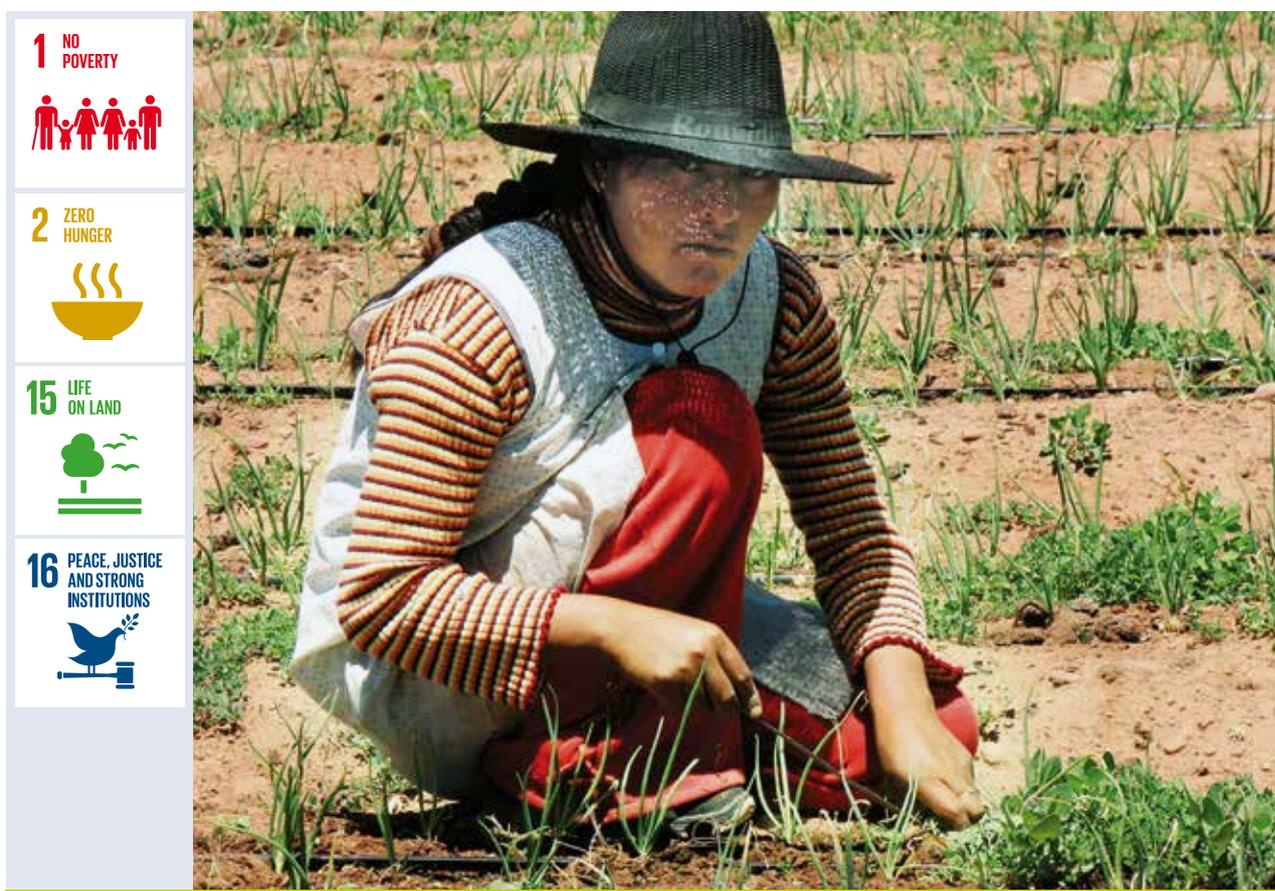


Copaibo and how to combine resource protection and settlements in Bolivian lowlands



Woman weeding onions in Bolivia

Issues:

- **Conservation area**
- **Migration and settlements**
- **Local and central government**
- **Value chains for sustainable production**

Copaibo Reserve is a local protected area with a vast biodiversity and with a highly complex pattern of land management that involves both government and local actors. *The Municipal Reserve and Cultural and Natural Patrimony Copaibo* is located in eastern Bolivia, as part of the Municipality of Concepción in the Chiquitanía Region. It was established in 2011 by the local government due to its biodiversity value. It is part of a biological corridor, connects two protected areas and ecoregions: the Chiquitanía and Amazonian ecoregion habitat. It gives life to more than 650 species of birds and other fauna and flora, especially Copaibo. The Copaibo is a local tree with enormous medicinal value, formerly called

“the Balsam of the Missions” in times of Jesuit Missions in the 18th century. The entire Chiquitanía region is home to the indigenous people of Chiquitanos. Many indigenous communities are based just next to Copaibo Reserve.

