

Transboundary: Trans-Border Management Group for the conservation of the environment of the Goascoran River, Honduras and El Salvador

Summary

The bi-national basin of the Goascoran River has a superficial extension of 2.345,5 km² and it is shared by Honduras and El Salvador. It is conformed by 36 “sub-basins”, located in the departments of La Union and Morazan in El Salvador and La Paz, Valle, Comayagua and Francisco Morazan in Honduras. For its natural characteristic and location, this is an area of great environmental, economical and geopolitical importance.

After the environmental problems that the local population faces and their necessities of progress, with the support of the Bi-national Program of Trans-border Development Honduras-El Salvador, in 2006 the Management Group of the Bi-national Basin of the Goascoran River (GGBCG) was created as a multi-sector instance to integrate, influence and coordinate sustainable management of the shared basin and to improve the life conditions of the inhabitants of the region.

Its objective is to coordinate actions of bi-national character that can be funded by national and international organisms, through the articulation and participation of different sectors of both countries and the development of processes of incidence for the appropriate use of the basin.

The management group, at institutional level in both countries and as a bi-national instance, has obtained positive results in the support and development of a management plan of the basin, as well as in the incidence, for the emission of municipal legal instruments in pro of the conservation of the local natural resources.

Importance for the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)

This experience is of great value for IWRM, as the management group establishes a model of work for the population of both countries, in search of an appropriate use of the natural resources in a shared basin. Through this, the bi-national effort is shown with a single objective, with the active participation of the representatives of diverse sectors in all the levels (local, central government's institutions, civil society, NGO, private company, groups of producers, environmentalist associations, teachers and the representatives of the municipalities of this basin) where the understanding and, mainly, the work of volunteers, constitute the primordial factor of its management.

From the technical point of view of river basin management, the experience shows the “key stages” in the development of a management plan, including the phase of characterization and the actions of conservation and management to be done, which implied negotiation processes of the representatives in both countries starting from processes of participative local planning.

Tools

B1.2 Transboundary organizations for water management, B2.1 Participatory capacity and empowerment in civil society, B2.3 Regulatory capacity, C2.2 River basin plans.

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1. Previous initiatives

The interest to conserve and manage the natural resources in an appropriate way, is not new in this area, before the actions undertaken by of the Bi-national Program in the regions that conform the basin of the Goascoran River at the Republics of Honduras and El Salvador, community organizations such as community boards, looked for contribution to ameliorate the environmental problems, supported and promoted by some projects and institutions that implemented actions in the region.

In El Salvador, the Association of Basins of the Gulf of Fonseca (ACUGOLFO) with the Ministry of the Environment (MARN) implemented projects related to the management of the natural resources and in the territory embraced by the Inter-municipal Association of the North of La Union (ASINORLU), partial projects of solid waste management were developed, supported by Caritas and the protection of basins with the support of Catholic Relief Service (CRS). This work got strengthened with the participation of some municipal environmental units (UMAS)¹ by Caritas (El Salvador).

In Honduras, projects that strengthened the environmental social capital were implemented, such as: Local Development PRRAC, with the technical facilitation of Fundación Vida, the Project PROMUR (Project for Strengthening Local Capacities with Dutch financing) and PROSOC (Development Project for the South-Western Area of Honduras). As well, projects and infrastructure were developed with funds of Switzerland, among others. These projects contributed to create a base on which the future actions related with the formation of the Bi-National Management Group would be sustained. The existence of local organizations in the basin of the Goascoran River -even when they presented strengthening necessities- allowed increasing the participation of actors in favor of looking for the creation platforms for the solution of the environmental problems that are faced in the area.

2. Inside the legal environment to begin this experience

In El Salvador, the conservation of natural resources is considered in the Constitution of the Republic, as well as in The Environmental Law and its Regulation, the Special Regulation of Waste Waters contains general guidelines through its National Environmental Policy. In Honduras the actions for conservation are based in multiple instruments, having the Constitution of the Republic as their framework. Likewise, the General Environmental Law and its regulation, the Law of Municipalities, the Forestry and Protected Areas Law and the Law of National Waters, among others, are included as part of the legal framework that supports this experience. On the other hand, there are laws in both countries that allow the local authorities (municipalities) to promote the administration and conservation of their natural resources.

