



CASE STUDY: MAINSTREAMING INTEGRATED WATERSHED AND COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ON INDIGENOUS LANDS IN BELIZE



Project location:

Southern Toledo District, Belize, Central America

Partners and stakeholders:

The Sarstoon Temash Institute for Indigenous Management (SATIIM), EcoLogic Development Fund, National Garifuna Council, Q'eqchi Council of Belize, Toledo Alcaldes Association, and five indigenous communities, including: Barranco, Midway, Conejo Creek, Sunday Wood, and Crique Sarco.

Summary:

SATIIM started its watershed management work inside the protected area of the Sarstoon-Temash National Park, some 42,000 acres of forested wetlands along the Gulf of Honduras. An extensive baseline data set has been gathered by community residents working along side national and international experts, including assessments of marine and terrestrial ecosystems, animals, plants, soils, geology, and hydrology as well as the socio-economic situation and the cultural links of the indigenous communities to the land and natural resources. From there, a management plan was developed that includes the holistic management of the region's watersheds, including reforestation, rehabilitation of biological corridors, and the development of economically viable livelihood alternatives for local residents. The reforestation and livelihood alternative programs are currently underway.



Sarstoon Temash National Park



Description of actions taken:

- Community agro-forestry program initiated (100 acres organic cacao).
- Reforestation program initiated (1,000 native hardwoods planted in 2005).
- Institutional strengthening for local authorities (offices, training).
- Agricultural land use mapping underway (milpas and matambres).
- Land tenure security effort underway (village boundary demarcation, advocacy).

Outcomes and achievements:

- Two watersheds mapped with threats identified (Sarstoon and Temash).
- Five indigenous communities involved in conservation activities.
- Development of participatory strategies for watershed management for Sarstoon and Temash.
- Village boundary maps developed for four communities.

Long term plans:

SATIIM's long term plans call for the development of comprehensive community-based watershed management programs as pilot projects for the Toledo district, and involve:

- The resolution of indigenous land claims to provide incentives and ownership for conservation and sustainable use at the community level.
- Intensive capacity building efforts to strengthen community-based natural resource management institutions at the community level.

Utility to IWRM practitioners:

- Innovative model of community participation in natural resource management, applicable to low income rural and indigenous stakeholders.
- Successful combination of traditional indigenous knowledge and scientific research.
- Balancing local subsistence resource use with conservation.
- Innovative multicultural (Maya Q'eqchi and Garifuna) alliance of communities.

Replicability:

SATIIM's work, while innovative, has been designed with replication in mind. Extensive documentation has been undertaken of the major strategies and activities implemented, including the recent work in demarcation and mapping village boundaries with GIS technology, fostering easy replication with other indigenous communities within the Toledo District and beyond.

Impact on policies at the national/regional level:

SATIIM has directly impacted national policy through the development of the management plan for the STNP, including:

- Showing that indigenous traditional knowledge and management regimes have contributed significantly to biodiversity conservation in Belize.
- Demonstrating that indigenous communities can directly manage protected areas.
- Establishing community rights to sustainably use natural resources inside a national park.

SATIIM, along with other protected area managers and environmental organizations in Toledo, has engaged the government of Belize through the Toledo Healthy Forest Initiative Taskforce to:

- Sensitize policy makers to community forestry issues and perspectives through exchanges with Guatemala.
- Develop a project to pilot community based sustainable forest management models at the district level as an alternative to current patterns of unsustainable harvesting.
- Developing a sustainable forestry policy paper for discussion at the Cabinet and Parliamentary levels.

Lessons learned:

- Community forestry, multiple eco/ethno-tourism attraction and services, and craft production and marketing are the major potentials for the conservation of the park while reducing poverty in the buffer zone indigenous communities.
- The traditional knowledge of village elders regarding forest product uses, medicinal plants, and the traditional management practices of the Q'eqchi Maya and Garifuna peoples have played an important role in successful biodiversity conservation.
- The extensive training of young people in the villages has creates an openness to visitors, researchers and their themes.



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