



Top 10 Kyoto Prize Finalist



CASE STUDY: TRADITIONAL FOREST AND NATURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP OF THE MAYA



Project location:

Totonicapán, Guatemala, Central America

Partners and stakeholders:

Asociación Ulew Che' Ja' and more than 50,000 local community members that work on a volunteer basis, EcoLogic Development Fund, Instituto Nacional de Bosque, PRISMA, ACICAFOC, Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo del Gobierno de Guatemala, US State Department, NOAA, US Forest Service, Ford Foundation, Inter American Foundation, Global Greengrants Fund, Fondo Nacional para la Conservación de la Naturaleza (FONACON), Communitas Foundation.

Summary:

Ulew Che' Ja' promotes community participation in the management of communal forest resources, implements reforestation and environmental education programs and aims to halt the advance of the agricultural frontier.



This project aims to reinforce customary environmental stewardship practices and introduce new approaches that respond to emerging threats to the forests and its resources, including the implementation of payment for ecosystem services provided at the local level.



Description of actions taken:

EcoLogic and Ulew Che' Ja' are working together to implement a reforestation project. These reforestation efforts focus on protecting water sources in vulnerable and degraded areas that are adjacent to old growth forests. In addition, this project uses the sale of additional tree seedlings as a means to create economic self-sufficiency to maintain a tree nursery on a long-term basis.

Actions taken include:

- Bi-monthly meetings of the General Assembly with representatives from the 40 water committees to discuss progress, goals, and unmet needs.
- Volunteer work done in the nursery and in reforestation by 1,906 representatives from 40 water committees from 24 communities.
- The cultivation of 103,165 seedlings in the community nursery.
- The first phase of reforestation completed in 19 degraded areas with 23,000 trees of degraded areas.
- Intensive training for 171 community volunteers that includes reforestation, nursery management, the tree life cycle, institutional development, and the concept and valuation of ecosystem services.
- 250,000 seedlings in the production process to reforest 275 acres in 2006 and 2007.

Outcomes and achievements:

- Active protection of a large expanse of communal forests (about 51,901 acres that compose San Miguel de los Altos Municipal Park).
- Annual campaigns to stop the illegal logging of the highly prized and endangered Pino Bete used in Guatemala for Christmas celebrations. Last year, Ulew Che' Ja' members helped reduce the number of illegal logging incursions from 150 to 5.
- The active protection of 1,200 springs that serve over 100,000 people.
- Maintenance of potable water supplies for 48 villages.

Utility to IWRM Practitioners:

This project aims to reinforce customary environmental stewardship practices and introduce new approaches that respond to emerging threats to the forests and its resources, including the implementation of payment for ecosystem services provided at the local level. This project is consistent with good governance in that it responds to community-defined priorities, while informing policy at the municipal and national level.

Replicability:

EcoLogic's work with Ulew Che' Ja' in Guatemala is, in essence, a replication of our work in the Pico Bonito National Park, Honduras. The work is modified to meet the communities' needs, priorities, and culture. EcoLogic also seeks to replicate this proven methodology with its other partners in Central America and Mexico, among them, PROLANSTATE, and the communities around the nearby Jeannette Kawas National Park, one of the largest and most important coastal marine protected areas in Honduras.

Impact on policies at the national/regional level:

- **Raising awareness of the population:** A crucial part of the entire process is raising awareness of those populations involved in the project. Community education focuses on resource conservation and the implications for quality of life improvement.
- **Lobbying of local authorities:** This project is consistent with good governance in that it responds to community-defined priorities, while informing policy at the municipal and national level.

Lessons learned:

- Deforestation and the environmental damage to the watersheds in Totonicapán are principally caused by a lack of environmental awareness and the existing demand of products extracted from the communal forest (firewood and other woods).
- Ulew Che' Ja's highly participatory organizational structure results in organizational priorities and projects that reflect community-defined needs.
- Ulew Che' Ja' is effective and a model for the region in part due to the dynamics of voluntary participation of the people.



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