Both countries have subscribed international agreements that propitiate a better management of the natural resources as the Advisory Agreement of the Central American Commission of Environment and Development, the Central American Alliance for the Sustainable Development, the Constituency Act of the Committee of Action upon Sea and Fresh Waters project, the Agreement of Bio-diversity and Protection on Wild Areas, the United Nations Agreement against Desertification, the Basilea Agreement, Transboundary Movement of Dangerous Waste and its Elimination, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Convention of Vienna for protection of the Ozone Layer, among others.

These frameworks support the actions for conservation, although Central America is still in the process of establishing guidelines at regional level for the management of transboundary watersheds.

3. Background to the problem

The bi-national basin of the Goascoran River has a superficial extension of 2.345,5 km² and it is shared by Honduras (South of the country) and El Salvador (East of the country). It is conformed by 36 sub-basins, which are part of the departments of La Union and Morazán in El Salvador and La Paz, Valle, Comayagua and Francisco Morazán in Honduras. The river flows into the sea at the bay of Chismuyo in the Gulf of Fonseca.

¹ Municipal instance in charge of coordinating all the actions implemented by the municipality related with the protection of the natural resources, including the supervision of the compliance of local regulations and the accompaniment to local organizations created with this objective. Their capacity is diverse but its role is very relevant according to the legal command.

From the socioeconomic point of view, 75% of the population of the basin inhabits the rural area. Because most of them depend economically on agricultural activities, the unemployment during dry season reaches levels of 70%. In Honduras, more than a 60% of its local population is in the indexes of extreme poverty and in the case of El Salvador, this indexes of poverty oscillate between 24,8 % and 65,1% in the municipalities that integrate the basin. On the other hand, there is a very limited public investment in the region, exemplified through the lack of highways and infrastructure, the limited connection to electric service and drinkable water among others. Although, future plans of vial development are planned for the future in the basin, such as the well-known projects of Dry Canal² (Canal Seco), which would enhance an improvement of the territory that conform the basin of the Goascoran River.

In relation to the environmental aspects, the problem is summarized in the following points:

Individual actions and their slight impact

There are actions carried out for the preservation of the environment in the basin but these are isolated and they have not corresponded to a strategic plan, according to the common necessities in the basin as a whole hydrographic and social unit. The results obtained under this scheme of action are limited, since some communities carry out these activities, other on the contrary, contribute to the deterioration. Negotiations have been carried out in some critical sectors of the basin, by local organizations with the support of projects, but at the same time, inadequate practices have been done, such as granting licenses of exploitation of the forest without management plans in Honduras, and fishing with cyanide, lead and dynamites in El Salvador.

Quick deterioration of the environment

In spite of the efforts of the countries for the conservation of the natural resources, the basin of Goascoran presents a tendency to the environmental degradation. The current increase of population is an important trigger, which is clearly perceived in an increasing water demand.

Among the elements considered as the most important causes for the degradation of the local environment, with negative effects in the conservation of water sources are:

- Agricultural fires, like traditional practice previous to the sows that increases the deterioration of the soil.
- The destruction of the forests.
- The migratory agriculture– disencumber of a parcel used for a period of time while it is productive.
- The increment of the firewood consumption diminishes the vegetable covering.
- A sustainable forest cut doesn't exist in the area.
- The lack of control of solid waste and liquids, due to the lack of normative of the garbage control (54 tons of waste are deposited in open areas without any treatment).
- The use of chemical in the depressing agricultural and cattle production affects the local biodiversity and could even have impacts in the Gulf of Fonseca, where the river flows into the sea.

Lack of vision to supply the potential demand of the water

The supply of water for domestic use and agricultural production is one of the priorities and concerns of the population, since, when considering the projected indexes of population density, the geographical area and the activities that this growth implies, this demand will be unsatisfied in a period not larger than 20 years; due, to the non-existent infrastructure to store and distribute the water resource to the population.

At the moment, the availability of water in the basin is of 680 MM³ annually, and the population's demand is of 110 MM³; under these conditions, there is the possibility to satisfy the current demand.

4. Action taken

The location of the Goascoran basin in an important area and the necessity of coordinated efforts to solve the environmental problems, mostly related to water, were some of the elements that motivated the conformation of the Bi-national Management Group. Through the Bi-national Program of Trans Border Development (financed by the European Union), actions were promoted to strengthen the local capacities and to impel the development of the municipalities and their inhabitants, by means of institutions and NGO's that have presence in the area. Considering the importance of the local participation to achieve the wanted results, some actions were focused in the conformation of organized structures that allow impelling coordinated actions, for the sustainable

² Canal Seco, is a project that contemplates the construction of highways in Honduras, for the improvement of communications in the region.

development of the area through specific programs and projects, which are supported by Inter-Municipal Technical Units UTI's for the strengthening of the existent local organizations.

