

## *Protected areas and RURAL COMUNITIES : A natural COEXISTENCE*


***“Zones of Conflict and Development, A Challenge toward a Governance with Social Participation ””***

### **1. CONTEXT:**

***The Central American Protected Areas System: Over three Decades of Challenges in its Conceptualisation and Negotiation.***

Central America has an extension of 533 Km<sup>2</sup>. Due to its geographic condition to be between two oceans (Pacific and Atlantic) and two Continental Masses (South and North America), it possesses great diversity of flora and fauna recognized at a worldwide level ,but, a lot of this riches are - even unknown.

The population of the region is aprox. 35 million of inhabitants. -

Regarding economic conditions, 49,9 % of the **inhabitants** of the region live in critical erty.

There's a tendency toward the concentration of land's property, and toward the economic concentration for large companies besides the bad management of the productive system, has increase the environmental problems especially on the volcanic central zone and the Pacific watershed , to the Central America isthmus. In general, the Atlantic watershed is less inhabited and developed, and consequently, with a bigger quantity of ecosystems little or very little intervened, until now.

All of the countries of the region are dependent of international commerce and foreign transferences, and the level of industrial development is underneath the average of Latin America. The exports are concentrated in agricultural products, raw materials and non-traditional products. This productive demand increase the pressure to the land's owners for part of private companies, the lack of land for agricultural activities makes that the poor increase their pressure toward protected areas, for their survival necessities.

Moreover, the policies of the regional integration, privatisation and release of (CAFTA ) it's a menace to the small producers.

### **1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATION**

The region combines its tourist potential among the agricultural and forestry themes. In Central America a rhythm of growth in the transformation of natural lands to agricultural activities is maintained.

Between 1990 and 1995 the rates of loss of forest coverage at the region was estimated at 450.000 yearly hectares. Today In Central America we are losing among 250.000 and 300.000 hectares per year approximately . Many countries are going so far as to have masses of natural forests only within the protected areas (of different categories of management ). The treat during the last years is the illegal-logging -.

Another problem that distress the region in environmental matters is: wet land's fragmentation, decrease of green urban areas, availability of water and pollution, loss of air quality, energetic dependency, trade of wildlife, degradation of landscape and environmental vulnerability, –drought- This last, specially and potentially will increase the pressure on the lands and the available resources of protected areas.

## **II. BENEFITS OF PROTECTED AREAS**

Protected areas are all those overland or coastal marine units, than under a regime of especial administration, offer a group of goods and useful and valuable incalculable services to the local, regional and worldwide society . Therefore, the perspectives of the advantages depend on the scale of value of protected areas.

Internationally, it's accepted that the protected areas, depending on its category of management, generate and facilitate a series of goods and services, that are of concern and valuable for the society, among those are: Protection of habitats, retaining of nutrients, Control of flooding and prevention to natural disasters, carbon sequestration, hydric charge, shepherding, fishing and harvests of wild life, logging and sustainable wood, landscape, receptive tourism and popular recreation, public education, basic research and future information, protection of the cultural patrimony and communitarian and spiritual values.

In Central America, two positions on the protected areas coexist. On the one hand, the institutional proposals, related to international conservationists entities, that develop the concept of preservation of the natural and cultural patrimony for the benefit of the society worldwide. They privilege the creation of national parks and, the application of tools like purchase of lands, the monitoring and management excluding productive activities in the areas under special administration regime, traditionally negotiated under the control of governmental centralized institutions.

In addition, there are another proposals, that encourage some institutions and specialists, leagued to the urban producer's needs of the peasants and indigenous groups in Central America, that privilege the access to the land, to the participative management of natural resources and the equitable distribution of benefits generated by them. This vision comes out from the communities reality “ People needs to be nourished, before preserving”

From the rural population's perspective, the creation of national parks in terms of protecting the biological diversity for the future generations or, for the well-being of the global society, is in general exemption and bit motivating. Alternative proposal is the protected areas of several categories of management declaratory, to satisfy the community's current needs and to supply services to the future generations.

### ***II.1 SICAP's CONCEPTUALIZATION***

The ”Agreement for the Conservation of the Biodiversity and the Protection of High-priority Wild Areas in Central America”, signed for the Presidents of the Central American countries in 1992, it's a high level political tool that describes by and large the concept of the Central American System of Protected Areas ( SICAP ).

