INDIGENOUS AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES

AN EXPERIENCE IN PETEN, GUATEMALA
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION
IMPORTANCE OF THE MAYA BIOSPHERE

- The biggest Protected Area in Central America (2,112,940 ha)
- The three communities mentioned have 63,742 ha. under management, also support the conservation of National Parks as: Mirador, Tikal and Laguna del Tigre.
- 18 different natural ecosystems
- More than 230 bird species
- 67 species of reptiles
- 62 species of mammals
- 85 species of flora
- 110 medicinal plants
- More than 175 mayan archaeological sites.
BIOITZA COMMUNITY

• The only indigenous group originally from Peten Guatemala.
• They live by the Peten Itza lake in the buffer zone of the Maya Biosphere
• 80 families are the beneficiaries
• The forest is their principal cultural base
BIOITZA BACKGROUND

- The only maya group originally from Peten, their language are the Itza and Spanish.
- They decided to organize themselves in 1990
- Problems with an international organization almost dissolved the group in 1995.
- The municipality decided to take away their reserve and give it to immigrants
- They get their legal status as an organization
- They get their Reserve in usufruct from the city hall, for 30 years.
- They get a block A, financing from GEF to start their project.
ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES
THE BIOITZA PROMOTES

• Reserve management and protection
• Ecotourism: Bioitza trail and Spanish School for foreigners.
• Medicinal plants gardens.
• Carpentry shop
PASO CABALLOS COMMUNITY

• A Q’eqchi’ community originally from Alta Verapaz Guatemala. Their languages are the Q’eqchi’ and Spanish.
• 112 families are beneficiaries.
• They live in the Laguna del Tigre National Park; on the side of San Pedro river.
• They have an agreement signed with the government of Guatemala.
• They have as a priority the implementation of an integrated plan.
PASO CABALLOS BACKGROUND

- As a result of the peace accord and in search of land, the people invaded the area in 1997.
- The community reached an agreement with the Guatemalan Government in 1998.
- There was a condition to have a management plan, and the community prepared one.
- GEF finances the conservation and support of Laguna del Tigre National Park; Paso Caballos became a beneficiary of the project.
ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES
PASO CABALLO PROMOTES

• Agroforestry
• Ecotourism
• Nontimber forest products such as: xate and copal.
CARMELITA COMMUNITY

• A petenero traditional community, mixed with ladinos and indigenous. Their language is Spanish and some Q’eqchi´
• They live in the Multiple Use Zone in the Maya Biosphere Reserve.
• The government of Guatemala gave them a community forest concession in 1997.
• They have as a priority the development of a forestry management plan.
CARMELITA BACKGROUND

- A forest economy based society
- Invasions started in 1994 and they recognized the problem of loosing their area.
- Archeological sites depredation increased.
- They iniciated the process of getting a forest concession. It took three year before getting it.
- The concession is given in 1997. For 25 years
- They have five year of implementing their management plan.
ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES CARMELITA PROMOTES

• Timber products
• Ecotourism
• Nontimber products (xate, chicle, all spice)
CHALLENGES FACED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT

- Originally ProPeten/CI started the community enterprises within its own structure with the plan of making them independent later on.
- This did not work out because of several limitations such as: Paternalism, policy, social, idiosyncrasy etc. These did not permit the development of the enterprises.
THE CHALLENGES WERE

- Low level education of the groups
- Lack of access to market.
- Commitment of the groups toward environment conservation.
- Political weaknesses.
- Lack of credits.
IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS
“ECOMAYA”

• A comercialization branch to support communities is established. (it supports local, nacional and international marketing)
• 8 community enterprises are the owners of Ecomaya (they are the shareholders)
• The communities concentrate on improving the quality and development of their services and products.
TO PROMOTE TOURISM
“ALIANZA VERDE”

• A proposal of tourism policy is prepared by all sectors from Petén and presented to the Guatemalan Government.
• A best practice code is implemented.
• Tourism programs for training communities are in place.
• “Green Deal” is a project that is implementing a tourism certification in Peten, the tourism bureau of Guatemala is interested in implementation of tourism certificaion in all the country.
FINANCIAL SUPPORT
“FONDO MAYA”

• It was created to support the forestry community enterprises (only nontimber products).
• The three community here mentioned (Bioitza, Paso Caballos and Carmelita) get a starting capital from Fondo Maya.
• The credit fund was closed, because the donor did not want to support tourism and timber products.
POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITIES “ACOFOP”

• It is an organization that integrates all forestry communities in Petén.
• The three communities are part of this organization.
• This organization defends politically all communities, regarding their rights to access to the natural resources.
CONCLUSION

- It is possible to construct indigenous community enterprises. Although it is needed to base the efforts in taking in account: participatory process, education levels of the groups, access to market, commitment with environment conservation, policy and access to credits.