

SALVADORIAN ECOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

“SALVANATURA”

Dialogue Proposal:

**“EL IMPOSIBLE – BARRA DE SANTIAGO
DIALOGUE TABLE”**

San Salvador, El Salvador, October 2003

1. What was the problem and its context?

1.1 Introduction to the problem/issue

The notable deterioration of natural resources, the wrong management of this resources, the high unemployment rates and the low levels of environmental awareness have generated a situation in which the few and limited water resources available to supply the municipalities of South Ahuachapan have almost disappear.

The deforestation is directly linked to the conservation of water sources. Presently the deterioration of loading areas in the sub basins and micro basins is generating a quick decrease on water reserves, and the few ones that exist, are exploited with no regulations becoming not efficient sources for all the different uses.

Despite the efforts to protect loading areas, the laws for protection of natural resources are not suitable and that inconsistency in the politics of water and environmental protection cause that areas with high infiltration rates are developed as urban areas, at the same time some areas are reforested but not equivalently, a parallel effect is also the contradictory message given to the educational sector when the State grants exploitations and investments that affect directly water resources.

In general, it is necessary to promote a level of awareness among civil population to direct the protection of natural resources in South Ahuachapan., and also identify the legal mechanisms that would allow to implement regulations for the protection of water resources.

This effort has began with a group of local actors from the municipalities of San Francisco Menéndez, Jujutla, Guaymango and San Pedro Puxtla in the Ahuachapan department, in El Salvador, this group tries to increase sensibility on the civil population in terms of the environment and implement the existing legislation supported by experts on implementing it.

1.2 Background

In 1991, the Salvadorian Ecological Foundation “SALVANATURA”, signed a cooperation treaty with the Ministry of Agriculture MAG , in order to manage along with them the most important natural area in El Salvador, known as El Imposible National Park, this park is located in the municipalities of San Francisco Menéndez, Jujutla, Tacuba and Ataco.

For over 10 years, the Salvanatura team has made evident the changes in the resources that are currently part of the El Imposible-Barra Santiago river basin., it also has implemented actions in order to protect and create awareness among the population in terms of the environment.

Today, despite the protection and awareness efforts by different institutions working in the area, the environmental degradation and the unregulated use of resources continues, that is why community leaders, who understand the real situation of water resources, have exposed the need for changing the management process of water resources.

With this in mind, in 2003 was created a new structure within the framework of the project AGUA and UICN, this structure would work as a discussion table for the

environmental problems that affect the area, trying to find solutions where the legal aspect would play a decisive role.

This effort allowed to give more credibility to the processes of environmental protection by local actors, allowing a broader participation and guarantee water resources for future generations.

1.3 Socio-economic, ecological and political context

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

The economy in the municipalities of San Francisco Menadez, Jujutla, Guaymango and San Pedro Puxtla, is based mainly on agriculture and livestock production as well as a little commerce; the fact that the area counts with wide production areas has not translated in well being for thousands of inhabitants that work mainly in the production of basic grains and maintaining coffee plantations, that are some of the main incomes for the municipalities. This situation is directly linked to the high cost of the materials for agriculture, as well as the low prices in the national and international market of the products.

Up to today, the reduction of work offer in coffee plantations has been 46%, the lack of economic benefits for the production and sale of basic grains (corn, beans, little corn) gives these activities only of survival character, and makes evident a deep social crisis that increases delinquency, migration to urban centers, malnutrition, continuous destruction of natural resources and more. This critical situation in the Ahuachapan department puts it among one of the poorest departments in the country. The poverty level for instance, in the South Ahuchapan micro region is 69%, the illiteracy rate is 20-30%, this facts become even more complicated with the high index of population density which is about 280 inhabitants by square kilometer.

ECOLOGICAL

Deforestation

In El Salvador, the total extension of natural forests was reduce due to the introduction of coffee, cotton, sugar cane and livestock, (using biological diverse areas highly populated and diverse).

Presently, the natural forests have decreased to a 2% of the national area, including a large portion made of mangroves (salty forests) located in the margins of estuaries. If we add to that the coffee plantations that have other kinds of trees for shading, the forests extension would increase to a 12% of the national territory (one of the world's lowest).

The municipalities of the South Ahuchapan extension, have a moderated forest area which is incremented by the presence of the protected natural area. El Imposible, however, suffers a high degree of deforestation by the inhabitants of the rural areas, due to fuel demand. The unregulated increased of the urban frontier, confront us with intolerable rates of deforestation in natural areas and the extinction of mangroves.

Deforestation in the area has created low rates for reloading in the water stratum and high rates of flooding. The damage in the natural areas is not restricted only to hillsides, the

mangroves in coastal areas have very quickly reduced, endangering that way the fishing resources that has the country.

Erosion.

The geography and weather conditions in South Ahuachapan, plus the very pronounced hillsides and sever rain, guarantee a continuous erosion. Most of the agriculture is developed in hillsides susceptible to erosion, meaning that most of the lands are slops from 30 to 60 degrees.

The Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), estimates that 22% of land in not very pronounced hillsides is lost every year, 54% is lost in moderated hillsides and 83% in very pronounced hillsides, that means that from a quarter to a third of the land good for agriculture in the area is being affected by erosion. Most of the land susceptible to erosion is the superior layer of fertile soil that is transported to the ocean.

The forecasts regarding this situation. are not very encouraging, considering that a large part of the Jujutla, Guaymango and San pedro Puxtla area have a large portion of land dedicated to coffee, which is a product that is presently on crisis, and for most coffee producers the best alternative now a days is to sell their land and expand the urban frontier.

Water Resources.

In South Ahuchapan , the rainfall is between 1500 to 1800 mm a year, there is not a sever physical lack of water, however, a large percentage of the population is private of the resource due to the inappropriate management.

The constant need to expand the production areas (basic grains), and the poor or nonexistent profitability of the agriculture industry products like coffee and sugar cane (generating the sale of lands to establish urban centers), limits the yearly infiltration in the hydro stratums, creating a contrast in terms of water used every year for human consumption and an accumulated deficit that reduces the useful time of the hydro stratums.

In general, the river basins in El Salvador are deforested and severely degraded, the reserves collect a great amount of sediments

Water Quality.

The main sources of contamination in superficial water are the non treated sewage water, agrochemical substances and other types of agricultural and industrial waste, specially from the coffee, sugar mills and solid waste.

Dangerous Solid Waste.

In the municipalities of the South Ahuachapan area there are large quantities of solid waste, most of it organic material (50 to 80% of the obtained daily) in the urban areas. The solid waste disposal is done outdoors at open sky sites, usually in creeks where rain water runs.

The municipalities have been commanded by the Ministry of Environment, that by the year 2004 all disposal sites that function outdoor at open sky must be close. This has motivated the municipalities to look for alternative ways to integrally manage solid waste, for instance sanitary filling sites that can be manage in a sustainable way if two or more municipalities work together (micro region).

POLITIC

The process to decentralized state goods, has been the strategy used by the government, convinced that this would allow such goods to be closer and more accessible for the population. This situation is now taking place on the areas of electric energy and telephony, and the health and potable water areas are being considered and debated.

The focused on human resources in El Salvador, has been oriented to the creation of qualify laborers, forming technicians that end up working in factories including the clothing industries that are being established as a way to reduce unemployment.

The agriculture does not have a strong interest at state level, they have not established a rescue policy in order to diversify some sectors as an strategy that would allow to develop rural areas, which are the most vulnerable sector.

El Salvador has a constitutional mandate to preserve the environment and foment the rational use of natural resources. However, the large diversity in terms of legislation related with water resources, contributes with the confusion about actions and definition of responsibilities.

In general this actions take a contrary effect against the environment, since it suffers human pressure aiming to obtain economic resources to subsist.

1.4 Key Challenges and obstacles

- The dialogue table must be legally recognized and constituted, as a mechanism of local coordination, space where the actors from the river basin meet.
- Look and identify the local legislation that would allow to solve conflicts regarding water.
- Create an strategy to self finance the discussion table.
- Continue the efforts to train all members of the table about their institutional scopes on the subject of water.
- Support pilot projects focused on restoring degraded natural ecosystems, reduce the degraded systems, monitor and control the sources of water contamination and improve the access to water resources.

1.5 Organization (about the organization evolved in the process)

Name of the organization: Salvadorian Ecological Foundation, "SALVANATURA"

MISION

Contribute in the conservation and recuperation of the environment and the natural resources, to reach a level a sustainable development and increase the quality of life in El Salvador.

OBJECTIVES :

- Contribute to protect and recuperate natural areas in EL Salvador.
- Promote the conservation and recuperation of bio-diversity.
- Develop activities aim to protect and improve the water resource and propose alternatives for solid waste management.
- Promote a behavior change in the attitude of Salvadorian people towards the environment and natural resources, through environmental education.

Areas of action:

- Protected natural areas.

Through the direct management of El Imposible National Park, Salvanatura guarantees to protect and conserve its natural resources such as the Montecristo, Complejo los Volcanes and El Jocotal Lagoon parks and their resources.

- Bio diversity:

Salvanatura, constantly researches and monitors the biological diversity, contributing that way to scientific development of Flora and Fauna in El Salvador. Besides, it promotes changes in the coffee industry by introducing and promoting organic coffee under the certification stamp Rainforest Alliance.

- Water Conservation:

The organization actively works to protect and improve the water resource, introducing a new focus based on micro basin management in the Ahuchaban Department.

- Environmental Education:

The organization produces educational materials to stimulate and strengthen the capabilities of the population, in order to consolidate environmental awareness among the population that would translate into action.

- Sustainable Development:

Salvanatura promotes sustainable development in the communities where it has projects, promoting local organization, micro tourist companies, adult literacy, potable water supply, gender focus, trying to find understanding and conflict resolution.

