

British Academy Global Challenges Research Fund Sustainable Development Programme

'Land2Coast' Workshop Reports - 2

May 2017



Image: Workshop discussions in Petcacab (Milana Pakes)

Introduction

In May 2017, researchers from Cardiff University, The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and the University of Manchester held a focus group with each the five communities that form the Alianza Selva Maya (Mayan Forest Alliance). At the workshops, women met to speak about everyday resource use in their communities, the challenges faced in sourcing and maintaining access to these resources, as well as changes over time. Following these meetings in Petcacab, X-Hazil Sur, Noh-Bec, Bacalar, and Felipe Carillo Puerto, two women from each of these communities came together for a cross-community workshop, meeting each other for the first time.

Report

In this workshop, women shared their visions of what they would like to see for the future of their respective communities. Having shared their aspirations, discussion ensued as to the similarities and differences between these visions, as well as the experiences they each have had in both successfully, and sometimes somewhat unsuccessfully acting to realise these visions. At the crux of this meeting was the wish to share advice and set a common ground for taking forward a collective vision, and to explore what could be done to alleviate the barriers that have so far stood in the way of successful realisation of these visions. In this way, key issues and opportunities emerged:

- *Gender inequity in decision-making processes* — There was a sense of frustration among the women in not being able to realise their plans within the framework of the ejido, which lacks the mechanism for reinvesting and translating their efforts into a long term initiative. The women spoke of their wish to have the community invest in their projects. While many women have ejido rights, this does not confer a voice in the management of the ejido activities and funds. Until power is shared more equitably across genders, women feel that they cannot move forward to support sustainable futures for their communities.
- *Need to conserve their natural resources for future generations* — While tourism was identified as an opportunity for economic wellbeing, there were concerns that too

narrow an economic base will make ejido communities vulnerable. What happens if the natural beauty of an ecosystem is destroyed by unchecked tourism and development, and the very environment that attracted tourists in the first place is lost. Where there is concern about past use not being sustainable, the lessons from that resource depletion were reflected on, and women expressed the importance of conserving their resource base so that future activities protect the natural resource base upon which their economy depends. This is the inheritance that they wish to pass on, intact, to future generations.

- *Barriers to accessing funds*
 - Corruption within government — How can the ejido work within an alternative economic framework to ensure funds for initiatives come directly to them, sidestepping corruption that might determine how funds are distributed? Women expressed a strong desire to form alternative and legitimate routes for distribution of funds, and in ways that avoids community indebtedness.
 - Equitable distribution of funds — Management and distribution of funds also need to allow for greater transparency and gender parity; women present at the workshops expressed a strong desire that decisions taken about how funds are spent must consider the voices of all within the ejido community, including future generations.
 - Need for starter funds — there is a need for start-up capital to invest in the equipment and supplies needed to get a project off the ground. Examples included the need to invest in handicraft production so as to make full economic use of local natural resources, such as timber cut-offs.
 - Capacity enhancement — capacity enhancement was also identified as a key step in supporting more diverse and sustainable forms of economic activity. This included training in grant application, bookkeeping and accounts and in marketing.

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- *NGO collaboration* — Strong interest was expressed in working with NGOs so as to provide community support that will allow women to better address their concerns and to provide capacity enhancement and support the attainment of starter funds.
 - Skills development to enhance the productivity of the land (food growing, fruit tree planting, for home consumption), and to enhance family income (basket weaving, saleable products). Some communities have experience, and success in this endeavour, that can be shared across communities. All those present expressed a strong willingness to share skills.
 - *Strategies for diversification* — Diversity of activities needed to offer more opportunities now and for future generations. There was a strong belief that these opportunities should not be solely economic, but also cultural. A rich cultural life is needed to counterbalance the effects of development that bring problems of migration, alcoholism, drug addiction and depression.
 - *Gender empowerment* — Last but not least, there is a need to empower women to realise their strong, collective vision for the future of their communities. This will enable women to act on these issues in ways that are appropriate to them, to meet their own needs as well as the needs of their family and community. Gender empowerment is good for everyone. A key lesson from the workshops is that women have an array of sound ideas for realising more diverse and robust futures for their communities, but the mechanism needed to put these ideas into practice need to be made available to them. More robust and resilient communities come from facilitating women's economic contribution.

To keep up-to-date with the progress of the Land2Coast project and to find contact details for the research team, please visit the project website.

www.land2coast.com

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