4.1. Establishment of Management Group

The need for the conservation of the Goascoran River basin impels the initiative to elaborate and to implement a natural resources management plan in the area, which resulted in the establishment of a Bi-national Management Group, integrated by three groups:

- Association of basins of the gulf of Fonseca (ACUGOLFO)
- Bi-national program of border Development of the European Union.
- Facilitating Entities: Catholic Relief Services (CRS) of El Salvador, Fundación VIDA and Caritas from Honduras.

The group was founded in November 8, 2006, in Nacaome's municipality, department of Valle in Honduras, integrated by local representatives of both countries.

In the sine of its creation assembly, the Bi-national Management Group was defined like a multi-sector instance created to integrate, and coordinate the administration of the sustainable management of the Bi-national basin of the Goascoran River, with the purpose of improving the conditions of the inhabitants' life. Their objective is to coordinate actions of bi-national character and promoting funding initiatives for national and international organisms, through the articulation and participation of diverse actors and the development of processes of incidence.

Organizational structure of the management group

For the execution of functions and tasks, it was defined that the Management Group would be structured in the following way:

Bi-national General Assembly: integrated by a directive boards and commission of the regional environmental committees or local management groups (MAMSURPAZ, MAFRON, ACUGOLFO). It's conformed by twenty people, ten from each country.

Coordinating committee: constituted by the presidencies of the regional environmental committees or local management groups (MAMSURPAZ, MAFRON, AGCUGOLFO) two from each country, a total of four people.

Commissions of work: they are conformed by environmental management aspects, production management aspects, water resources management aspects and social management aspects. Each commission is integrated by a maximum of four people, making a total of sixteen members, their purpose is meant to support and pursuit the suggestions emitted by a Technical Committee, conformed by the facilitating institutions of the process.

In a complementary way to the structure, an internal regulation was generated, so that all those involved, could exercise the functions that were delegated by the General Assembly that is constituted as the Management Group's maximum authority.

Strategic components of the management group

According to the institutional vision, the Bi-National Management Group defined the following components as the pillars through which it must establish its work:

- **Component of incidence:** influence the agendas of the governments of Honduras and El Salvador to favor the creation, modification and strengthening of public policies and bi-national initiatives for the integrated management of the basin of the Goascoran River.
- **Negotiating component:** prepare funding initiatives to be presented to national and international instances, public and private.
- **Education component:** promote the education and the population's understanding of the Bi-national Basin of the Goascoran River.
- **Communication component:** Establish communication mechanisms that allow socializing the different instruments.
- **Organization component:** propitiate the legitimacy and leadership through the representativeness, participation, invigoration and empowerment of the different member organization.

For the internal and external credibility of the processes and for their appropriate operation in a trans-border environment, the management group established principles and values. The principles that were defined are to

search the common welfare, solidarity, justice, brotherhood, cooperation, transparency, justice and loyalty. The values include responsibility, honesty, punctuality, respect, generosity, loyalty, identity, good will, empathy, tolerance and freedom.

4.2. Actors and sponsors

In Honduras

As local entities: Council of Municipal Development (CODEM), Association of Municipalities of the South of La Paz (MAMSURPAZ), Association of border Municipalities of Valle (MAFRON), Commission of Departmental Development of Valle (CODEVA), Commission of Departmental Development of La Paz (CODEPAZ), Municipalities, Water Boards, Community Boards, Society of Parents of Educational Centers, Local and Municipal Emergency Committee (CODEL and CODEM), Clubs of Housewives, Associations of environmentalists Teachers.

As Facilitating organizations: CODDEFFAGOLF, ADED Valle, Pastoral Social CARITAS Comayagua, CARE, COMCEPROL, Honduran Foundation of Environment and Development VIDA, Honduran Red Cross, INTERFOROS, PRACC–FHIS, among others.

National and international cooperation: COPECO, Tropical Agronomic Center of Investigation and Teaching (CATIE) / Secretary of Natural Resources (SERNA) / GEF, Central American Bank of Economic Integration (BCIE).

Programs and Government Projects: MARENA, PROMUR, Project of Rural Municipalities, Agricultural School Luis Landa, INFOP, Secretary of Public Health, and Secretary of Public Education.