2. How was the issue addressed?

2.1 Key strategies adopted to address the challenges

The well known exploitation and inappropriate use of resources in South Auchapan, made evident the need to create a process that would allow to gather information on the effects that humans have on the resources and the necessary mechanisms to face the

negative pressure on resources and humans. This situation resulted in the creation of “El Imposible – Barra de Santiago” discussion table in the year 2002; this effort was made in order to increase knowledge in the rural and urban populations, specially about environmental subjects, the proper use of water, environmental legislation, water cleaning, and more. Through the same effort, they tried to find solutions to conflicts created for the inappropriate use of water, specially in the areas of cattle production and irrigation, uncontrolled logging, and all kinds of social and environmental violations. To begin this effort, the next actions and strategies were implemented:

- a) Identify key actors: In this context, it was necessary to identify and classify the actors:
 - LOCAL ACTORS: Urban and rural community leadership who know the different social and environmental every day situations. Some of the participants are: member of the Community Development Association (ADECOS), members of the water management assemblies, cooperatives, and more.
 - LOCAL INSTITUTIONS: Governmental and Non Governmental organizations that try to impulse development processes in the municipalities of South Ahuachapan, among others: the NGO’s (Ecological Foundation from El Salvador, Salvadorian Ecological Union, World Vision), Government Institutions (Health Ministry, Education Ministry, Peace Court, National Civil Police, among others).
 - External Support Institutions: Institutions that support the social environmental processes and environmental legislation, they have regional headquarters and also in the capital city. (Ministry of the Environment, Environmental National Civil Police, General Republican Prosecutor’s Office on Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture (Natural resources and Wildlife National Program).
- b) Proposal and presentation of the Dialogue Table project. This process allowed to draw up key actors in order to propose alternative solutions to the constant social environmental problems through an inter institutional process, with the support and follow up from civil society, stating the need to conform a dialogue structure that would open a space to explain and expose concerns and propose their solutions.
- c) The follow up in this process confirmed the need to start a series of training sessions about environmental legislation, and follow up demands among other things.
- d) Exposition and training with specialist on legislation subjects.

In this effort and through some expositions the common leaders introduced the laws and treaties that support protection of natural resources
The environment, risk and drainage laws were introduced.; and the steps that must be followed to enforce such legislation were identified. This open space of

expositions and mechanisms to follow up, made evident for civil society and other actors that in fact there are conditions to initiate a program about sustainable use of natural resources, executed by all actors in a coordinated manner.

- e) Open spaces where environmental claims can be presented and also create awareness regarding generic subjects.

The El Imposible-Barra de Santiago discussion table, allowed to create a space where the present situation of natural resources could be exposed.

3. What were the major outcomes?

3.1 Key achievements

- Local actors approved the proposal for creating the structure known as a dialogue table.
- Diverse institutions involved in social and environmental development were integrated to the table, to participate and direct according to their specialty in the process.
- A level of awareness was achieved among local actors in terms of subjects related to environmental legislation.
- Draw up institutions. A common concern among different institutions was achieved, to the point of facilitating continuity to the dialogue table and contributing with resources and technical capacities which have been used to create awareness among local actors and follow up the problems identified at the discussion table.
- React towards claims stated by the environmental prosecutors and National Civil Police, overcoming that way differences among local actors regarding the inappropriate use of water. This actions have created a level of trust among local actors to the point that it is expected to increase the number of participants at the dialogue table.

3.2 Factors that led to success

- There is a good level of awareness among civil population (it exists and is strong) about the importance of water resources; this level has been achieved thanks to the efforts by different institutions present in the area by some years; this level has

allowed local actors to identify abuses committed against natural resources, which directly affect the loading areas and then water supply sources.

- The objectives of the institutions supporting the process, are focused on trying to find and strengthen local sustainable development, this process can not be brought to reality if the environment is not considered as a part of development. Water protection (quantity and quality) and the rest of natural resources are vital to achieve local sustainable development.

3.3 Short and longer term impact

Short Term

- Achieve credibility among local population, so the dialogue table can be seen as a space for protection and efficient management of water resources.
- Generate a space for permanent environmental awareness with locals from the El Imposible-Barra de Santiago basin.

Longer Term

- Enrich with new actors the dialogue table, that way the structure will formally and legally consolidate.
- Strengthen the dialogue table through local actors with expertise on environmental legislation and with capacity to resolve social environmental conflicts.
- Use the dialogue table as a mechanism to resolve water conflicts.

3.4 Key lessons

- The inter institutional effort has permitted to create a multi disciplinary vision to impulse the dialogue table.
- Local actors are the main source to generate a change, since they are part of the sector that has the biggest impact on the environment.
- It is necessary to count with the permanent participation of municipalities in all processes of the dialogue table, so they become real direct generators of change in the region.

4. Who is the contact for more detailed information?

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