



PROTECTING TERRITORIES FOR CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

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Country: **ECUADOR** | Principal Organisation: **NES Ecuador led by ECOLEX**

ABSTRACT

The Mojanda–Cajas Lake Complex, located in the Ecuadorian Andes, is an area of moorland with high value for conservation and the provision of ecosystem services. However, the development of anthropogenic activities and climate change are threatening the integrity of its ecosystems. The Autonomous Decentralised Municipal Government of Pedro Moncayo (GAD-PM) together with the Platform for Land and Sustainable Territories

(ENI Ecuador), through ECOLEX, carried out a participatory process to promote territorial governance. The participatory process resulted in a declaration creating the Mojanda Conservation and Sustainable Use Area (*declaración del Área de Conservación y Uso Sustentable - ACUS*), via a municipal ordinance, which will help to conserve the ecosystem and maintain water sources that supply about 200,000 people.

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SKILLS

LAND POLICY AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

MAPPING AND LAND REGISTRATION

ESTABLISHMENT AND STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS

BACKGROUND

Freshwater wetlands, such as those that make up the Mojanda lagoon system, provide water for basic needs and for agricultural activities that sustain the local population, and are also key to food security. This lake complex is the only source of water for human consumption in the canton of Pedro Moncayo. Despite its strategic importance, the lagoon system has been threatened by periodic burning of the páramo (mountain ecosystems), linked to grazing in the highlands and production practices that have led to advances of the agricultural frontier. These incursions have led to fragmentation and degradation of the ecosystem with serious social and ecological consequences, reducing the quality and availability of water,

which puts at risk the productive activities of local communities and their income. The reduction in ecosystem resilience also increases the vulnerability of local populations to climate change.

To address this scenario, Corporacion de Gestion y Derecho Ambiental (ECOLEX) and the GAD-PM led actions for the establishment of the ACUS. The declaration was oriented towards the conservation of water sources and the páramo ecosystem, promoting inclusive and systematic processes of social dialogue between diverse actors that allowed the establishment of limits and agreements on the use of the protected area, strengthening a people-centred governance structure.

THE CHALLENGE

The process for the declaration of the Mojanda ACUS involved overcoming institutional challenges and other challenges linked to the local population – such as acceptance of the existing conservation strategy – as well as the achievement of agreements between the local population and the different actors involved. Initially (in 2016), the GAD-PM intended to implement the declaration within six months, but this implied a lack of ownership and participation by the local population in the decision-making process. In order to remedy this, training workshops on the legal framework and procedures were held

with local communities, as well as with officials from state entities, and meetings were held with the participation of various institutional actors.

These activities inspired decision-makers and technical experts from the GAD-PM to open up spaces for local participation in the formulation of the policy, especially relating to access to, use and exploitation of natural resources. Equally, the participation of leaders and communities in the formulation of this public policy 'gave them a direct say in the conservation and protection of the lake system.

Following the municipal ordinance declaring the creation of the Mojanda ACUS in 2019, ECOLEX continued working towards territorial governance of local ecosystems, resulting in the Ministry of the Environment issuing a 2021 declaration that created the Mojanda Water Protection Area (*declaratoria*

del Área de Protección Hídrica Mojanda - APH). The declaration of the APH – for which the ordinance was a very useful preliminary step – made it possible to expand and reinforce protection of the territory and water sources, as it is a recognised instrument within the national system of protected areas.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

The process of both declarations, ACUS and APH Mojanda, has established a pathway for the conservation of ecosystems and in particular of water in the territory of Pedro Moncayo. To overcome the challenges, it was crucial that the various actors involved understood the environmental importance of the páramo ecosystem and the need for a public policy for its conservation.

Another key step was helping state institutions and civil society to understand the importance of inclusive processes with the participation of a broad spectrum of local actors.

Diverse actors bring diverse perspectives and promote diverse and high impact actions at multiple levels (local and central), and take into account environmental, social, political and economic dimensions, for the well-being of the inhabitants of Cantón Pedro Moncayo.

The mechanisms for dialogue between communities, local government and central government allowed the local population to participate in decision-making about the limits of expansion of the agricultural frontier, the nature of land tenure and the generation of socio-environmental information.

MOVING TOWARDS PEOPLE-CENTRED LAND GOVERNANCE

The process of declaring the protected area, under two different but complementary conservation instruments, responded to the local population's need to protect and conserve their water sources. It also helped decision-makers to recognise the need to formulate public policies that seek to ensure the common good from the grassroots up by including diverse perspectives in spaces for dialogue and consultation, such as nature-based solutions (based on ecosystem services to address challenges such as climate change and food security).

Synergies were established between local government, local populations and the Ministry of Environment of Ecuador (MAE), building solid relationships for the participatory construction of public policy and creating a precedent for similar processes. The actions of the local government for the conservation of water sources and the páramo ecosystem through the declaration of the Mojanda ACUS and the Water Protection Area have created confidence in its actions in defending the human and collective rights of the population.

THE GOOD PRACTICE IN FIVE SIMPLE STEPS



1

ESTABLISHMENT OF INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENTS WITH THE GADM-PM AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Once the project was approved for the conservation and protection of the páramo ecosystem and water sources and the development of a public policy for the regulation of access to and use and exploitation of natural resources, land tenure rights, planning and land management, it was necessary to begin building relationships. First, it was necessary to contact the local government with authority to regulate land use; then community organisations and private landowners in the area of the Mojanda lagoons. Discussions and workshops were facilitated to familiarise the community with the project. A roadmap was drawn up with the local government and was included in the Annual Operational Plan of the GAD-PM (*Plan Operativo Anual*). In addition, agreements were reached between the government, communities and representatives of the different parties.