SICAP is the frame that identify and defines the development of the group of protected areas legally declared. The SICAP is therefore for the moment, the indictment of the National System of Protected Areas ( SINAP ), and these are the areas that are officially recognize at each country.

However, for system it is understood the group of elements or things in an orderly way related or organized in such a way among themselves, that contribute to a determined purpose or that maximizes desirable characteristics. Internationally it is considered that a system of protected areas must be developed starting from five key characteristics: representative, appropriate, Coherent and Complementary, Consistent and, Efficient, terms which are not currently developed in Central America.

### **III COMMUNITARIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PROTECTED AREAS NEGOTIATION**

In Mesoamérica, a set of communitarian experiences exists on the subject of management of natural resources at protected areas and bordering zones, that are relevant in its national scenes, and at recognized local, national and regional level, with important contributions as much towards the resolution of conflicts in these zones and their governance from a perspective of real social participation.

The importance of the participation of the different social groups in the construction of the policies and legislation that bear to a new governance model is undeniable on the natural assets of Mesoamérica, than only reflex on the paper the contributions of community groups rather also may be palpable in practice.

The visible and concrete development in the management of natural resources and resolution of conflicts has generated among the local organizations and its leaders the need to interchange their experiences, giving rise to an answering condition, extension, multiplication and adaptation of the best mesoamerican practices.

Gathering many of the successful communitarian experiences of ACICAFOC and having been able to generate a group of instruments and tools with conditions to get constituted in a economic, ecological and social sustainability of the peasants, afrodescendants and indigenous experiences related with the Central American System of Protected Areas ( SICAP ) and the National Biological Corridors become essential to perceived them within the framework of the Governance with Social Participation.

The real and recognizable achievements of local experiences have potential to have a political effect on Mesoamerica for it's necessary its systematization and analysis with the aim of making good use of the lessons and concrete contributions derived from them, that must be in the governmental policies on the subject of sustainable management of natural resources and the resolution of conflicts at Zones of greater confrontation.

Increasing the power of current opportunities furthermore, request a new model of negotiation and of governance, led to multiply the impacts of experiences and to deepen the mesoamerican connectivity among the organizations, community leaders and the governmental entities.

In order to advance in this direction and in the frame of the “ I Mesoamerican Congress of Protected Areas: Promoting the conservation for the development and regional integration ”, held in Managua, Nicaragua on March 10 to 14, 2003, and facing the V Worldwide Congress of

Protected Areas, well known as Worldwide Park Congress, CICAFOC answering to the request of its grassroots organizations took initiative and convoked for March 8- 9 in Managua, a workshop of analysis and discussion on the subject of protected areas which was named “***Mesoamerican Precongress of Protected Areas and Rural Communities: A Natural Coexistence***”.

Considering the subjects approached in these events it represents the challenges and defiances of the protected areas management and the resolution of environmental conflicts, is attempted that inside the discussion, is inserted the conviction that from rural and community experiences propose like a demonstrated potential of contributions for the design and execution of policies, plans and local, nationals and regional strategies.

The discussion tries to create the necessary conditions to generate a basic consent around the Protected Areas negotiation. In this sense the community mesoamerican groups have taken the determination to give its contributions through a responsible and positive participation.

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### III. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONGRESS

#### III.1 General perceptions

Perception of the communities on protected areas and its development	Inclusion of the Communities in the negotiation of protected areas	Perception of the communities in front of the policies of protected areas
What it means being within a protected area, its limitations of use, rights and responsibilities is unknown. Once the subjects are openly debated the people acknowledge and engaged with their own development and that one of the protected areas.	Governments do not generate policies to work together with organized groups.	Legislation is far away as to the technical and juridical information.
	It is necessary to fight against three enemies: the legislation, the governments and some NGOs.	Little application of legislation exists and the inequality in the application.
The spaces of coordination among government and local actors are fundamental for the appropriate management of protected areas. Local processes must underlie the proposals of legislation for the consolidation the community processes.	Distrust on the side of the communities exists, due that the have been acting defensively and not with the disposition to build proposals.	Excluding for: lack of information, a little governmental support, deficient and not much legislation socialized, specially with the indigenous groups.
Policies are not based in the needs of the people.	A sincere interest from the State does not exist, external recommendations are simply taken and the communities are seen like a an obstacle.	If co-management is not allowed, the people will continue advancing toward the forest.
If co-management is not allowed, the people will move forward to the forest. The communities must be a priority option for co-management.	Advances as to the co-management exists, to the protected areas specially in Guatemala and Panama.	

