



Community-Based Management of Environmental Challenges in Latin America

Newsletter nº2. January 2013

FIRST YEAR OF THE PROJECT: COMET - LA

COMET-LA's first year of operation has been dedicated to the project's implementation, mainly to having a better understanding of the territories and of the stakeholders involved, as well as making progress in the characterization of the different socio-ecological systems.

With this objective, each of the Latin American teams began field work with the pertinent communities, culminating in late August with a stay in the field of representatives of all COMET-LA partners. The visits served to disseminate the project among the inhabitants of each area and also for researchers of COMET-LA to obtain a real vision of the communities in which they work. Several meetings at different levels were organized with local stakeholders to discuss the project and to get a better understanding on the local vision of the COMET-LA aims.

The project thereby started to shape the 'learning arena' in which local and scientific knowledge is exchanged, which forms the conceptual basis of the project. In this way, researchers will be able to adapt their research to the needs of local communities. These will therefore have access to a knowledge tailored to their needs and useful for their management. The field researchers and civil society organizations working together has been very much appreciated by all and has very fruitful results.

After these first months of fieldwork, teams of Colombia (PUJ-CCC), Mexico (UNAM-ERA) and Argentina (IADO-UNS-AQM) wrote the first deliverable. This includes the views of stakeholders on the characterization of each one of its socio-ecological systems (the details can be seen in the following pages). The UCO team, meanwhile, supported the project methodologies for characterizing socio-ecological systems at the local level. NILU and the Spanish Committee of IUCN have been responsible for the work of publishing and disseminating the project at different levels and JHI team will begin its work in the field next year.

In mid-February 2013 the COMET LA team of researchers will meet in Cordoba in order to share achievements and to make decisions about how to address the challenges that might rise during the second year of the project. This will include a prospective analysis to identify the strengths and weaknesses of socio-ecological systems in the territories that COMET-LA and validate the usefulness of methodologies to characterize socio-ecological systems with local communities and stakeholders.

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COMET-LA TEAM'S FIELD WORK IN LATINOAMERICA

Santiago Comaltepec - Mexico

In August 2012, the team project visited the community of Comaltepec in order to conduct a series of participatory workshops with the inhabitants of the three main towns in the area, Santiago Comaltepec, La Esperanza and Soyolapan. Comaltepec is located in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Mexico. These workshops helped to gather the information needed on the vision that locals have about their socio-ecological system. UNAM and ERA, the local and national research partners, were already investigating in the community.

Comaltepec is characterized by having an endogenous social structure, unlike the governmental structure established in the rest of Mexico. This is a very well-structured community with high social capital whose inhabitants acquire an unwavering commitment to their neighbours, alternately occupying leading positions of responsibility within the community. In addition, they are surrounded by more than 18,000 hectares of cloud and temperate forest administered under a communal property regime, under which they all take responsibility for the sustainability of their territory, through well-defined systems of rules. Through their system of governance, they can ensure levels of production sufficient for home consumption and surplus for the market, meanwhile ensuring access to basic health, education, security and justice.

Some of the changes detected by the population in recent decades are climate variability, especially in changing rainfall patterns, vegetation, wildlife and crop yields. Similarly, villagers insisted on the need to return to agriculture as a way of living and ensuring self-sufficiency in the community, as well as seeking for new sources of employment therefore stemming migration to other cities in Mexico and to the U.S.A.

(More information)



Download Stakeholder's vision on Social-Ecological-System in the case study of Mexico

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COMET-LA TEAM'S FIELD WORK IN LATINOAMERICA

Bajo Calima and Alto-Medio Dagua Black Community Councils COLOMBIA



The COMET-LA team also visited the municipality of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca, Colombia, in order to see *in situ* the research developed by the Colombian partners: the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and the Community Councils Black Communities of the Lower Rio Calima and the Upper and Middle Dagua.

During this visit they participated in workshops with people of both Councils and other major stakeholders in the territory, such as authorities, universities and academic centers or civic organizations. Once more, the main objective was to identify and systematize the vision that these actors have of their territory and identify main strengths and weaknesses detected in managing their biodiversity and water resources.

The areas have abundant and rich natural resources and the population shows a great awareness of the need to preserve these. However, they also recognize that they are facing threats that may endanger biodiversity and cause contamination and pollution of water sources in their territory. Among these threats, they highlight the presence of illicit crops and mining activities in the river basin of Calima Dagua, causing pollution with heavy metals like mercury and the alteration of the river flow.

(More information)



[Download Stakeholder's vision on Social-Ecological-System in the case study of Colombia](#)

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COMET-LA TEAM'S FIELD WORK IN LATINOAMERICA

Bahia Blanca Estuary - Argentina

In late August, the project team visited the selected area's towns and communities in Argentina, meeting with decision makers from both, social and civil organizations of Punta Alta, Pehuen Co, Villa del Mar, Engineer White General Cerri, Coronel Rosales and Monte Hermoso.

COMET LA researchers worked together with the people and found out about their concerns. Among other issues, they mentioned the decline in fish catch or the change in the direction and intensity of winds.