2

ESTABLISHMENT OF A BASELINE TO DETERMINE IMPORTANT AREAS FOR CONSERVATION THAT LACKED LEGAL PROTECTION

In collaboration with the Autonomous Decentralised Provincial Government of Pichincha (*Gobierno Autónomo Descentralizado Provincial de Pichincha - GADP-P*), the participatory methodology titled Adaptive Management of Risk and Vulnerability in Conservation Sites (*Manejo Adaptativo de Riesgo y Vulnerabilidad en Sitios de Conservación - MARISCO*) was applied. The methodology promotes an ecosystem-based approach to nature conservation and sustainable development.

For the collection of primary and secondary information, communities, water boards and parish councils in the Mojanda Lake System were convened, in coordination with the GADM-PM. Workshops were held, which, together with analysis and processing of the information collected, made it possible to define the geographical scope and the object of conservation as objectives of human well-being interdependent with the ecosystem.

3

IMPLEMENTATION OF A MULTI-LEVEL AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH WORKING WITH TECHNICAL EXPERTS FROM THE GADM-PM AND MAE AND ALSO INVOLVING THE POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING LEVEL

Decision-making on the management of territorial spaces is an inherently multi-level process and involves the participation of multiple actors (private, institutional and community).

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In addition, different social, political, environmental and economic dimensions must be taken into account. All this translates into multiple interests, positions and needs that may conflict with one another. Acknowledging this complexity, a process was designed to identify common objectives and interdependencies between stakeholders as a way to promote joint working. This also encouraged the emergence of a participatory and transparent governance process among stakeholders.

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMME FOR THE GAD-PM AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS ON THE PLANNING, MANAGEMENT AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROTECTED AREA, PLUS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

Spaces were provided to strengthen the capacities of the GAD-PM's technical teams and local stakeholders. As the aim was to develop and design processes and instruments for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity that had few precedents, it was necessary to incorporate technical and legal details that would enable the management of ACUS. Additionally, the processes and instruments integrate sectoral and inter-sectoral policies in planning tools for the management of the territory. As the declaration process progressed, training and sensitisation workshops were held on its different stages.

5

POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Once agreements were reached on permitted uses in the different zones of the territory, limits for the expansion of the agricultural frontier had been clarified and every actor understood their responsibilities and the scope of their actions, the final agreements were drawn up. The Mojanda Conservation and Sustainable Use Area (ACUS) was created by decree in 2019, and in 2021 the Mojanda Water Protection Area (APH) was established, as a continuation of the work to conserve water sources and the livelihoods of local communities.



KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS FOR REPLICABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY PURPOSES

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During the five years it took to complete the process, actions were carried out that allowed objectives to be achieved and the attainment of results with a high level of impact and a high probability of sustainability, replicability and scalability. The main factors taken into account were:

- 1 Establishing inter-institutional agreements and transparent relationships with authorities and community organisations from the outset;
- 2 Promoting a participatory and inclusive approach, which allowed the different actors to reach agreements for the common good;
- 3 Designing a political advocacy strategy with mechanisms for dialogue and capacity-building for the creation of public policy;
- 4 Adequately identifying local priorities. This allowed the process prior to the declaration to be coherent and compatible with local agendas, identifying needs in a timely manner in order to respond within the framework of a long-term strategy for the territory.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 It is important that conservation projects be thought of in a holistic way, and that they address issues such as sustainable development and production.
- 2 For respectful and flexible relationships between the various actors, it is necessary to know and understand the local context and to identify cultural traditions and protocols.
- 3 Political advocacy is not enough on its own to meaningfully address issues concerning land, territory and natural resources. Before thinking about advocacy actions, it is essential to recognise the realities facing local populations and local governments.

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MORE INFO

- Municipal Ordinance No. 022-2019 of 13 February 2019, creating the Mojanda Conservation and Sustainable Use Area: <http://www.pedromoncayo.gob.ec/documentos/ord2019/022-2019%20ORD%20ACUS%20MOJANDA.pdf>
- Municipal Council approval for the continuation of the process of declaring Mojanda a Water Protection Area, on 14 November 2019: <http://www.pedromoncayo.gob.ec/documentos/actas2019/Acta%2030%20SO%2014nov19.pdf>
- Press release on the declaration of the Mojanda Water Protection Area: <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/ministerio-del-ambiente-agua-y-transicion-ecologico-declara-a-mojanda-como-area-de-proteccion-hidrica/>
- Resolution MAATE-DZ2-DAPH-MJD-2021-001R of June 23, 2021, establishing and delimiting the Mojanda Water Protection Area. - <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/ministerio-del-ambiente-agua-y-transicion-ecologico-declara-a-mojanda-como-area-de-proteccion-hidrica/>
- ILC information note: "Ecuador: new conservation area preserves water sources and ecosystems of the Mojanda lake system": <https://lac.landcoalition.org/es/noticias/ecuador-nueva-area-de-conservacion-permite-preservar-fuentes-de-agua-y-los-ecosistemas-del-sistema-lacustre-mojanda/#>
- Video on the Mojanda Water Protection Area: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxr5vZ_wG3k&t=6s



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