**III.2 Communitarian Proposal for the CCAD, I Mesoamerican Congress of Protected Areas and the V Worldwide Park Congress in Durban, SA.**

<b>Central American commission on environment and development. (CCAD)</b>	<b>Mesoamerican Congress of Protected Areas &amp; Worldwide Park Congress</b>
<p>Reviewing and updating the national legislations on the subject of land tenure with a common concept, and promoting the satisfaction of the communities's needs..</p> <p>Promoting the access and opportunities for the communities in the use of natural resources within the protected areas.</p> <p>Incorporating, in the national legislations, the co-management 's figure, giving priority to the adjacent communities of the protected areas.</p> <p>Review the governmental institution's system related with the protected areas and its relation with the communities.</p> <p>Establishing supportive economic mechanisms to the community sector, specially through the access of credits.</p> <p>Promoting a dialogue among the environmental and productive agendas ( environmental and agricultural ).</p> <p>Encouraging the creation of national mechanisms in the decision making processes, inclusive of the communities that inhabit the protected spaces.</p> <p>To elaborate upon mechanisms that allow the resources generated by the protected areas are re-invested in the communities that inhabit them.</p> <p>Decentralizing the responsibilities on the management and the economic resources destined to the protected areas, incorporating the community actors in the plans and programmes.</p> <p>Identifying the factors that threaten to the protected areas and measures to counter them.</p> <p>Impulsing the multiplication of successful national and or regional models in the negotiation of protected areas for part of the communities.</p> <p>Promoting the creation and the strengthening of judicial instances in environment and the setting of penalties to the environmental crimes.</p> <p>Promoting the increase in the assignment of budget to Ministries of Environment and promoting the respect of environmental rights.</p> <p>Fomenting the dissemination and knowledge of environmental legislation.</p> <p>Incorporating in the Policies and environmental legislations of the countries, the payment for environmental services those communities that inhabit the protected spaces, integrating the focuses contemplated in the international environmental agreements.</p>	<p>Review MBC's Business Plan and the increase in the budget allocation in productive matter.</p> <p>Identification, protection and negotiation integrated of hydric resources at the region, incorporating the communities's participation..</p> <p>Promotion of information and the current situation of the region in the subjects of Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA);, Puebla-Panama Plan and organisms genetically modified? ( transgenics ).</p> <p>Ecological Territorial organizing, establishing the basin like basic element for the planning of the territory.</p>

### III.3 Indigenous Vision of Protected Areas in Central America.

Communitarian leaders from grassroots organizations and afro descendants participated during the pre-congress analyzing the subjects of protected areas from their perspective and reality.

Organization	Political Aspects	Rights	Productive proposals	Cultural uses of natural resources
<p>The ethnic communities that inhabit Mesoamerica, have a vision shared as to the problems, needs and ambitions for the effective management of our protected areas and sacred places; Risen of our own cultural idiosyncrasy and framed within the communal perspective.</p> <p>That we count on the organizational networks inside our communities that are a living example of investment in capital stock and local strengthening that we possess, because the achievements attained in the negotiation of protected areas are based in the community organization and our capability to share experiences.</p>		<p>For the indigenous people and afro descendants communities is indispensable that our requests are acknowledge on the subject of guaranty and juridical certainty for the territories that we inhabit, since the land and the resources that we possesses is our principal patrimony, an ethnic community needs to of its territory to define its cultural identity.</p>	<p>In this sense, at the mesoamerican region successful experiences that have contributed to upgrade the quality of life of the inhabitants of these towns preserving their natural surroundings exist.</p>	<p>It has been demonstrated than the indigenous and Afro descending peoples for over 506 years; have procured the effected management of protected areas and sacred places giving rise to harmonious relation that must exist among human group and natural resources.</p> <p>The recognition of validity of communitarian conservation practiced until now, the respect to our world vision ( spirituality, language, knowledge of alternative medicine, cultural practices, etc ) like key element.</p>

