

CI-GEF Agency

PROJECT FIELD REFLECTIONS



Implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Network of Marine
and Coastal Protected Areas of Ecuador

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PROJECT INFORMATION

GEF Project Name	Implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas of Ecuador
Project ID	9369
Period	GEF 6
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Implementing Agency	CI GEF
Executing Agency	CI Ecuador
Country	Ecuador
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GEF Grant	USD 5,813,303
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PROJECT SUMMARY

The project Implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MPAs) of Ecuador was a four-year initiative led by Conservation International, the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (MAATE) of Ecuador, and WildAid. This project aims to improve the management of Ecuador's Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MPAs) and the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity. With funding provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the project assisted with the priority actions of the MPA Network's ten-year strategic plan within the new framework established by the new Organic Environmental Code (COA) that mandates the development of a new management agreement for the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP).

The project had three components. The first component focuses on establishing the basis for the effective functioning of the AMCP Network. The second component aims to extract the learning-by-doing during the integration process between local management and management by the AMCPs in two pilot areas, and the third component explores ways to conserve connectivity between mangroves and inland forests in two pilot areas.

The project determined that interventions in two pilot projects could generate good governance and integrated management of coastal zones associated with two protected areas: the Puntilla de Santa Elena Coastal Marine Fauna Production Reserve (REMACOPSE) and the Playas de Villamil National Recreation Area (ANRPV). Both areas are characterized as beaches in direct contact with urbanized areas (without boundaries between them) of intensive use, especially during certain seasons, and by the existence of ongoing formal or informal collaboration processes with local municipalities and interest in solving problems related to tourism activities, making it one of the most critical challenges within the project to strengthen governance processes to co-manage public use areas in each pilot.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PILOTS

Lessons Learned from Component 2

The work has involved promoting and encouraging inter-institutional coordination with different actors to plan and implement actions on the beaches of Punta Carnero and General Villamil Playas. It began with the formation of technical working groups in each pilot comprised of institutions that contribute to the management of the beach, who created a work plan for the four years of the project based on the needs of each of the territories.

The Punta Carnero beach of REMACOPSE was made up of the Municipal Decentralized Autonomous Government of Salinas with its departments of environment, tourism, territorial planning and risks, the Government of Santa Elena, the Ministry of Tourism, the Port Captaincy of Salinas and the administration of REMACOPSE. In the case of the ANRPV beach, it was composed of the Decentralized Municipal Autonomous Government of Playas with its departments of environment and tourism, the Ministry of Tourism, and the ANRPV administration; according to decision-making needs, local authorities with decision-making power, such as the members of the Cantonal Council of each of the territories and the presidents of the associations of tourism service providers, joined the technical working group.

Through participatory processes, under the guidelines of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coastal Marine Spatial Planning methodology, different territorial planning actions were developed, and regulations and agreements were established by the project to allow an orderly use of land and activities on the beaches and adjacent areas. Thus, the Management Plans for the Sea Beach and Adjacent Strip of Punta Carnero and General Villamil Beaches, framed in the Organic Environmental Code and its regulations, were developed. These instruments are not only for territorial planning but also become excellent instruments of governance, which are consolidated by approving the instrument through an ordinance by being included as complementary instruments in the Development and Land Use and Management Plans and the Land Use and Management Plans; and by signing two cooperation agreements between institutions establishing about 17 commitments (10 from the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition and seven from the Local Decentralized Autonomous Governments) assigned to each of the institutions and about eight commitments of joint compliance aligned with their competencies.

REMACOPSE's administration is executing strategies outlined in the PMFA that help the effective management of Punta Carnero Beach. It began with the regularization of 100 service providers working on the beach who are part of the Sirenitas del mar (41 members; 24 men, 17 women) and Playas Limpias (59 members; 24 men, 35 women) associations through a registry of tourism service providers, identification cards and the delivery of identification materials (divers).

Likewise, in General Villamil beaches, support has been provided for drafting proposed ordinances regulating productive activities carried out on the beach and the environmental management and control ordinance. The members of the Beaches Municipal Council must approve both instruments. In addition, work is underway to expand the Playas Villamil National Recreation Area and to establish a marine connectivity corridor between this protected area and the Manglares El Morro Wildlife Refuge.

