

NARRATIVE REPORT

PROJECT YAHUARCACA – P 1308

1st PHASE. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of the Tikuna people as an input for social wellbeing and sustainable nature and resource management of the riverine landscape in the Colombian Amazon.

EXECUTED BETWEEN JUNE 2013 AND APRIL 2014



Illustration about the relation between the floodplain forest and indigenous communities. By William Harvey Ahue, teener from the community San Juan de los Parentes and winner of the drawing contest. 2013.

MANDIOCA



Fundación
GRUPO PROA



UNIVERSIDAD
NACIONAL
DE COLOMBIA
SEDE AMAZONIA

The Netherlands, Schipluiden, May 17th 2014

Executed by:

Stichting Mandioca (ANBI)
Fundación GRUPO PROA (Colombia)

In collaboration with:

Asociación Intercomunitaria Painü
Universidad Nacional de Colombia (UNAL) – Sede Amazonas

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PROJECT INFORMATION

Registration number	P1308
Name organization	Stichting Mandioca
Project title	Project Yahuaraca
	Planned duration: Jul 2013 – Feb 2014
Project duration	Actual planning: Jun 2013 – Apr 2014

1. SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

The overall objective of this project is to contribute to: 1) recover and revitalize traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and 2) use it effectively in improving social wellbeing and promoting sustainable nature and resource management of the floodplain forests. Hence, keeping the ecosystems integrity and guaranteeing biodiversity, food availability, and other ecosystem services for actual and future generations.

The first phase consisted of a so called readiness phase in which the proposal was presented and discussed with communities and stakeholders in order to consolidate and articulate it and besides to create trustful relationships and alliances with governmental authorities and institutes among which with the ecotourism organization Asociación Intercomunitaria Painü (hereinafter referred to as Painü) and the National University of Colombia – Amazonía (UNAL). Ten communities, divided over two sectors (sector 1 Yahuaraca, sector 2 Tarapoto) participated directly in carrying out fieldwork activities in order to collect traditional ecological knowledge and to formulate strategies on how to communicate and teach this knowledge to their children. Simultaneously, two indigenous associations (AZCAITA¹ and ATICOYA²) who work on their own education system for their communities were supported in content and process. Additionally, Painü received one-to-one technical assistance in a realistic and practical way without creating dependency.

They have booked great successes and have demonstrated that ecotourism has a great potential in the area concerning sustainable land use, nature and resource management, environmental education and generating income. Overall, the execution of the first phase of the project went very well and intended outcomes have been achieved.

2. NATURE CONSERVATION AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

This project makes part of an ongoing process in the Yahuaraca lake area on community-based sustainable (co)management development projects and researches which started around 8 years ago by the communities, UNAL-Amazonas, Tropenbos International-Colombia, and governmental authorities among others. Some of these results so far are:

- Interinstitutional collaboration between research institutes and governmental authorities.
- Community-based fishery management organization Tika consisting of 7 communities.
- Community-based ecotourism organization Painü.
- Scientific and partly traditional knowledge on fishery, limnology, land use and nature management; and social-environmental history.
- Recommendations and cartographic input for plans and policies for governmental authorities derived from participatory methodologies.

¹ AZCAITA - Asociación Zonal de Consejo de Autoridades Indígenas de Tradición Autóctona

² ATICOYA - Asociación de Autoridades Indígenas del Resguardo Tikuna Cocama y Yagua

One of the project's focuses is about bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge. About gathering valuable information about complex ecosystems and make it useful for both communities and other stakeholders.

NATURE CONSERVATION. The results of this project so far are the recovery and initiating process to revitalize traditional ecological knowledge. The type of information we have gathered is about: the ecological relations between the vegetation, fish, birds, insects, and other fauna and people; health and nutrition; ecological cycles related to meteorology and astrology; cultural events; tradition and management principles.