***Indigenous leader proposals .***

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Political Aspects</b>	<b>Rights</b>	<b>Productive proposals</b>	<b>Cultural uses of natural resources</b>
<p>That a true social active participation and citizen be promoted, in order that the communities and their grassroots organizations be integrated in the decision-making processes that affect them, procuring inclusion and social equity.</p> <p>Recognition of the contribution of community organization and strengthening of the capital stock in the negotiation and management of protected areas.</p>	<p>That the needs and indigenous people's ambitions, afro descendants and peasant be a part of the priority agendas of work of the governments, and we may count on the support demanded to achieve the integral and sustainable development of our towns, diminishing existent inequity's breach and combating with the strategy of poverty reduction.</p>	<p>That assign technical resources and financiers to give answers to the collective requests on the tenancy of the land of the indigenous, Afro descendants and peasant communities, we are sure that to achieve this, it must be accompanied of true politic will.</p> <p>The communities and populations be integrated like associates or subjects of process, breaking off the politic favoritism that is practical common at our region.</p>	<p>Access to technical resources and financiers for the implementation of productive projects at the zones where population in the protected areas are located ..</p>	<p>That recognize and respect the inalienable rights of the community practices of conservation and protection that we have accomplished, as to the same as our worldview in the negotiation of management of protected areas be taken into account.</p>

**The analysis on the negotiation of protected areas concluded with a pronouncement that gathers the feeling of over 70 community leaders men and women of the region that participated in the pre-congress, with the aim of taking their voice and proposals to the spaces of discussion on the protected areas' negotiation .**



## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

**Men and women representing indigenous people, peasant and afro descendants communities, participating in the Mesoamerican Workshop carried out in Managua on March 8-9, 2003.**

### **Considering :**

1. That it is impossible to examine and discussing the conservation and the development of the so-called protected areas without understanding the natural coexistence of the rural communities with the them.
2. Than the management models of these areas, conceived like external interventions or central, from projects or policies and regimentations, they constitute a model with a limited impact, that has not been able to revert the destructive dynamicses generated from the extreme poverty or from the insatiable avidity of easy profits.
3. Than, meanwhile inhabitants of so-called protected areas and their zones of proximity exist, our ways of life and future find themselves indissolubly related to the future of them.
4. Than the future of Mesoamerican natural resources it will depend on the capability of the rural communities to turn them into natural assets, capable to improve their living conditions and to insure local development.
5. That the surging of conflicts among the communities and the protected areas does not take for difference of interests, but for difference in the valuation criterions of the natural assets and the lack of spaces of discussion, analysis and consent among all of the actors itself..

### **The peasant communities, black and indigenous demand:**

1. The concepts of social focus of visions characteristic of beneficence and social philanthropy give in, those that reproduce the poverty and extreme poverty that our communities already suffer.
2. That the projects and international cooperation abandon benefitted communities's vision, understanding that an audit and budgets, would reflect that the beneficiaries of this cooperation are out of so-called protected areas. The communities need associates with a conducive intention toward a new association, that distribute the roles and responsibilities in the negotiation of natural resources.
3. That the vision that the rural communities's inhabitants are ill-mannered in environmental matter be changed. Environmental education programs must be checked, we can not continue taking color's books with drawings of trees that to our children that is not environmental education. We want to know how, the Siuna's peasants in Nicaragua have been able to substitute slash and burn in the agriculture; How the peasants in Río Plátano and the Biósfera Tawaka have cattle raising without deforesting ; How Petén's communities in Guatemala sustainably manage their forests.

4. That the traditional idea of institutional strengthening seen like more clerical staff, equipment and consultantships be abandoned. It is necessary to strengthen institutional capability local, municipal and national in order that they generate agreements in the negotiation of protected areas. A concrete agreement among a community and a governing instance contributes more to the future of so-called protected areas than any item of institutional strengthening: Totonicapán in Guatemala and Filo del Tallo in Darién of Panama, these associations confirm the economic clearing return that report intelligent associations.
5. That the demagogic concept of social participation, limited to technical consultations to communities in absolute inequality of conditions and with leaders misinformed be abandoned. It is necessary to advance toward institutionalized mechanisms of community participation, beyond false formal consultations, establishing permanent processes of work and true dialogues.
6. Is necessary to leave holding the peasant, Afro descendants and indigenous communities responsible as the principal promoters of environmental conflicts and the ungovernability in the protected areas.
7. That the restrictive and now anachronic concept of protected areas be abandoned once and for all, giving rise to the concept of management sustainable areas.

**We convene:**

1. To redefine the strategy of negotiation of mesoamerican sustainable areas of management on new basis, starting from a redistribution of loads and responsibilities among the ruling national institutions, municipal authorities and the local groups.
2. To give it some productive contained, social and organizational to the so-called buffer zones, recognizing that only the communities that inhabit them have the capability to translate in concrete actions this important function.