

Evaluation overview

La Montañona: adapting to climate change through agroforestry, silvopastoralism and forest protection

Countries: **El Salvador**

Topic: Sustainable management of agricultural and forest regions

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Date of evaluation: **April - July 2024**

Key FFEM support data

Project name: La Montañona: adapting to climate change through agroforestry, silvopastoralism and forest protection

Project number: CSV1001

Amount financed by the FFEM: € 1,100,000

Project grant date: 14 May 2014

Duration: 8 years (carried out 2016 – 2024)

Context

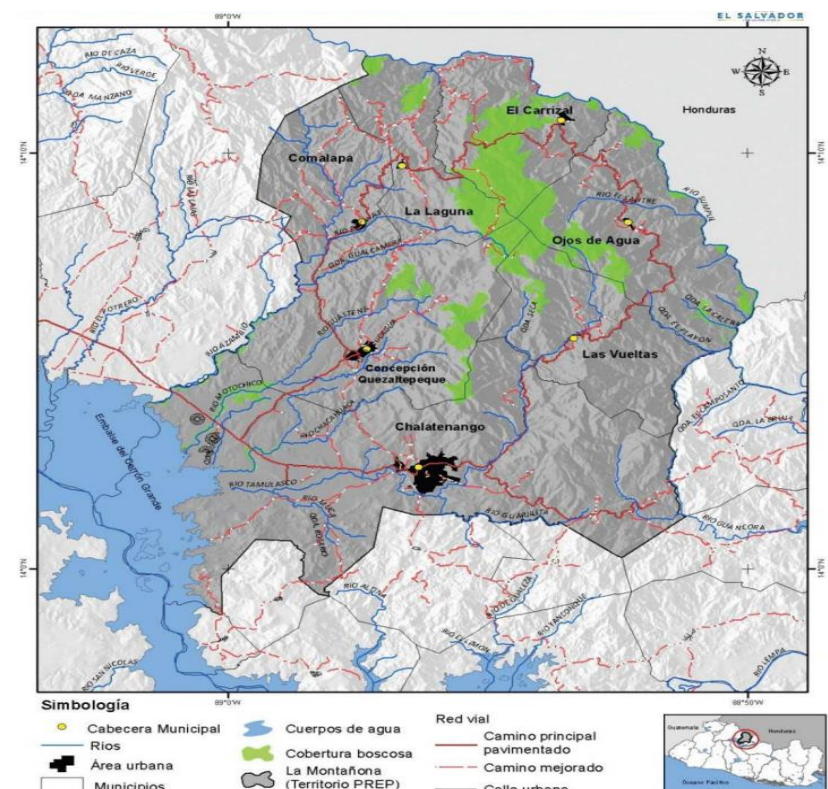
La Montañona at Chalatenango, in El Salvador, is a significant forest range which plays a critical role in water supply to the sub-region. It is managed by the Mancomunidad, a Community of Communes, at the time comprising seven municipalities.

It was recognised in 2012 by the Colombian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) as an area of interest for the National Restoration of Ecosystems and Landscapes Program (PREP), a programme which marked a turning point in the planning of environmental public policies by putting in place a strategy for localising actions and defining citizen participation mechanisms in the environmental management of the regions. In this context, discussions and a collaboration between the MARN and the FFEM began in 2013 in this particular area, giving rise to this project.

La Montañona is already iconic, as an area in which local actors have prioritised the management of natural resources since the end of the armed conflict, by mobilising the local population to gain access to water, and to build spaces for dialogue and agreement with State projects and institutions.

Participants and operating methods

The MARN has been the main beneficiary of this project. The association of Communities of Communes (Mancomunidad) implemented the project, in collaboration with local actors. The end beneficiaries of the project are the farmers, forest landowners, municipalities and the water management associations. There were also a number of co-financers, the main ones being the CRS, FIAS and PRISMA.



Aims

The objective of the La Montañona project was to **redirect the agricultural and livestock production of a group of producers and leading communities toward agroforestry and silvopastoral production systems in order to ensure their production capability and revenues, preserve water sources in the La Montañona region and contribute to the restoration of biological diversity.**

Specific objectives:

- Encouraging the transformation of traditional production and farming systems toward conservation agriculture, agroforestry and agrosilvopastoral systems that are resilient to the impact of climate change.
- Putting in place appropriate management able to restore coverage and biodiversity of the forest area which contains the primary water supply sources for the 7 municipalities of the region of La Montañona.
- Strengthening the local governance of natural resources and technical capability of the municipality of La Montañona and its local municipalities.