But also the recognition and basic understanding of the relevance of this knowledge among indigenous authorities (who work on a new education model) and governmental institutes. On short term results will serve as an input for a project on global change of the university. On longer term results will be integrated in plans and policies. Additionally, Painü has yet demonstrated to be a viable community-based indigenous organization which aspires to work according the principles of sustainability.

LOCAL POPULATION. The developments and participatory methods used throughout the implementation of the 1st phase converted the involved communities into decision makers about how the education of their children will look like in the nearby future. The concept of the Modelo de Educación which AZCAITA is developing is about teaching indigenous principles, traditions, territory and ecological knowledge in combination with common education. People in the communities told us about the importance of this knowledge. Without a proper education indigenous people suffer of a loss of cultural identity and cause a lot of social and ecological problems. Traditional principles are very much related to ecological sustainability.

Painü has demonstrated during the 1st phase to be a key figure in educating and raising awareness about sustainable land use and nature conservation among their children, youngsters but also adults. But also among children and people from Leticia, Colombia and elsewhere from the world. Additionally, the active members and their families have also experienced and demonstrated that these touristic and educative activities have a serious potential to generate a moderate income. And even the communities receive a small contribution per visitor.

3. PROJECT SUCCESSES

ACCOMPANYING PAINÜ

When formed, Painü was left alone in the deep without knowing how to swim, resulting in internal conflicts and other bottlenecks keeping them from building up their organization. Not wanting Painü to perish we decided together with its motivated members to let them be part of this project - as partner and beneficiary party by collaborating and meanwhile getting one-to-one technical assistance in a realistic and practical way without creating dependency. Throughout the 1st phase this approach has borne fruits. At their own pace, good results have been achieved and future prospects are positive. Furthermore they have played a pioneering role in designing and developing activities to use TEK in a practical educative way.

PAINÜ MEMBERS IN THE PROJECT TEAM

The integration of two board members of Painü (Ángel and Elkin) into the project team, has also been an effective decision. It guaranteed a constant communication with Painü and facilitated the process of strengthening the use of TEK within their organization. Namely, they were the ones who practically did the fieldwork (field surveys, interviews etc.) and learnt a lot about their territory, flora and fauna and their ancestors' cosmovision. Knowledge which they verbally and in writing taught and exchanged with the other members during e.g. field trips with tourists and meetings. They were so to speak the connection between the elderly, leaders, and youth.

And besides, our egalitarian principles within the project team, with equal responsibilities and weekly evaluations and reflections were the pillars of the project. Because of the positive results so far, we have jointly decided to continue this collaboration and aftercare in the following project phases.

TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AS AN INPUT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

To achieve recognition and a better understanding of TEK and its relevance concerning nature management and well-being, interim results and recommendations based on TEK were presented and shared with governmental institutions and indigenous organizations. It resulted in a mutual information exchange and integration of TEK in: the Modelo de Educación Propia of AZCAITA, local management and development plans, and research and project proposals within the research group of Limnology - National University of Colombia (UNAL) in Leticia.



Local operator Ángel Fernández during a rainy field survey in the Yahuaraca lake area in order to identify trees and other vegetation. February, 2014.

INTERINSTITUTIONAL ARTICULATION & COLLABORATION

With modesty it is worth mentioning the efforts we took to articulate the proposal with the indigenous and (non)governmental perspectives, policies and projections. Besides this process it gave us the opportunity to adjust and improve the proposal it also facilitated little by little confidence and communication and resulted in fruitful collaborations and alliances as was planned from the outset.

YAHUARCACA AND TARAPOTO

Working and building up relationships with communities and other institutes in two different areas has been a challenge but was definitely worth it. The two areas are separated 80 km but have similar processes in fishery management, recovery of traditional knowledge, and education among others. It facilitated the project a regional projection and coverage.

REMOTE ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT

Although the project team is not completely present in the project area between the 1st and 2nd phase of the project, we have agreed to continue supporting Painü. On a regularly base we have contact by telephone and email. Very nice about José the chairman and Elkin, is that they are not afraid or too proud to ask for support when they are expected to hand in e.g. a quotation and proposals for educative group field trip or with tourists.

