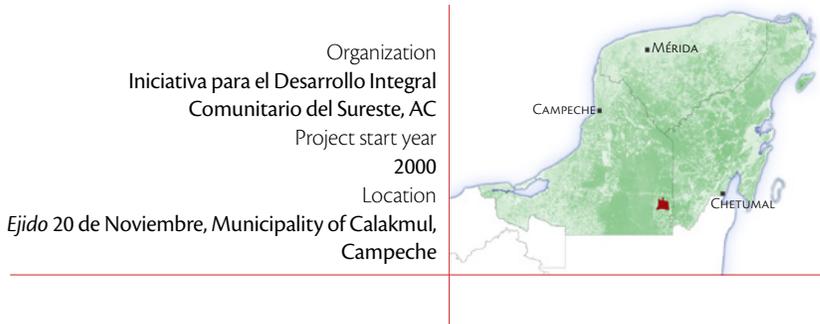


SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THE EJIDO 20 DE NOVIEMBRE



INTRODUCTION

When walking along the trails of the *ejido* 20 de Noviembre, a huge number of species of birds gradually appear on the scene, including the majestic ornate hawk-eagle. Continuing along the path, the fresh tracks of a tapir reveal the biodiversity sustained in this forest, which even houses the mythical jaguar. The *ejido* 20 de Noviembre is a forested area southeast of Campeche surrounded by neighboring *ejidos* with deforested areas for crops and ranching. This begs the question: what enables this *ejido* to maintain their forest in good conditions? The answer is 20 years of sustainable forest management and a well-organized group of 67 landowners with ongoing technical support from Iniciativa para el Desarrollo Integral Comunitario del Sureste AC (DICOS).

INITIAL SITUATION

Don Elías Cahuich, Municipal Commissioner and leader in the community, says that 30 years ago there was no forest management in the *ejido*, which meant the resource has been harvested everywhere." But in 1994, with technical support, the *ejido*

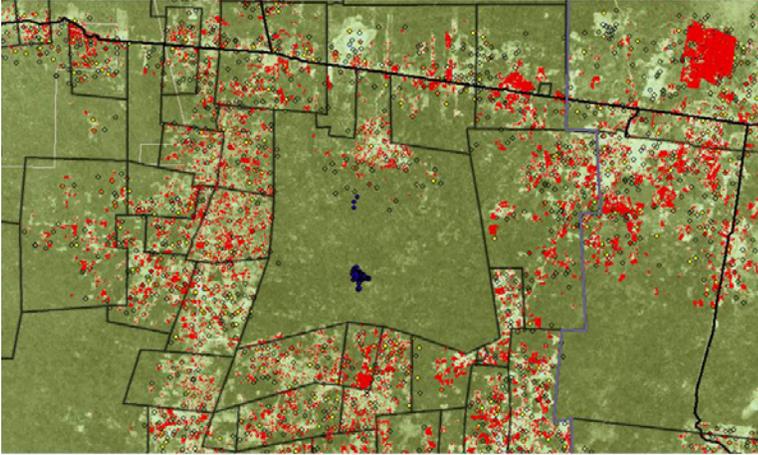


Wood processing in *ejido* 20 de Noviembre. Photo TNC.

made its first inventory of 5,000 hectares, producing the first forestry management plan, at which they decided to allocate an area of 1,913 hectares for permanent community conservation. In 2005 a second forest management plan was approved to include 8,000 hectares; and in 2006 the management plan for the entire *ejido* is developed. As a result, the community's economy fully revolved around wood production and forest management, and with ongoing technical advice 20 de Noviembre has managed to maintain 90% of their forests in good condition.

KEY MOMENTS

Juan Alberto Villaseñor, from DICOS, emphasizes the importance of the 2006 *ejido* management plan and how critical it was to enable community ownership of this vision through participatory processes. Another milestone that marked the *ejido*'s forest vocation and gave momentum to their ability to offer processed wood was in 2010, when a sawmill was purchased with support from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the National Forestry Commission (Conafor). TNC's interest to make the case for REDD+ in the Yucatan Peninsula fostered further collaboration with 20 de



Satellite image of 20 de Noviembre and deforestation in neighboring *ejidos*.

Noviembre which in 2013 led to a study to assess CO₂ emissions from forestry practices. Measurements were made to assess impact throughout the harvesting process and the study provided interesting reflections for IDICOS but, most importantly, engaged the community in the collection of data and understanding of the results, explains Juan Alberto. Following the study, the *ejido* incorporated a series of improved management practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated by the activity, towards a low-carbon forestry model.

In 2013, an obstacle arose for 20 de Noviembre: the municipal land use plan concluded that the permanent forest area of the *ejido* was to be considered a protection and research area because of its good condition. This situation complicated the renewal of permits for logging, which negatively impacted the economy of the *ejido*, which depends 80% on this activity. Josué Isaías Kú, president of the *ejido* county, mentioned that the Federal Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat) has provisions to renew the permit, but that a change is needed in the municipal land use plan, and that they are working on it. "While we wait for the permit renewal, says Josué, the *ejido*'s economy revolves around the production of honey and some temporary employment programs, which unfortunately are not as economically significant as forestry".



Flower of tajonal.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the most important lessons for the *ejido* 20 de Noviembre revolves around this last obstacle on the need to diversify economic activities. While over the years they have proven to be very good forestry entrepreneurs, experience has shown them that an unforeseen delay in logging permits can ruin years of work without another source of income. In that sense, Juan Alberto Villaseñor says there has been a significant change in attitude to start considering other activities like beekeeping, improved *milpa*, conservation and ecotourism. “The greatest potential of the *ejido* will remain forest management, but we have the idea of exploring other options that complement local income”.

“One of the best decisions in all these years of work, says Juan Alberto, has always been making decisions in a participatory manner”. The *ejido* is very well organized, and is considered an example of good forest management in the region, characteristics that have allowed them to interact with other organizations such as TNC, UNDP and People and Plants International. Perhaps

the next step would be to strengthen administration and marketing skills toward improved management of the wood company”.

“It’s nice when you work in a group, with sixty-four people everything’s done quickly. The community is united and organized; in the assemblies we have 90% attendance. We have an agreement to organize ourselves, and that has good results”, said Mr. Elías Cahuich, highlighting again the importance of these elements for successful forest management at the territorial level.