In El Salvador

As civil society: ASINORLU

As Facilitating organizations: CARE, CARITAS, CRS, ACUGOLFO

National and International cooperation: JICA, FISDL, COMURES, ISDEM, Red Cross from El Salvador, Spanish Agency of International Cooperation (AECI), German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), OPS/OMS, USAID, Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), UNICEF, Great Dukedom of Luxemburg, among some.

Programs and Government Projects: PRODERNOR, Civil Protection, Ministry of Natural Resources (MARN), Ministry of Education (MINED), Ministry of Public Health and Social Attendance (MSPAS), Spanish Agency of International Cooperation (AECI), European Union (UE).

5. Results up to date

The participative integration of the management group with the different actors facilitates the elaboration of the following documents:

- Strategic Plan,
- Management Plan,
- elaboration of its internal regulation and its statutory setting.

Inside the institutional strengthening the following achievements are obtained:

- Integration of the commissions of productive, social, environmental and water resources management.
- Creation of platforms of debate and consult (cooperation agencies round tables and forums), where topics of relevance are discussed for the conservation of the basin.
- Internal training impelled by the group and with the support of the facilitating organizations, with the development of the topics of incidence, leadership, negotiation and calendar handling. Realization of exchanges with other experiences in river basin management (Costa Rica) and control of solid waste (Sabanagrande and Santa Rosa de Copan, Honduras).

For the organization of the local groups, the pattern of ACUGOLFO was taken as an example, being integrated in the following way:

- Local Management Group of the MAMSURPAZ (Association of Municipalities of the South of La Paz) integrated by the municipalities of Aguantequerique, Guajiquiro, Lauantequerique, Mercedes de Oriente, San Antonio del Norte and San Juan.
- Local Management Group of the MAFRON (Association of Border Municipalities of Valle) integrated by Alianza, Aramecina, Caridad and in the context the municipality from Goascoran gets associated to that Association, and the municipality of Langue is excluded because its outside of the basin.

- ASINORLU (Association Inter-municipal of Municipalities of the North of La Union, El Salvador) Concepción de Oriente, El Sauce, Leslique, Nueva Esparta, Poloros, in the context, Pasaquina is added to this Association.

Meetings of diverse participants from Civil Society of both countries, to elaborate and implement the Integrated Management Plan of the Basin was made; a guideline of actions to solve the environmental problems was carried out through workshops and several events.

Active participation in trainings related to incidence and public policies at municipal level and in the elaboration of the draft of municipal regulations³ directed to promote the solid wastes adequate management, socializing them in fifteen municipalities and achieving its approval in 14 of them.

6. Lessons Learned

Among the multiple lessons learned in the process of this experience, it is quoted:

- The participation of the facilitating institutions and cooperation agencies facilitates the establishment of the group of basins; however, they should give the leadership from the actions to the local governments and participants of the civil society.
- The continuity of the actions proposed in medium and long term in the process of the bi-national calendar, depends on the will and commitment of people's who integrate the Management Group, since they constantly demand their time to assure their implementation.
- The active involvement of all sectors and strategic participants of the different parts of society facilitates the integration and the adoption of the model of bi-national management in the conservation of the environment of the communities involved.
- The environmental education should be developed in strategic sectors of population so that a positive impact is generated. The work with schools, community boards, and water boards, among others, can generate a disseminating effect in the community.
- The support and constant technical accompaniment to the Management Group, as well as the strengthening of its organizational structure generates high coordination capacity, facilitating the obtaining of funding.
- The participative mechanisms that were used from the beginning of the process for the Conformation of the Management Group and the design of the Management Plan of the Basin, guarantees that the latest is taken as an operative instrument to be used by the local communities for the conservation of the natural resources.
- The participative planning of the actions to carry out allows the identification and implementation of consensus actions that facilitates the active and equal participation of its members.
- The active commitment and involvement of the management group members in the planning and implementation of the different activities, allows a constructive criticism evaluation of the events, as well as the construction of empathy between the diverse members of the group and its consolidation.

Potentialities of the Bi-National Management Group

The development of the Bi-national Management Group, the management of the bi-national river basin under the "bi-nationality" scheme, has a potential significance in matter of conservation of the water resources at Central America. This is a model to promote and to be acquired under the scheme of shared responsibility.