Project performance appraisal

Relevance

The project, initiated by the MARN following an analysis of local issues, had goals which aligned with the problems identified. Local actors were consulted with their suggestions taken on board, and stakeholders clearly defined. A major difficulty was the absence of validation by the local operator of neither the logical framework nor of the project itself, which was finalised by an external consultant. Nonetheless, this constraint was partially overcome by the flexibility and adaptability of all the stakeholders involved. In conclusion, the activities put forward by the project proved overall to be relevant with respect to the challenges of the area and needs of the beneficiaries.

Coherence

The project is aligned with national and international strategies and initiatives, as well as with the local dynamics. Collaboration with other projects in the region was judged relevant with respect to the project's objectives. However, on an internal level, coherence was limited: the logical framework presented a wide range of activities, and resulted in a lack of coherence and duplication across the components. In addition, these activities were very ambitious with respect to duration and available resources. Finally, the goals and results of the project required a change of paradigm and mindset, which requires time.

Effectiveness

Overall effectiveness of the project was judged satisfactory, with numerous activities being fully implemented and successful. The evolving nature of the initial logical framework made it possible to fine-tune some actions, although this process was not sufficiently thorough. Underperformance for some activities is mainly due to over-ambition and the implementing of independent actions beyond the project sponsors' intent.

Efficiency

Governance was complex at the outset of the project, but very positive at a local scale thanks to the strong commitment shown by the actors involved. It's essential to note that the real driving force behind this project has been the Mancomunidad team, whose commitment and local knowledge enabled obstacles to be overcome and a vision to be shared with the other project actors. Nonetheless, the lack of activity prioritisation and shortage of human and financial resources quickly constrained the project's efficiency. Other elements revealed moderate overall efficiency; the system for monitoring and evaluation was insufficiently solid to provide clear information feedback and effective analysis of project progress, and the financial mechanism also showed some weaknesses. With respect to the different components, some disparities were observed: component C1 stood out as highly efficient thanks to strong interaction with the beneficiaries, while component C2 showed mixed results.

Impact

The overall impact of the project is positive and is clear at a number of levels. Looking at the environmental aspect, the project has encouraged more rational use of fertilizers and herbicides while reducing practices harmful to the environment, such as eradicating burning, promoting good practices for covering soils and stubbles to prevent runoff, putting in place alternatives for water management, and better control of fires. Socially, the main impacts include improvement of living standards and income for beneficiaries, stronger mutual support, and the creation of established and stable governance structures.

Viability/sustainability

The project benefits from good technical viability, having successfully raised awareness of sustainable agricultural and forestry practices among producers, which generates a greater level of satisfaction and a change in mindset that is favourable to these practices in the long-term. The methodology for sharing transverse knowledge was key to this success, as were the other mechanisms implemented (the forestry development plan for example). However, financial viability is less certain due to the persistent reliance of agricultural production on inputs and seeds, and due also to insufficient income from forestry production. Finally, the high participation rate of the project, together with local governance structures and discussion mechanisms, reinforces the regional and institutional viability of the project.

Added value of FFEM support

The FFEM was key to the effective roll-out of the project, in particular through its flexibility and ability to find shared solutions. The FFEM's requirements provided a good framework for the project, and acted as a catalyst for the participation of various actors and interventions. Embassy support was important locally.

Recommendations & learnings

With respect to the logical framework and project planning, it would have been worth clarifying the overall objective, integrating the key actors right from the outset in the consideration and development of the project, and proposing a regional approach at landscape scale. To improve functioning, more sustained support for the FFEM's procedures would have facilitated greater fluidity of discussion and communication right from the outset.

For monitoring and evaluating, it would have been wise to define a clear and accurate system from the beginning and adapted this as necessary. Monitoring lacked clarity, and the absence of a dedicated person has hindered the collection of complete, detailed and structured data. Such a system should also have included specific indicators to evaluate the project's impact on the environment and biodiversity.

For innovation and knowledge sharing, more discussion and collaboration with external actors would have helped to create a wider scale dynamic. In addition, it would have been necessary to strengthen efforts in matters of capitalisation and communication around the project, in order to highlight and draw out learnings from the abundant and positive results seen.

Finally, to deepen and ensure the continuity of the project's activities, it would be pertinent to diversify and support development of value chains in different sectors of the La Montaña region, to reinforce work on the PES, and to formalise the mechanisms and structures for governance and technical assistance put in place.