Another great compromise, as described before, is that during the bridging period between the 1st and 2nd phase of the project; Ángel and Elkin continue collecting specific data on TEK on a voluntary base. Both of them continue to be welcome to the laboratory of Limnology (UNAL) where they can use a computer to process data or for internet access.

4. PROBLEMS

The problems and/or difficulties we have experienced and/or observed during the implementation of the 1st phase are described per subjects and are followed by the key lessons learnt from the experienced difficulties. But first some general key lessons we have learnt.

GENERAL KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- It is important to take sufficient time to present, discuss, and adjust the proposal. Likewise the interinstitutional articulation. Moments of reflection and self-evaluations during the implementation of the project are also one of the keys to success. It allows the team and its members to adjust themselves and specific project elements. It increases the probability to achieve better results.
- The chronogram is more like a guideline. What really determines the field work activities is the weather and the time availability and willingness of people to collaborate. Flexibility determines the success of field surveys and workshops.
- A constant regular communication with the people and communities is essential. Regular visits are much more significant than agreements on paper.
- Integrating TEK into education requires long-term efforts. Pilot activities play a major role to find out what works and what not.

TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

The act of working with traditional ecological knowledge of the indigenous people is not something straightforward. It is complex and it is a delicate subject within many communities. It is a challenge to avoid common errors made in collecting, defining, understanding, interpreting, and integrating this kind of knowledge in e.g. school curricula and contemporary resource and nature management. Not that we have obtained different results than expected, it is just important to mention that we had to find our way to really get into this complex subject and how to work with it and how to work with the people.

Besides the complexity of traditional knowledge, there are many cases in which indigenous people feel being fooled or even robbed by researchers and project developers who work in this topic. According to villagers many researchers use traditional knowledge only for their own interest. There is little or no communication at all once field activities are done, and less much result lead to tangible or financial benefits for the community.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- To work with traditional knowledge it is important to include people from your target group into the project team. A certain amount of responsibilities and independency in carrying out field activities is significant. Of course guidance, support and direct contact with the communities is very important. It facilitates confidence, better results and stimulates a mutual learning process among team members.
- The mindset of the villagers demonstrates that working with traditional knowledge is a delicate subject. So also in this case a thoughtful and cautious approach is very important and besides making false promises towards the villagers should be avoided at any time.
- Throughout the decades several investigations and projects have been conducted over three countries (Colombia, Peru and Brazil). A comprehensive literature study avoids double work. The fieldwork activities serve to collect 'new' information to verify and complement.

EDUCATION AND INTEGRATION OF TEK

In Colombia indigenous people have the right and liberty to develop their own education model according to their principles and knowledge in combination with the curriculum developed by the state. Despite of potential financial resources from the government, the process itself is very difficult for a wide range of reasons having to do with organization and knowledge capacities. But on top of that in case of AZCAITA, instead of dealing with one or two indigenous ethnicities, they have many since Leticia is a city of migration: many people from all over Colombia including indigenous have come there to escape from conflict areas elsewhere among others. So they have to deal with many different opinions, languages, cosmovisions, and knowledge. The process is slow and difficult and perhaps will never come to an end.

An organization like AZCAITA needs guidance. For that reason we decided to collaborate directly to their project, even though this was not according plan. What we attempted to achieve with our support was to not stick around in a vicious circle of talking and discussing about the importance of traditional knowledge. But to be much more concrete in what they want their children need to learn and to materialize ideas.

KEY LESSON LEARNT.

- On one hand our direct support to AZCAITA got us more focused on education and increased the possibilities to integrate TEK in local schools, but on the other hand we have also learnt to not fully depend on the so called formal education system. In order to transfer knowledge and raise awareness informal education initiatives like Painü and other independent organizations play a major role by offering tailor made excursions for their children.