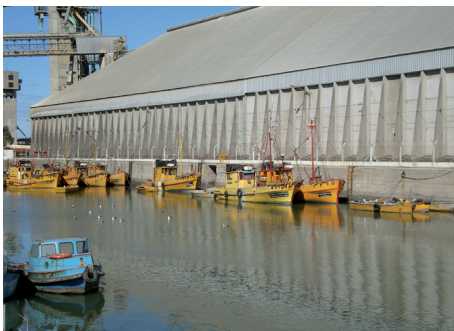
The latter is of concerns because it increases the risk to fishermen, especially those that have to fish further from shore and are therefore the most exposed. In addition, residents expressed their concern over the increase in coastal erosion and the potential danger of a new project aimed at dredging the estuary in order to extend the depth of the harbour. This would severely alter the estuarine ecosystem affecting the food chain.

In relation to coastal erosion, residents expressed their fear that this will affect the paleontological Pehuen Co and Monte Hermoso natural Park, where there are traces of Megatherium over 12,000 years old and human traces over 7,000 years old.

The authorities of the municipalities of Monte Hermoso and Coronel Rosales have declared of municipal interest the COMET-LA project.

Both municipalities are part of the study area in Argentina.

(More information)



Download Stakeholder's vision on Social-Ecological-System in the case study of Argentina



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INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF COMET-LA

The V World Conservation Congress of IUCN adopted three proposals submitted under the project COMET-LA

Three main priorities, from the selected case studies, have been approved in the V World Congress of Conservation, held in Jeju, South Korea, from the 6th to the 15th of September 2012.

For Colombia, the proposal calls for further strengthening of the autonomy of Black Communities to enable the sustainable management of natural resources, especially those that are non-renewable and lie underground, as mining resources was emphasized. [Read more](#)

For Mexico, the proposal calls for the co-management of natural areas in the country and the establishment of specific measures for this. [Read more](#)

Finally, for the Argentine case the proposal concerns the “Integrated water resources management (MIRI) approach on the estuary of Bahia Blanca, Argentina”, and favours the protection of the wetland and the coast of Bahia Blanca, while calling for an impact evaluation report on the potential environmental damage of the mega project. [Read more](#)

The Spanish Committee of IUCN, with the support of Spanish and Latin American members of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, promoted and defended these proposals during the Congress.

The publication: International Innovation disseminates the project

The prestigious journal International Innovation has three pages dedicated to the dissemination of the project COMET-LA. This magazine is considered one of the world’s leading sources in scientific, technological and research.

To read the full article dedicated to COMET-LA, click on the image. For more information on this publication, please visit www.researchmedia.eu



Lessons from Latin America

Climate change is affecting the day-to-day lives of many people around the world. COMET-LA is an innovative knowledge-sharing platform which aims to consolidate global and local issues and facilitate sustainable responses to this environmental crisis, with collaboration and communication at its core

THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE IS BECOMING DIFFICULT TO IGNORE AND COMMUNITY BASED SOLUTIONS ARE BEING EXPLORED TO MANAGE THESE CHALLENGES.

COMET-LA is a project of the COMET network, managed by the Spanish Committee of IUCN, with the support of the Spanish Government, the Spanish Ministry of Environment and the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The project is a key element in the development of the COMET network in Latin America, and has been implemented in several countries, including Colombia, Mexico, and Argentina. The project aims to consolidate global and local issues and facilitate sustainable responses to this environmental crisis, with collaboration and communication at its core.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION
At this early stage, dialogue and the collaboration among various local representatives of the network will be able to communicate effectively with each other.

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK
Local networks are the main objective of COMET-LA. The project aims to build a network of local representatives of the network, who will be able to share their experiences and expertise with other local communities. This network will be a key element in the development of the COMET network in Latin America, and will facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience between different communities.

INTERNATIONAL INNOVATION
The project aims to disseminate the results of the project to the international community, through the publication of the project's findings in the journal International Innovation.

The second case study is located in Mexico and focuses on the water and soil resources of the state of Chiapas. The state of Chiapas is one of the poorest states in Mexico, and is characterized by its high levels of poverty and illiteracy. The project aims to improve the water and soil resources of the state of Chiapas, and to improve the living conditions of the population of the state of Chiapas. The project aims to improve the water and soil resources of the state of Chiapas, and to improve the living conditions of the population of the state of Chiapas. The project aims to improve the water and soil resources of the state of Chiapas, and to improve the living conditions of the population of the state of Chiapas.

THE SOCIAL AND RURAL CONTEXT OF THE CASE STUDY
The case study is located in the state of Chiapas, Mexico, and focuses on the water and soil resources of the state of Chiapas. The state of Chiapas is one of the poorest states in Mexico, and is characterized by its high levels of poverty and illiteracy. The project aims to improve the water and soil resources of the state of Chiapas, and to improve the living conditions of the population of the state of Chiapas.

RESEARCHERS FROM THE NETWORK AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN COLLABORATION
The project aims to disseminate the results of the project to the international community, through the publication of the project's findings in the journal International Innovation.



