



Beeswax candles made at La Mancolona.

# COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AND A CHANGE OF VISION, LA MANCOLONA

Organization  
Iniciativa para el Desarrollo Integral  
Comunitario del Sureste, AC  
Project start year  
2008  
Location  
Unión 20 de Junio (La Mancolona),  
Calakmul municipality, Campeche



## INTRODUCTION

The Calakmul Biosphere Reserve was declared as such in 1989, but in those years there was still a challenge to be solved, given that within the reserve area there was a community. Its inhabitants, of Tzeltal origin, had arrived from Chiapas a few years ago, and the government offered them a series of incentives if they accepted the community relocation. That was how in 1993, forty-three families moved into what had been a gum camp called La Mancolona, and founded a new community.

The government gave each family 50 hectares, and because of their tradition of working in the *milpa*, they started to open plots to farm, and that was the beginning of the transformation of a forest with high biodiversity towards fragmentation. It took little time to discover that the soil was not suitable for commercial agriculture and barely enough for self-subsistence. It seemed more appropriate to aim towards a managed landscape that contemplated natural resources conservation, rather than an agricultural destination. However, that involved a profound change of vision for its inhabitants. Finally, with the support of technical advisers and the implementation of incentives for conservation, women

and men with a great sense of collaboration were involved in a proposal which confirmed the rightfulness of the new community name: Unión 20 de junio (June 20th Union).

## INITIAL SITUATION

“When the community discovered that soils were unproductive, a feeling of frustration took over”, Juan Alberto Villaseñor of DICOS AC explains. In response, organizations with proposals for conservation began to arrive, but this generated mistrust because they had already been relocated once for the creation of a reserve, and feared that engaging with conservation activities could limit their livelihoods. In addition, as community people tell, there were deep-rooted cultural aspects, for example they had the belief that a man is truly a man if he cuts down at least 20 hectares of forest to make a *milpa*. Changing that view was a challenge.

## KEY MOMENTS

Through training and workshops, the community began to realize that conservation of natural resources is an alternative for landscape management that has the potential to be a source of income, in addition to the benefits provided by the forest as supplier source of food for humans and animals, construction materials, medicinal plants, protection from hurricanes, among other ecosystem services. People began gradually to take ownership of such knowledge, the benefits in air and water quality, the presence of beneficial flowers for honey production, the use of the pepper tree and the opportunity to provide ecotourism services. As a result of this change of view, the community began to receive financial incentives such as PES programs, and thus began to develop a greater sense of belonging to the forest and a revaluation of the community's resources.

In the case of the PES program, DICOS AC is the technical responsible to 4, and they have to present renewal applications, reports and follow up field work, as well as to ensure that commitments are met. The community is responsible for clearing gaps to prevent fire, placing of nests and troughs for wildlife, posting



María Eugenia,  
La Mancolona community.

signs indicating the ban on hunting, illegal logging, extraction of flora and fauna, and installing protective fences in the case that there is cattle in the hinterland, so that there is no grazing inside the premises.

In 2013, the community began to work with an ecotourism project. Julio López, community naturalist guide, expresses that for two years they have been receiving students from England, Belgium and national universities for five or six weeks to monitor biodiversity. “People here know that their natural resources have a great potential,” Julio said.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

“Much of the success in the direction taken through landscape management, which is predominantly a forest in good condition, is because of the way the community is organized, the interest of

its inhabitants in working together and a strong sense of collaboration”, explains Juan Alberto. “This gives us the opportunity to guide them in the proper management of the forest. In the first workshop we focused on defining what is the forest and the services it provides, and we realized that they already know about this, simply by living in contact with the forest. But our task was to organize those ideas, and then they were the ones requesting different topics for the following trainings”.

“The workshops were always very participatory and with a positive learning attitude”, Juan Alberto says. Here decisions are made together, and women and men participate equally. This community is characterized by joint work and good organization.

A key point was that the inhabitants of La Mancolona (Unión 20 de Junio) were able to reinvest the PES revenues. “While part was to cover their basic needs, they assigned a part of it to enable their apiaries, another part to build *jagüeyes* (watery) and for tourism projects,” Juan Alberto says. “All these investments can continue generating revenues beyond the economic incentives received by the program, and people understood that maintaining a landscape managed with a tendency to conserve biodiversity does not mean they cannot do anything with the forest, but they can use it and receive incentives if they do well”. La Mancolona experience is instructive, and once again demonstrates how decisions that define the fate of a landscape are in the hands of its own inhabitants and organizations working at that level. Strongly committed supporting organizations, and a community with high social cohesion and a sense of collaboration, managed to change the running course that seemed to inevitably lead to an increasing deterioration of resources and of the community's economy, and they have built a common vision so that the forest provides them resources in a comprehensive way that sustains their livelihoods in a landscape where the forest prevails.