In the area of Communication, Education, and Citizen Participation (CEPA), throughout the project, we worked on educational-communication campaigns to promote responsible tourism, on signs and brochures containing information and regulations of the protected area, on the installation of safety flags with informative signage, on updating the CEPA technical plans for each of the protected areas, and on capacity building for 100 people, including officials from local institutions, beneficiaries, critical stakeholders in Integrated Coastal Management, construction of instruments such as the PUGS and the PM PMFA, and Governance.

In the area of Public Use and Tourism, support was provided in the evaluation of the feasibility of applying beach or destination certifications in the ANRPV, concluding the importance of initiating a destination certification process, being the "Green Dot Recognition - TourCert Certification" the most convenient certification because it is the official certification to be applied within protected areas, for its flexibility in meeting criteria and its adaptability to the destination. Although REMACOPSE began its Green Dot Recognition and TourCert Certification process in 2019, it must still meet specific infrastructure and administrative and tourism equipment requirements to obtain certification.

The following lessons learned were identified with the implementation of the project:

- To maintain the sustainability of the technical working group throughout the four years of the project, it was necessary to establish a work model at the beginning of the project that involved defining a working group coordinator and his/her responsibilities, a way of making decisions, the participation of those involved, and the importance of recording the meetings in the form of meeting minutes or a report with the responsibilities acquired. Another way in which the technical working group was maintained was to involve them actively in the activities developed by the project and to hold quarterly accountability meetings to coordinate efforts among institutions.
- Although coordination between local authorities and protected area management was a significant challenge, it was overcome thanks to the governance model promoted by the project.

- Properly defining local needs, user participation, level of involvement, and stakeholder commitments are the keys to improving governance between local governments and protected areas.
- Maintaining fluid and recurrent communication with complete freedom of expression, accompanied by the fulfillment of established commitments, allows for building relationships of trust among stakeholders and effective coordination among institutions.
- The will and the political-administrative processes to approve, execute, and sustain the instruments, tools, or governance schemes to manage the beach effectively are relatively long and depend a lot on the political interests of the rulers in power. These extended times and external interests must be considered when structuring projects.



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The Network project was of great support for the governance strategies that the protected area had been proposing, primarily due to the new laws that were created in 2018 with the enactment of the CODA; it provided support to strengthen governance with local stakeholders, specifically with the local government.

However, the policy of changing the Ministry of Environment, merging and restructuring it, put limits to the process that had been advanced with the project, delaying activities and even putting the protected area in breach of agreements with stakeholders.

However, despite this limitation, goals have been achieved, and to date, some instruments and agreements have been implemented with stakeholders. At the same time, the project made it possible to learn about the reality of women in decision-making. Still, it is necessary to strengthen this knowledge further and define strategies to improve the perception of gender among stakeholders.

Carlos - Administrator of Playas Villamil National Recreation Area

Achievements:

- Establishment of Guidelines to validate the Sea Beach and Adjacent Strip Management Plans in Protected Areas.
- Articulation of the Sea Beach and Adjacent Strip Management Plans with planning and land management instruments: Development and Land Management Plan and Land Use and Management Plan of the Cantons.
- Both pilots include in their Annual Operational Management Plans, the activities initiated through the Marine and Coastal Protected Areas Network Project in their planning.
- Baseline gender analysis and establishment of strategies/actions to integrate gender perspective in the pilot.
- 169 stakeholders and beneficiaries (62% women; n=105) sensitized on gender issues.
- 103 stakeholders and beneficiaries (48% women; n=49) strengthened their knowledge on Integrated Coastal Management, construction of instruments such as the Land Use and Management Plan and the Sea Beach and Adjacent Strip Management Plans; and Governance.
- Regularization of 100 service providers at Punta Carnero Beach (52% women; n=52).
- Inclusion of the ANRPV in the Blue Ecuador Subaccount.