INTELLIGENCE
COMET-LA
COMMUNITY-BASED MANAGEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN LATIN AMERICA
OBJECTIVES
To identify sustainable community based practices for the management of natural resources that could be used to address social-environmental systems in the context of climate change and increasing competition for the use of these areas.
RESULTS
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INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF COMET-LA

Participation and dissemination of COMET-LA in conferences

Berlin Conference on the Human

Dimensions of Global Environmental Change

Maria del Mar Delgado, project coordinator, Olexandr Nekhay and M^a José Ambrosio-Albala, all from the University of Cordoba (Spain), presented the project COMET-LA at the Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change, within the panel dedicated to the importance of local knowledge in global change scenarios. The conference was held in October 2012 in Berlin.

National Congress of Environment (CONAMA-Spain)

The COMET-LA was present at the XI National Congress of Environment in Spain –CONAMA– as the Spanish Committee of IUCN developed a technical communication report “Community management of environmental challenges in Latin America”, which can be downloaded at this [link](#). CONAMA is one of three most important conferences in Spain, which has had over 7000 participants.

Workshops about scenario-building

Carlos Galan-Diaz and Kerry Waylen (JHI) have undergone training and are building their skills in scenario-building. Kerry Waylen attended a workshop linked to ESPA (who work on many similar topics to COMET-LA- see www.espa.ac.uk) whilst Carlos participated in a scenario planning workshop linked to EPIC (the Scottish Government’s Centre of Expertise on Animal Disease Outbreaks).

Ecosummit

The COMET LA team had 2 submissions accepted for the EcoSummit 2012 conference in Columbus Ohio, USA (30 Sept-05 October). The theme of the conference “Ecological Sustainability, Restoring the Planet’s Ecosystem Services” was an ideal showcase for the COMET LA project. The first submission was for an oral presentation by M. Mar Delgado Serrano (University of Cordoba) and Alice NEWTON (NILU-Center of Ecology and Economics) entitled “Community-based Management of Environmental Challenges in Latin America” that presented the concept of the COMET LA project. The second accepted abstract was for a poster detailing with technical aspects of project management “Agile for projects” submitted by Mike Kobernus and Alice Newton (NILU).

The COMET LA project was also disseminated at a NKGCF-ESSP-ISSC-ICSU joint workshop in Berlin, at the PLANET UNDER PRESSURE conference in London and the ECSA 50 conference in Venice.

Meeting with fishermen from the Tirúa River Estuary

Gerardo Perillo met with fishermen from the Tirúa River estuary (Chile) with whom he shared the experience of COMET-LA. They also expressed their experience and problems associated with the existing design of the breakwaters, so that their problems were related to those discussed in the study area of Argentina.

GLEON

Cintia Piccolo, IADO-CONICET, presented the project COMET-LA in a panel discussion at the 14th meeting of GLEON (Global Lake Ecological Observatory Network) Mulranny (Ireland) that she attended as a guest panellist (October 2012).

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FIELD MONITORING

Meetings with local agents in Mexico, Colombia and Argentina

During the last six months, several workshops at the local level have been conducted and meetings with local actors, stakeholders, journalists and decision-makers in the three countries. During these meetings the vision on problems was treated in more depth, opportunities and strengths of communities to confront the challenges presented by climate change were also dealt with.

In addition, Argentina's team participated in the second workshop on "Adaptation to Climate Change in South America", an interdisciplinary program at the University of Buenos Aires on Climate Change (PIUBACC) in October 2012. A poster was presented: "Perception of Climate Change and potential adaptation in Bahía Blanca Estuary" by Silvia London, Mara Rojas, Marina Recalde and Mariana Zilio.

Furthermore, the project has been presented at various schools and institutes through lectures, outings on environmental interpretation and presentations. The inclusion of young people is considered vital for the project, so there will be a drawing contest in March-April 2013 to engage youth and gather information about how they feel about environmental issues.



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ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

- During the coming months, the country teams will conduct further workshops to continue gathering information and discussion on the results obtained so far in the SWOT analysis, the problem trees and the view of the stakeholders. The researchers will begin to look for the social and environmental variables that affect the sustainability of the communities.
- From 12 to 14 February, the COMET-LA team will hold a coordination meeting in Cordoba. Then, COMET-LA team will visit some sustainable initiatives and analyse Socio Ecological Systems in Southern of Portugal.
- March-April: a drawing competition will be held for schoolchildren. These months were chosen because they fit into the school calendars of the three countries.
- From 1 to July 7, 2013: second team technical visit to Argentina COMET-LA
- From 8 to 14 July 2013: second team technical visit to Colombia COMET-LA
- From 15 to 21 July 2013: second team technical visit COMET-LA to Mexico

Calendars COMET-LA to spread among the local population and other stakeholders



In order to give greater visibility to the project and its activities, the project has published calendars with information on COMET-LA activities. These will be distributed between the local population and the project stakeholders. Thus, they will have information regarding the project activities available throughout the year. This material has been published in the three languages of the project: Spanish, English and Portuguese.