The Bi-national Management Group presents potentialities that indeed to become in:

- Dialogue space on environmental challenges and for the development of the basin.
- Coordination mechanism to discuss environmental topics with authorities of the Central Government.
- Promoter of public municipal policies on environmental and conservation topics of the basin.
- Funding efforts for the implementation of projects in benefit to the environmental development of the basin.

Challenges of the Bi-national Management Group

The management group is a recently created instance, but with wide vision of action to the future. However, it yet presents important challenges that should be overcome at level of their institutionalism. Among them:

³ The municipal regulations, refer to a local legal instrument approved by the Municipality and with effect in the jurisdiction of an entire municipality.

- ***The processes of Management of the Bi-national Management Group must be taken conjointly in order to be efficient***
To achieve the efficiency in the levels of planning, execution and monitoring of the programs is of high-priority for the Bi-national Management Group. Understanding and implementation of the agreements is required, without leaving aspects related with funding and legality of the processes, since all the scenarios are linked and many times implementation will depend on the capacity in getting political will for decision taking. For its strengthening, the members of the management group should develop integration strategies, policies and capacity of analysis for an agile process in decision taking; if not they should undergo training processes.
- ***Achieve public participation through voluntary actions***
The installed capacity must be evaluated to add to this process other communities and to continue with the consolidation of this initiative. The communication and negotiation agendas should be efficient, since linking other groups should allow the control of operative and financial aspects.
- ***Develop educational programs that contribute to the awareness of other participants in order to develop and to reaffirm values related to the protection of the basin as a responsibility of all***
These programs include awareness raising programs such as “Clean Community” prize, introduction of ecological issues in curricula of schools.
- ***Assure the continuity of the processes implementing strategic actions of short and medium term with the different participants of the civil society***
At the time of a governmental change and seeking that the actors that integrate the Management Group and that are part of the political scenario, don't interfere in the discontinuity, waste of time and the lack of follow up of the processes, models must be search to contemplate alternative actions that minimize the risk as:
 - Define and validate with the diverse actors of the civil society, a profile of the requirements that the potential candidates should gather to be members of the group.
 - Create strengthening mechanisms for civil society base organizations, for the recruitment of potential candidates that can substitute in any moment those that at the present time occupy directive positions, and once identified, they should participate in a training processes to develop competitions required by the project.
 - Search for alternatives in governance, to assure the continuity of people who have been vital in this process, so that they can integrate a consultant organ after their periods.
 - Integrate the topic of gender so that women participate in the directive positions, according to the internal regulation of the third principle of Dublin.
- ***Search the economic independence based on results obtained at administration level***
The results obtained at management level, incidence and preservation of the environment of the Goascoran River Basin must be supported by all cooperating agencies. Strategic actions must be programmed to contribute their capacity to obtain resources, whether human, technical, economical or institutional resources from the Municipal Associations so that the different actors favor the actions done until today in pro of the improvement of the basin.

Potential threats

The participants of this process have identified following threats:

- insufficient maintenance of the process, since is expensive,
- the operability of the group becomes more complex when enlarging the number of actors, and
- the absence of the central government's support and local governments in the processes that are wanted to be carry out.

7. Replication

The hydrographic composition of the countries that integrate the Central American is constituted in an ideal land to reproduce this experience, since there are 120 main basins and 23 of them are shared. Another interesting fact is that some of the most populated cities of the region are located in shared basins: Managua for example is part of the basin of the river San Juan, San Salvador in the basin of the Lempa River and Tegucigalpa in the basin of

the Choluteca River. In Central America territory, 65% of Belize and Guatemala is within shared hydrographic basins, in the case of El Salvador 62%, Honduras in 19%, Nicaragua around 35%, Costa Rica 34% and Panama around a 5%.

As a model of social integration for common problems

The establishment of the Bi-national Management Group is constituted in a model of community integration of the diverse participants of the civil society, facilitating institutions as a technical branch and external cooperation agencies of both countries that work towards a common objective: the conservation of the Goascoran basin.

As a coordination option for basin management

This experience validates that it is possible to bring closer organizations from the different sectors, around the same objective: the management of the basin and its natural resources, mainly the water resource.

As an innovative alternative in shared basins management

At the present time, the experiences of basin management are a result of individual management at the country level, that's why the conformation of the Bi-National Management Group is constituted as a model of shared management where the synergy between the populations of both countries is generated. A shared agenda is defined through common problem prioritization and the strategic canalization of human, technical and financial resources.

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