Integration of the gender perspective in governance and integrated management pilot projects on two beaches in Ecuador: Punta Carnero and General Villamil Playas

As in many other spaces, incorporating the gender perspective in marine coastal planning becomes an important challenge in the territory. The project Network of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas in Continental Ecuador assumed since 2018 the challenge of strengthening marine and coastal protected areas in continental Ecuador by promoting coordinated work and exchange among them.

Conservation International implemented its rights-based conservation strategy, which explicitly states that the organization will "respect and promote human rights and welfare within conservation programs" as well as "protect the most vulnerable from violations of their rights." Within this framework, the project implemented the CI-GEF Gender Policy, which states that projects "will actively work to incorporate a gender perspective and anticipate gender-related outcomes in their design and implementation phases".

The gender perspective has been an important consideration in the marine coastal planning process. In this context, to comply with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the project considered it was essential to integrate the gender perspective in a cross-cutting manner throughout the implementation of Component 2 of the project. To this end, in June 2021, a diagnosis of the current gender situation in the pilots was carried out, identifying three key issues:

- Women's work overload, a situation that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, took time away from their personal development and their participation in the organizational and community spheres.

To address these issues, 11 strategies and actions were established, including workshops and spaces for reflection on gender, human rights and self-esteem; communication strategies at the community level and promoting the work of women in managerial positions, considering the time and needs (logistical, childcare, transportation, etc.) of women to ensure their adequate participation, complementing organizational studies on women in managerial positions, among others.

Thus, some of the identified actions were executed, prioritizing the execution of awareness-raising processes that included the development of capacities to recognize and address gender gaps and barriers and to consider women's needs, such as time, logistics, and childcare, to guarantee their participation.

In June 2021 and September 2022, workshops were held in Playas and Salinas to integrate the gender perspective with different stakeholders. Key stakeholders included beach tourism service providers, local government officials, officials from the Ministry of Tourism, the Santa Elena Governor's Office, the Port Captainty of Salinas and the different protected areas, people from the local communities, and project staff from the Marine and Coastal Protected Areas Network.

A total of 169 people participated in the workshops, including stakeholders and beneficiaries, primarily women (62%; n=105). Increasing the participation of women in the awareness-raising processes was a significant challenge since there was a lack of knowledge about gender issues on the part of key institutional stakeholders, beneficiaries, project specialists, and managers of the pilot-protected areas. This lack of understanding led, at the beginning, to resistance to the topic and to not considering it as a priority in the annual planning of the project's first year. However, this perception changed due to the diagnostic results and the actions implemented to integrate the gender perspective in both pilot areas.

Maintaining the same gender specialist in the implementation of the actions contributed to and considerably influenced the change of perception of stakeholders since the limitations in the initial sensitization workshops were identified through a satisfaction survey, which led to improving their techniques or tools for the next workshop. For example, the 2021 trainings were aimed at explaining the contextualization of the gender perspective. Although the methodology was participatory and interactive with talks, group work, artistic representations, and presentation of audiovisual material, it did not cause as much impact as the methodology applied in the 2022 training, in which the same methodology was applied. Still, it included sharing lived or known experiences on gender equality, self-esteem, empowerment, leadership, women's rights, gender-based violence, and legislation relevant to gender issues to connect with the emotions and experiences of the participants.

It was also identified that to increase women's participation in awareness-raising events, it was necessary to:

- i) hold the events at flexible times
- ii) encourage voluntary participation
- iii) look for spaces close to their home addresses
- iv) make it easy for women with small children to attend
- v) consider economic support for their mobilization, food and lodging for women and children, in the case of living in remote areas
- vi) consider children in the refreshments of the event; and
- vii) consider giving some incentive that will help them in their daily work.

Thus, at the beginning of the awareness workshops in 2021, 51% (n=47) of the participants were women, and the participation of women increased considerably to 75% (n=58) after implementing the measures mentioned above.

In this context, the project collected qualitative information about women's perceptions of involvement in these processes. The testimony presented below confirms that the actions implemented contributed to generating interest and at least minor changes in women's participation through these workshops.

Likewise, the following testimonies present the women's perception of the methodology applied, which manages to connect the emotions and experiences of the participants and the knowledge acquired regarding human rights and gender equality.



