Oaxaca: a way toward sustainable rural development

Oaxaca, the state with the greatest biological and cultural diversity in all of Mexico, also ranks third in forest loss in the country. This is due to the use of production models of livestock, agriculture, and forestry that threaten its natural wealth. The consequences are unsustainable land management, poor rural development, species extinction, emission of greenhouse gases, and loss of ecosystem services.

To reverse this trend, the Mexico REDD+ Program, funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and in coordination with various state actors, worked toward a common goal to define policies, align efforts, and coordinate actions to manage the countryside, the forests, and jungles of Oaxaca in a sustainable manner.

We created and set up new agricultural, forestry, and farming practices to enhance production and increase profitability while preserving natural wealth and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Main REDD+ achievements in Oaxaca:

- Participatory development and adoption of the REDD+ State Strategy
- Consolidation of spaces of participation for decision-making, capacity building, and knowledge management
- Conducted studies to understand, diagnose, develop proposals, and define actions to stop deforestation or reverse land-use change
- Capacity building for various stakeholders in favor of low emission and sustainable rural development
- Establishing sustainable production models: agroforestry and silvopastoral systems

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We developed the REDD+ State Strategy, which integrates the visions of producers, communities and ejidos of various ethnic groups, civil society, academia, state and national government, and coordinates efforts for a comprehensive and sustainable management of agricultural and livestock production, as well as forests and jungles in the state.

The broad social and institutional participation is one of the central features of the process. The result is a document that reflects the interests and commitments of all stakeholders.

We consolidated the state advisory council, the REDD+ institutional working group of Oaxaca and its focus group, and we contributed to building capacities in various allies.

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Building a common goal to unite visions and efforts in the state of Oaxaca

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Coordination spaces for REDD+: governance in Oaxaca

- We created, strengthened, and provided support to specialized groups to improve decision-making: 1) REDD+ Institutional Working Group of Oaxaca; 2) REDD+ Institutional Focus Group of Oaxaca; and 3) Advisory Council of the REDD+ State Strategy Working Group.
- We founded, strengthened, and provided support to specialized groups for capacity building: 1) MRV Working Group; 2) REDD+ Learning Community Focus Group (CA REDD+ by its initials in Spanish).

Along with the government of Oaxaca, we designed the foundations of a financial mechanism that provides economic viability to the lines of action outlined by the REDD+ State Strategy.

Ernesto Ruiz
Undersecretary of Environment, Secretary of Environment and Sustainable Development, Government of Oaxaca

“*The relevance of the REDD+, Strategy is invaluable for the decision-making process of the state’s government to continue preserving or sustainably using the natural wealth of Oaxaca.*

In Ejido San Martin Soyolapam, Oaxaca, women learn to mix maize and cocoa crops.
Capacity building in Oaxaca

Developing capacities:

- We developed capabilities in communities, organizations, and institutions in terms of REDD+.
- We conducted 64 workshops and courses, and trained 828 men, 445 women, and 25 technical specialists.
- In addition, we did two field trips and experience exchanges.
- We created and consolidated the REDD+ Learning Community (CA REDD+) by its initials in Spanish, strengthening the capacities of 35 actors who today are leaders in their field in the state.
- We certified 24 members of the CA REDD+ under the EC0217 competency standard to provide training courses for human capital formation specializing in climate change.

We supported:

- Workshops on theory of change, the creation of results chains, and establishing results and activities for each region: Istmo, Mixteca and Sierra Norte de Chinantla.
- Environmental and social assessment of the Mixteca region.
- Deforestation and forest degradation.
- The assessment of funds and useful financial mechanisms to promote sustainable rural development under REDD+.

Testing and showing new ways of production and conservation in the field

Finding and testing new sustainable production practices and transforming activities that cause deforestation, such as extensive farming and conventional agriculture, have contributed to creating a common goal for the state.

To do this, we strengthened the experiences of community management of forests; we developed capacities and provided support to producers and civil society organizations to start silvopastoral and agroforestry projects in the Istmo of Tehuantepec region and in the Sierra Norte Chinantla.

Through the design and implementation of tools for sustainable rural development, we strengthened technical, administrative, economic, and financial capacities in ejidos, communities, and among producers. These tools allow producers to seek subsidies and financing, analyze the cost-benefit relation of their systems, and identify environmental and social benefits of their productive activities.

In Chisanta, along with women of the region, we set 12 hectares under agroforestry systems with maize intercropped with fruit trees (MIAF) and enrichment of secondary forest (acahuales) with cocoa trees.

In Santa Fe y la Mar we increased the value of 10 hectares of rubber plantations by introducing parlor palm. Thanks to this, we diversified the value of the commercial forest even more and avoided the change of land use for extensive cattle ranching.

In San Cristóbal la Vega, we achieved the adoption of silvopastoral systems in 40 hectares, which later became field schools adopted and led by local producers and their families.

In the region of Chisanta, we recovered five hectares of land, which were originally intended for extensive livestock farming, for conservation.

Though productive projects, we showed that livestock and agriculture, the main causes of deforestation in the state, can become a great ally of conservation and climate change mitigation if sustainable practices are adopted.
Two models for sustainable production and conservation

Silvopastoral model

Regions: Community of El Barrio de la Soledad, Municipality of El Barrio de la Soledad; Ejidos Santa Fe y la Mar and San Cristóbal la Vega, Municipality of San Juan Bautista Valle Nacional; and San Martín Soyolapam, Municipality of Santiago Comaltepec.

529 hectares have been directly impacted
20 farmers and their families benefited directly
The systems feature a photovoltaic electric fence, chippers, weeders, hedgerows, protein banks, timber and fruit trees, high yielding grass areas, and pasture rotation.

Approximate investment: $ 40,000 pesos

In the Istmo region, a farming school is being developed so other producers can replicate good practices.

Agroforestry model

Regions: Ejidos Santa Fe y la Mar and San Cristóbal de la Vega, Municipality of San Juan Bautista Valle Nacional; and San Martín Soyolapam, Municipality of Santiago Comaltepec.

178 hectares directly impacted.
18 farmers and their families benefited directly.
The systems include plots with vegetables, fruit trees, and timber species; nurseries for plant growing; shaded cultivation systems for camedor palms in rubber plantations; secondary forest (acahuales) enrichment with cocoa and timber species of high commercial value.

With the support of civil society organizations and government institutions, we fostered institutional and financial conditions that can scale and replicate sustainable livestock projects.

We generated inputs for an institutional re-engineering of the state’s environmental and agricultural sector, we strengthened the governance and working groups that drive the REDD+ agenda, we worked on pilot projects that have shown sustainable production is economically feasible, and laid the foundations of the REDD+ comprehensive model with broad participation of all stakeholders. Oaxaca is ready to begin the REDD+ implementation process and we are proud we were able to support them.

This is how we created momentum and a common path that not only enables the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, and the reversal of deforestation and forest degradation, but also drives rural development and improves the living conditions of communities in Oaxaca.
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