



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION

Awareness and Education in Environmental Legislation: Small Grant Program for Public Participation under chapter 17 “Environment” of the CAFTA-DR

“ The indigenous people have an ancient heritage, which is not only a territory to manage, it’s also a culture closely linked to the ecosystems and a language with which they express their being and identity. ”

Eduardo Vega Castillo, Executive Director of Green Earth Development Team, Costa Rica



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Programa de Cooperación Ambiental
del DR-CAFTA

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The CAFTA-DR (Dominican Republic-Central America - United States Free Trade Agreement) is the first trade agreement of Central America that incorporates environmental regulations as an integral theme into its legal chapters. Thus, the CAFTA-DR Environmental Cooperation Program funded through the US Department of State, includes among other projects a Small Grant Program for Public Participation and Environmental Legislation (SGPPP). The program's goal is to foster public participation mechanisms and environmental legislation knowledge in each signing Party (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic) and to develop environmental information systems in support of institutional strengthening and legal compliance.

The CAFTA-DR recognizes and strengthens the right to present complaints of non compliance with environmental legislation by any citizen or organization of any of its parties, which may result in trade difficulties or restrictions for the respective country, unless the authorities of this country act on the complaint and pursues the accusations in line with its national environmental legislation.

As these rights enshrined in the CAFTA-DR are hardly known in the respective countries, the program finances small projects in each CAFTA-DR Party to inform the wider public on its rights for participation, based on chapter 17 of this treaty. Priority themes include: Capacity building and environmental legislation knowledge in each country; use of public participation mechanisms; strengthening of the Secretariat for Environmental Matters; engaging citizens with their governments in law enforcement and encourage citizen environmental audit, among others.

This brochure summarizes the overall experiences of the SGPPP and its grantees of the second cycle of awards (2010-2011), as well as accumulative achievements since the beginning of the Program.

THE PROJECT

Helvetas in partnership with the US Department of State, through the Environmental Hub for Central America and the Caribbean in the US Embassy in Costa Rica, coordinates competitive fund allocations to at least one public participation project in each CAFTA-DR Party. A second call for proposals was launched in 2010, awarding 7 projects with a maximum donation of US\$ 44,000 per project. A total of 13 projects have been awarded since 2009 with a total investment close to US\$ 537,000.

The seven projects awarded in 2010, worked thoroughly in increasing the capacities and knowledge of citizens regarding environmental legislations and their rights to participate in environmental compliance and decision making. The geographic area of the projects included 53 communities and municipalities of the participating countries where lack of knowledge and access to information is notorious. A total of 8608 people (3918 women), surpassing the Programs' initial goal, were directly reached through training workshops and awareness meetings on environmental legislation and by supporting mechanisms to actively engage them with their local and central authorities for environmental law enforcement. Other outreach activities included information campaigns, expositions, art and essay contests regarding the environment. Some training activities focused on key actors, such as good agricultural practices, environmental improvement project formulation, and cleaner production practices.

All together, the projects strengthened 51 organized civil society groups, many under the frame of public participation mechanisms to address environmental issues. Also, 22 public institutions received assistance to foster law enforcement and other public services. In all the project's results, except Dominican Republic, a strong advocacy component emerged as part of the public participation mechanisms, and influenced local and central governments to adopt tools and modalities to strengthen their environmental decision making.

Another strong component of all the projects were information campaigns to disclose the importance of participating in environmental law enforcement, and the laws that apply in each case. Materials such as posters, brochures, training manuals, journalists reports were drafted as well as radio spots and forums were transmitted, specifically in Guatemala's, Nicaragua's, El Salvador's and Costa Rica's projects.

Regarding accumulative achievements for the 13 projects for 2009-2011, more than 11800 persons (44% women) have been directly involved with the first and second cycle projects. An assessment is pending on how these actors have successfully translated their knowledge into concrete actions for impact, and up to what degree multiplying effects have been achieved beyond initial project interventions.



SMALL PROJECTS SUMMARY

Costa Rica

Green Earth Development Teams (GEDT)

The “Dissemination and training on environmental management of Chapter 17 of CAFTA-DR to indigenous communities and farmers of the Terraba, Boruca and Maleku reserves territory” project was conducted in areas where environmental information is hardly accessible and people have little knowledge about their rights. In 33 training workshops and 16 forums on the aforementioned topics, around 2000 actors (44% women) have been reached. With these activities more than 80% of the population of each reserve has awareness of their basic environmental rights and obligations, as well as the opportunities that Chapter 17 offers to speak out and take action in law enforcement.

El Salvador

Environmental Investigation and Promotion Institute (IPA)

The project “Environmental Units: Mechanisms to increase citizen and corporate participation in environmental management and implementation” worked in 6 municipalities of the Departments of La Libertad, Sonsonate and San Salvador, strengthening their Environmental Units. A total of 6 Municipal Environmental Management Councils (COGAM) were established and trained in 54 meetings. These groups consist of citizens and local authorities, engaged to attend municipal environmental issues. In 25 workshops Participatory Environmental Assessments were created or updated in the six municipalities. This activity enabled the COGAM to identify issues that are affecting the environment, and were analyzed to take legal actions. As a result a COGAM sent a communication to the SEM (Secretariat for Environmental Matters), proclaiming that the State has not complied with its environmental law enforcement. An environmental legislation and public participation manual was published for training sessions, as well as posters, t-shirts, and radio spots were created as part as the projects awareness campaign.