ACCOMPANYING PAINÜ

Just right after their constitution in august 2012 the organization was left alone and did not had any guidance. Meanwhile it suffered from a lack of: good leadership, management, active participation of members resulting in serious legitimate problems with governmental institutes, internal conflicts and a loss of materials. At start in June 2013 it soon became clear that PAINÜ was quite a delicate topic (more than we had thought beforehand) among its own members but also among the inhabitants of the involved communities and councils. With caution we started to gather members and community councils to talk and discuss on how to overcome existing problems. The constitutional problems turned out to be that severe that founding a new organization with a slightly different name was the most viable option and resulted in Association Intercommunitarian PAINÜ.



Part of the project team during the execution of the first phase of Project Yahuaraca. From left to the right: Elkin Demetrio Castillo, Martha Parente with daughter María Fernanda, Ángel Fernández Ramos and Camila María Pérez Cubillos. Community San Pedro, 2013.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT

- Community-based (co)management initiatives are many times romanticized by (in this case) not-indigenous people. From the outset people have an idea of harmony and collectivity. However, in reality it is different, or at least in the communities we have worked with. The way we see it: if one or two families within a community are motivated to work with e.g. ecotourism, let them be. The challenge here is to create mutual support and acceptance with the involved communities.
- Community-based initiatives based on sustainable development and income generation create high expectations among inhabitants. People expect money flows in easily and compromise to work along with the project. However, when money does not appear that easily, dissatisfaction and conflicts arise and keep the truly motivated people away from building up their organization. A thoughtful and cautious approach is necessary.
- Many community-based projects and/or target groups are very much focused on hard infrastructure and/or on capacity trainings. But additionally, one of the most important keys to success is providing one-to-one technical assistance in a realistic and practical way without creating dependency, and for a certain period of time.

5. COMMUNICATION RESULTS

First we elaborate on our contacts and communication concerning lobby and advocacy. Followed by our contacts with the target group(s), and finally press publicity.

LOBBY AND ADVOCACY

Especially in the preparation/readiness stage many efforts have been made to meet with governmental entities, participate in public meetings, roundtables and conferences to bring to attention the actual situation, difficulties and challenges on social, ecological and economic aspects of the indigenous communities nearby Leticia.

1. However we had planned to work with 12 communities divided over two sectors (Yahuaracaca lake area, municipality Leticia; and Tarapoto lake area, municipality Puerto Nariño). We turned up working with 10 communities (5 in each sector), which on hindsight was a more manageable amount concerning workload. With the communities of Yahuaracaca we had much more and regular contact. Due to distance and logistic issues we visited the ones of Tarapoto three times, with overnight stays.
2. CORPOAMAZONIA (Corporación para el Desarrollo Sostenible del sur de la Amazonia). The project team participated in several public meetings concerning the management of the Yahuaracaca lakes and catchment area. During these meetings the project was presented and discussed and recommendations on management and TEK were shared
3. The Municipal Secretary of Competitiveness, Environment and Tourism. The project team had several formal meetings with the secretary tourism and interim results and recommendations were presented and shared. This resulted in an incorporation of the Yahuaracaca lake system within their actual plans and policies on tourism. Besides, the project team was invited to present the project and Painü at the World Tourism Day.
4. Because of the agreement and close collaboration with AZCAITA, the project team had the opportunity to communicate and socialize directly the outcomes of interviews and workshops with families, community leaders, elders and youngsters. Besides, as a collaborating party three interim progress reports were presented and served as an input for their project on the Modelo de Educación Propia.
5. The UNAL – Amazonas (Leticia) facilitates workspace and internet access among others. And besides, the project has been approved and recognized as ethical responsible. The project results so far were presented to the Limnology research group and will be an important input for several planned development/research projects and will articulate and adjust their research questions and activities.

PRESS PUBLICITY

As described before, the UNAL - Amazonas, is an important collaborating party and concerning publicity, they have turned out to be a significant communication channel at regional, national and international level. Because of their social network we the project team got the opportunity to promote Painü and their way of working by newspaper articles and television.

