



SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME

Community action in environmental conservation in Renacimiento

Beneficiary: Asociación de Productores Agro Ecológicos La Amistad (ADPAELA)

Location: Piedra de Candela, Renacimiento, Chiriquí, Panamá

Contribution PPD: US\$ 19,422.00

In-kind cofinancing: US\$ 19,878.50

Project Duration: Jun 2013 – Feb 2015

Number of people served: 460

Focal Area: Biodiversity

Context

The communities of Piedra de Candela and Monte Lirio and the area of Jurutungo are situated in the district of Renacimiento by the border with Costa Rica. The area is mountainous and is located next to the National Park PILA (Parque Internacional de la Amistad), also classified as a World Heritage Site. People in this area are mainly dedicated to agriculture. A few landowners own big part of the land, while others count with small terrains around 2 hectares. There are around 300 permanent inhabitants in Piedra de Candela and 3500 in Monte Lirio as well as a floating population of mainly indigenous people who come to work in the area during the coffee harvest season. These two communities were chosen for the project because members of the association reside in the communities and could therefore involve other community-members more easily.

The temperature in this area of high-altitude tropics is around 15 degrees. The climate is just right to grow the famous geisha -coffee as well as several vegetables.

The area faces several environmental threats such as erosion, contamination, illegal hunting and extraction of plants in the National Park. There was also a plan to build a hydroelectric plant in the nearby river but the communities objected the project, which in the end was abandoned. Worried about the expanding plantations, logging and willing to conserve the rich biodiversity, The Asociación de productores agro ecológicos La Amistad, originally founded in 1999 and legally registered in 2006, presented a proposal to SGP about community management for conservation and enhancement of natural resources. Previously ADPAELA had received a planning grant of US\$2,000.00 in the beginning of 2013, which helped to further develop the project proposal and was then eventually followed by this project. ADPAELA has built alliances with other environmental organizations such as FINDICCEP (Fundación para el desarrollo integral, comunitario y conservación de los ecosistemas en Panamá), ANAM (Autoridad Nacional del Ambiente de Panamá) and ADATA (Alianza Para el Desarrollo Ambiental de Tierras Altas).

ADPAELA has a rustic cottage near the National Park La Amistad, which has been used to accommodate scientists, students and lately also casual visitors and tourists. Part of the project is also dedicated to improve the cabin in order to receive more visitors and develop rural tourism in the area as a way of bringing alternative income to the association as well as indirect benefits to the nearby communities.



Project objectives and key activities

The objective of the project was to support community action in promoting environmental conservation, protection and management of natural resources in La Amistad in the district of Renacimiento, more specifically in the communities of Piedra de Candela and Monte Lirio. Majority of project activities aimed to increase the local people's awareness about environmental issues and promote sustainability. One goal was to establish a plan of risk management and emergency response in the Parque Internacional de La Amistad as a measure of adaptation to climate change. The other goal was to improve the cabin infrastructure and its services in Jurutungo in order to increase the amount of investigation tourism and community-based tourism. Other activities included incrementing organic agriculture, conducting courses and workshops on first aid, biodiversity, sustainable tourism as well as use of geo-referencing equipment.

Environmental impact

The environmental impact of the project is central and significant. ADPAELA is originally an association dedicated to environmental conservation, especially focused in preserving biodiversity and conserving sources of water. It is not only important to protect the National Park but also the surrounding area. This project has raised people's environmental consciousness and therefore led to concrete actions in preserving and valuing the existing natural resources in the zone. Among others, ADPAELA has organized cleaning projects with the local schools and has been able to diminish the quantity of garbage in the area. Also the cultivation of organic crops will diminish the use of harmful substances.

Socio-Economic Impact

The project has been able to little by little improve livelihoods and increase the incomes within the association as well as in the communities. By developing further the community-based tourism project the incomes will become more stable in the future. The members of the association benefit directly according to their tasks during tourist visits and other members of the communities benefit indirectly for example by selling their products to the association as well as to the visitors. Receiving national and foreign visitors enables the interchange of ideas, which increases knowledge and social capital. The project activities and workshops have improved different skills, use of technology, knowledge and sustainable use of natural resources. The involvement of the community-members has been fundamental.

Policy Impact, Replication and Scaling up

This project was continuation of the previous planning grant founded by SGP. This kind of project can easily be replicated in any place dealing with issues of conservation and community-based tourism keeping in mind the special characteristics and needs of each place. In the case of Jurutungo the project could also be scaled up to establish a research center and an information center together with the cabin. There could be more cooperation with the environmental authorities of ANAM and the cabin could also serve as a patrol checkpoint for them for guarding the National Park La Amistad.



Lessons Learned

- This project has been an enormous lesson for the association in terms of managing funds
- It is important to involve the members of the association throughout the decision-making process even if outside technical assistance is needed.
- Distribution of responsibilities among the members of the association may be challenging due to multiple reasons.
- It is necessary to consult various opinions and references before financial planning that involves large investments of budget, time and staff.
- Climate events might be unexpected in this kind of a mountainous area, which must be taken into account when implementing the projects.
- It is vital to hold participatory monitoring meetings with all actors involved as well as the community at large in order to report on conflicts and obstacles encountered and to create joint solutions together.