Guatemala

Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation

The project intervened in 7 cities of the departments of San Marcos, El Quiché, Alta Verapaz and Baja Verapaz, addressing mainly but not exclusively indigenous ethnic groups such as Mam, Tzutujil, K'aqchiquel, Q'eqchi and Achí. In 29 outreach activities, including training workshops, persons from different socio-economic sectors had access to the project's information and became more aware of their legal rights that are environment related. A series of 14 environmental expositions were conducted, where massive attendance characterized the activities, especially of young citizens. A total of 2191 persons (45% women) were reached with these activities. An environment managers network was created, were members virtually discuss environmental issues.

Nicaragua

Action and Support Center for Rural Development (CENADE)

The “Capacity Building in Environmental Management with Emphasis in the General Environmental Law and Chapter 17 of CAFTA-DR in 3 Rural Municipalities of Río San Juan was implemented in 20 rural communities of the municipalities of Morrito, San Miguel and El Almendro, with a direct participation of 1966 persons (50% women), including Municipal Environmental Units, and Ministry of Education delegates. These actors were trained in the General Environmental Law, Chapter 17 and on the Public Participation law through 69 workshops. In 52 meetings 15 Community Environmental Commissions (CAC) were created. These CAC have been a successful public participation mechanism to take action in environmental decision making and to represent the community's ideas and rights on related issues. These organized groups have proposed two environmental protection initiatives to their local governments.

Honduras

Central American Technological University (UNITEC)

The project “Dissemination and training of environmental regulations and its implications within CAFTA-DR” was implemented in three departments of the country: San Francisco Morazán, Atlántida and Cortés, specifically in 12 cities. Environmental legislation and its implications in the CAFTA-DR were disclosed in public conferences, with a massive attendance of 1231 persons (52% women). On a more thorough level, 3 certified courses on environmental laws and Chapter 17 took place in these three departments, working with study cases and sharing experiences among the stakeholders. A total of 135 persons (44% women) completed the course and have a commitment to share the information, reaching a multiplying effect. Two journal articles were published communicating the importance of this project and the benefits that these topics have for the Honduran people.

Tropical Agricultural Research and Education Center (CATIE)

The Project “Strengthening capacity and management of institutions, local authorities and communities for the implementation of environmental legislation based on Chapter 17 CAFTA-DR in Guacerique River Subbasin, Tegucigalpa Honduras” conducted workshops on good agricultural practices and environmental laws compliance. These were addressed to local farmers and public workers in order to improve agricultural yields and environmental management of the sub-basin. Also, cleaner production activities were implemented in two industries within the project area. The main partner was the Servicio Autónomo Nacional de Acueductos y Alcantarillados -SANAA-, which is the authority for water and environmental management in this sub-basin and a key stakeholder in the region for environmental law enforcement.

Dominican Republic Alianza ONG

The project "Strengthening of the National Capacities for the Compliance of the Environmental Chapter of the DR-CAFTA, phase II", promoted the dissemination of the opportunities and obligations of Chapter 17 "Environment" of CAFTA-DR and conducted 4 training sessions to SMEs (small and medium enterprises) with a participation of 101 persons of 4 country districts (East, North, South and Central). Training of trainers workshops on Chapter 17 were developed with 22 participants, a methodology and training manual was created for this purpose. Another component of the project was awareness rising on environmental and public participation through a photograph contest addressed to the general public. Additionally, four journalists' articles were published, 200 news on environment and DR-CAFTA-related notes were uploaded on the project's web page and 6 newsletters emailed to Alianza ONG's contact list.



THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

Geographic scope: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic

Project period: November 2008 to March 2013

Budget US\$ (over project period):

Total	USDOS	Cost Share
1,317,435.00	1,178,100.00	139,335.00

Partners: US Department of State and Environmental Hub for Central America and the Caribbean

Contacts: Department of State of the United States.
Office of Environmental Policy
CAFTA-DR Environmental Cooperation
Address: 2201 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20520
Telephone: 202-647-8772
Web site: www.state.gov

Helvetas Guatemala

2nd Avenue 9-42, zone 9, Guatemala City
Telephones: (502) 2361-2905 and 06
email: helvetas.guatemala@helvetas.org
www.helvetas.org.gt

Small Projects:

EDTV: www.gedt.org
Alianza ONG: www.impulsar.org.do
IPA: www.fundacionipa.org
FRMT: www.frmt.org
UNITEC: www.uniteceventos.com/helvetas/
CATIE: www.catie.ac.cr
CENADE: cnd@cablenet.com.ni

“ The Municipal Environmental Management Committees put public participation into practice at local level, strengthening the Environmental Management Units of the Municipalities for better compliance with environmental laws. ”

Víctor Hugo Mata, President of IPA

PROSPECTS

The Small Grants for Public Participation Program has reached many people and civil society organizations within the CAFTA-DR region, increasing awareness on public participation and fostering an informed and active population to contribute to environmental decisions. Still, a lot of work has yet to be made towards promoting the opportunities within Chapter 17 "environment" of this treaty which can best be achieved by providing access to information and showing concrete examples for successful interventions. This is particularly important in rural areas where concrete on-the-field actions can well be combined with awareness creation and locally appropriate mechanisms for public participation.

The capacities generated in the two cycles of projects under this fund can be used in future projects i) to multiply the impact and expand the knowledge on this chapter, ii) to enhance opportunities to participate in environmental decision making, iii) to use established public participation mechanisms as pilot institutions and replicate successful experiences, and iv) to motivate citizens to engage with their governments in environmental law enforcement.

Many initiatives on public participation still need to mature, however, foundations are set for taking Chapter 17 into practice.



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