- In December 2013 an article written by the project team and Painü team member was published in the newspaper Notimani, the Instituto Amazónico de Investigaciones (IMANI) part of the UNAL. See appendix 1.
- In February 2014 a big and nice article was published in the UNAL newspaper which always is attached to the sunday edition of one of Colombia's most well-known newspaper El Tiempo. See appendix 2.
- Due to this newspaper article we were contacted by Caracol TV. On the 8th of april this year recordings were done with Painü and on the 29th of april it was broadcasted nationally at noon and the 20:00 o'clock news. See appendix 3.



Field survey with Abuelo Tigre to identify vegetation and to get to know the Yahuaraca lake area.. El Castañal, 2013.

6. PROJECT FUTURE

Our future plans are to execute the two final phases of this project. As described in the proposal the project consist of three main phases: 1) Fieldwork, 2) Conceptualization and Development, and 3) Socialization and Conclusion.

SECOND PHASE

The main objective of the second phase is to conceptualize and develop comprehensive informative and educative material about TEK of the floodplain forests and lakes in order to incorporate it into: a) the Modelo de Educación Propia of both indigenous associations AZCAITA and ATICOYA; b) local and regional development and management plans; c) alternative informal education initiatives such as community-based ecotourism.

Some of the contemplated main activities are: gaining more in-depth traditional knowledge about the ecological calendar and food and nutrition among others, conceptualize and develop pedagogic materials, develop and coordinate pilot activities concerning TEK. To bring the value of TEK to the attention and stimulate its integration in policies and plans, presentations/workshops

will be given to local and regional authorities. Additionally, like in the first phase we will give technical assistance to Painü to strengthen their ecological practices, administration and communication skills, and aftercare among others.

THIRD PHASE

This final phase is to conclude, socialize and evaluate the project activities with the directly involved and collaborating parties. Firstly, we make sure that all unfinished project activities are completed and organized. Secondly, one of the most important final activities and responsibilities of this phase and project is to make sure that all documentation on TEK lands is in the hand of those who need it and teach them how and when they can use it. Especially the indigenous people from the involved communities, indigenous organizations, and schools, but also the university and other governmental institutes and authorities.

PLANNING

The actual planning differs from the one we had last year. The so called readiness stage in which we presented and discussed the proposal with the communities and other stakeholders took us more time than we had planned. Also the support to AZCAITA delayed the project. But on reflection these two issues made it possible to achieve better support by the target group and other collaborating parties.

2nd phase. September 2014 - March 2015

3rd phase. April 2015 - June 2015

FUNDING

From the beginning, the idea was to cover the 2nd and final phase of the project with funds from where the project is implemented (Colombia) or at least a part of the funds. Over the coming weeks we work on the project proposal and budget for the 2nd and final phase. A rough budget estimate for these phases together is 35.000 - 40.000 euros without printing or production costs for educative or informative materials.

So far the project reserve is about 9.000 euro due to a successful fundraising period in 2013. In May 2014 Stichting Mandioca will start fundraising in the Netherlands again among individuals, religious and non-religious charity organizations, second hand shops, and companies. We also would like to approach Cordaid and WNF-NL to find out if there are possibilities for financial support to also conclude these final phases successfully.

COLOMBIA

At the UNAL - Amazonía there is a so called "Convocatoria Nacional de Extensión Solidaria para el Fortalecimiento de la Innovación Social", a funding opportunity for solidarity projects to strengthen innovative social initiatives. Proposals must be signed by teachers which in this case would be the coordinator of Limnology. This would be a good possibility to cover a part of the budget because most development initiatives and researches from the last couple of years originated from Limnology. This includes Painü which emerged from a project on community-based (co)management and sustainability in the Yahuaraca lake area. At this moment we are communicating with the university about handing in a proposal.

If this will be approved, these funds will not be administered by Stichting Mandioca or Fundación Grupo Proa but by the UNAL - Amazonía in Leticia. Besides this funding possibility, the university will cover and facilitate workspace and internet access like during the first phase.