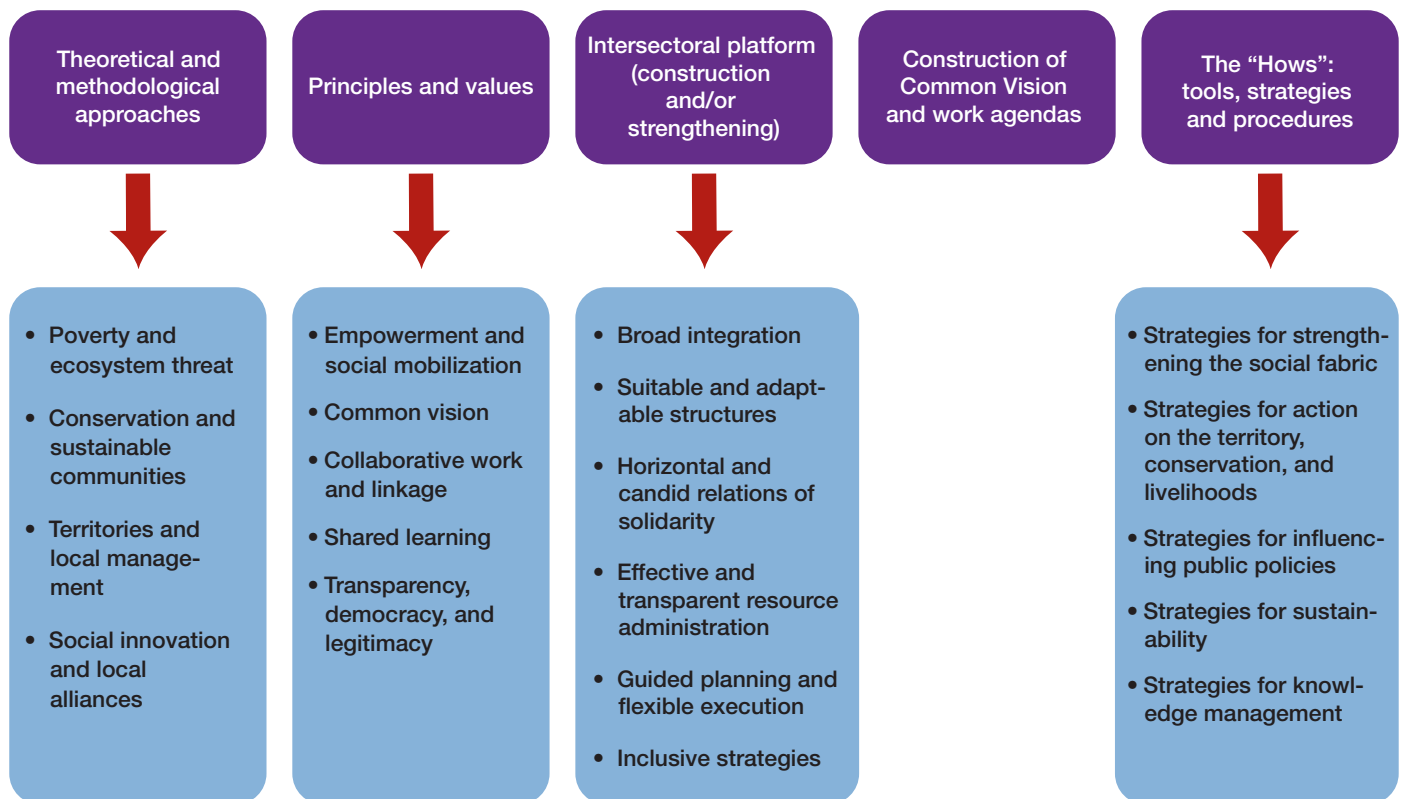
It is a challenge to design a system of collective learning about environmental management and sustainability that uses technology creatively and makes it possible to monitor progress in all areas.

As synthesis and conclusion, the following diagram illustrates the different elements making up the Alliances model as developed and described in previous sections.



Cahuita National Park, Costa Rica

Diagram 2
Elements of the Alliances Model
“Local Governance for Land Management”



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Interviews Conducted between April and July of 2012

Interviews and Workshops for Reflection with the IUCN Team

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- Alfredo López, Environmental Advisor to the Mayoralty of Bocas
- Ángel González, PROMAR
- Bonifacio Rodríguez, Member of the Siekin community
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- Felix Sanchez, President of Fundación Naso. Advisor to Naso King
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- Trinidad Umaña y Jeannette Ocampo, Asociación de Mujeres del Valle
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- Antonio Corado, Referent of the communities of Los Cerritos
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Unión para el Desarrollo de Talamanca

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The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), created in 1948, was the first environmental organization in history, and currently is the largest force for conservation and sustainable development in the world.

Its mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

IUCN is composed of three pillars: its members, its technical commissions and its secretariat. There are 1100 members, including social organizations, government agencies and nongovernmental organizations in approximately 160 countries.

The secretariat staff is comprised of 1100 employees who work in more than 60 offices all over the

globe. Headquarters are located in Gland, Switzerland.

In addition, IUCN includes a worldwide scientific community of around 12000 volunteer experts working through six technical commissions that provide theoretical support and apply the Union's work.

For the area of Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, IUCN has a regional office with more than 25 years of experience, as well as several offices distributed throughout the region to facilitate the implementation of field projects.

The IUCN is convinced that this path clearly illustrates the importance of supporting local organizations in their processes of empowerment and capacity to influence, in order to construct an inclusive and caring society that values natural resources.



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