My experience in the workshop was truly enriching and fun because of the learning methodology that was applied before starting a topic, organizing working groups to discuss ideas on the questions raised and then making presentations or performances through small scenes on gender equality, women's empowerment and decision-making in different areas: family, social, economic and political.

Knowing our rights and the entities that guarantee them. All of this allowed me to broaden my knowledge on these important issues of gender equality.

Estefanía - Association of Clean Beaches service providers in Punta Carnero

When speaking of gender violence, it is a situation that primarily affects women, children, and young people in terms of their human rights, which violates their dignity and integrity. While it is true that there are some types of gender violence and currently, femicide has increased, and one of the main ways to avoid it is prevention, it is important that members of all the society work together with the entities in charge and thus be able to help family members who have been victims of violence. I thank the project for inviting us to this workshop to raise awareness about gender issues and, most importantly, to make us understand that not only men but also women can make decisions within governance spaces.

Jenny - Association of Clean Beaches service providers in Punta Carnero



At the end of the events, the participating men and women committed themselves to apply the new knowledge and experiences in their daily lives and to motivate other colleagues to participate in the sensitization processes.

As a result of the diagnostic and sensitization processes to integrate the gender perspective in the pilot of Punta Carnero belonging to the Marine Coastal Fauna Production Reserve Puntilla de Santa Elena (REMACOPSE) it was formally agreed, through the signing of a commitment act between the associations of service providers Playas Limpias and Sirenitas del Mar with the administration of the REMACOPSE; To "actively participate in decision-making spaces convened by the administration and that in these spaces men and women must participate equally to maintain gender equity".

On the other hand, within the Sea Beach and Adjacent Strip Management Plans of both pilots, a governance scheme has been established with indicators framed in 6 principles for good governance, including gender equity, which in turn should be integrated into the different management instruments used by both protected areas and local governments to measure the participation of multiple stakeholders.

Within the framework of lessons learned, the following were identified:

- Generate baseline information on gender issues at the beginning of the project and learn about the realities of the territories to define the appropriate actions and strategies to be applied to integrate the gender perspective in the territory.
- Involving the organizations' directors in coordinating the meeting and establishing suitable times and spaces nearby to hold the event increases participation. Maintaining the continuity of the gender specialist throughout the implementation of gender actions contributes to and facilitates their execution, since it helps to get to know the stakeholders and beneficiaries and the correct way to sensitize them.
- Evaluating the methodology applied in the sensitization workshops becomes a support to improve methodological tools.
- The participation of gender specialists from local institutions in the workshops favors the exchange of information, knowledge about their rights and ways to enforce them, and the specialists often become the leaders of the group work, encouraging the reflection of others.
- The participation of the project's technical team in the workshops contributes to strengthening the knowledge of those who must integrate the gender approach in the project's actions, but also helps to identify the problems experienced in the territories.
- Continuity in the implementation of actions to integrate the gender perspective in the pilots will depend on the importance given to gender equality issues by protected area managers. Therefore, it is essential to invest efforts in sensitizing this type of stakeholder from very early on in the implementation of the projects.
- There are naturalized and invisible realities, such as gender violence and human rights violations among communities. Therefore, it is necessary to know the legal context, mechanisms and care routes to address these issues, to advance awareness processes that address these issues.



CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of component 2 on governance and integrated management encouraged coordinated work between local governments and the administrations of the pilot areas, which led to improved relations and an interest and commitment to reach agreements for the effective management of the beaches with a focus on conservation and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems to improve the quality of life of the users/beneficiaries who make use of these resources. However, it is important to point out that political and administrative will is one of the main barriers when making decisions and following through with the processes to obtain good governance in the territory.

Part of this project's legacy is implementing activities to improve the management of beaches in the pilot areas, where gender has played a fundamental role. Integrating the gender perspective has not been a simple process, but it has been necessary. The challenges for the future are great, but the first steps have been taken, such as constructing participatory mechanisms that help improve governance in the territory, sensitizing local stakeholders, and creating mechanisms to mainstream gender.



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