Its enormous dimension of 350,000 hectares makes Copaibo Reserve difficult to manage. Continuous land disputes and interests in its local natural resources make it an ongoing point of conflict and an issue on different policy levels including a wide range of stakeholders. The process of managing this socio-environmental conflict was accompanied by the Foundation of the Chiquitano Forest Conservation (FCBC) and was documented by the Núr University and integrated into the Atlas of Environmental Justice (ejatlas.org). Both organisations are local partner organisations of the Civil Peace Service Program (CPS) as part of the German Society for International Cooperation GIZ in Bolivia.

Phases from conflict to peace

1 Phase 1: 2011 Creation of COPAIBO reserve

COPAIBO reserve was founded by the local government of Concepción in 2011 after a productive initiative had found great amounts of Copaibo reservoirs. After an investigation was undergone, it uncovered that this was the largest reservoir of this species of Copaibo trees in South America. Local authorities asked FCBC Foundation for technical support in the creation of their new protected area. In 2012, just one year after the establishment of COPAIBO Reserve, its management plan was elaborated and ready for implementation.

2 Phase 2: 2012 Settlement of population from the highland areas

In 2012, a group of so called *interculturales*—a population originally from Bolivian highland areas which settle in lowland areas arrived and settled in Copaibo Reserve. Some of them were supported by central government initiatives: They were leaving a big straight cut in the forest, right in the middle of the protected area. It turned out to be a settlement with legal governmental resolutions to settle in the area, even though the Protected Area had been previously established there.

This was how tensions began to rise. Local governmental authorities tried to protect and control their municipal territory, while the national government gave permission to others to settle within the protected area, creating a legal contradiction.



3 Phase 3: A local NGO (FCBC) support the local government and other actors, negotiations take place

The local NGO, FCBC collaborates with the local municipality and local population to protect their territory and natural resources in and around Copaibo Reserve. The local government wanted to get rid of the new population as they considered the settlements an intrusion to their territory. But it did not need deep reflection to see that this would be a long and complicated process, which would definitely foster conflict escalation.

Long and complicated negotiations between the local government of Concepción and the new settlers took place. They managed to relocate the settlement group, which had been located in the middle of the Reserve, to the southern part of Copaibo Reserve before they had finally settled there. A new management plan was elaborated by 2014 to adapt the conservation status and allow settlement and agriculture in the southern area.



Key message

Central and local governance must coordinate to prevent conflict escalation, while economic perspectives based on sustainable resource use are helpful

4 **Phase 4: FCBC assesses different stakeholders and provides technical information**

FCBC assessed legitimate local authorities (mayor, responsible authorities for land and resource issues, municipal councilors) in how to install and manage their protected area. It also assessed legitimate representatives of civil society (“control social”, civil society committee to control authorities) in how to manage COPAIBO Reserve and the importance of conservation. It assessed municipal authorities in who and why to create the protected area’s management committee, assessed in who to integrate into the committee and how they could get organized. Finally it assessed various actors on how to deal with land and resource conflictivity, and collaborated with conflict analysis and monitoring.

At the same time FCBC provided technical information on conservation needs, ecosystems, geographical information (GIS-mapping), governance of natural resources, sustainable development and sustainable forestry, especially the management of COPAIBO trees and its oil. It provided information and contacts to develop a supply chain for COPAIBO oil.

5 **Phase 5: Networking and economic perspectives**

FCBC created networks between the different municipalities within the Chiquitanía region. It supported the exchange of experiences with management committees of protected areas, on a local level (Chiquitanía) and on an international level (Model Forest). It connected local actors, producers, authorities, forestry entities and the private company to get to a sustainable use of local natural resources.

6 **Phase 6: 2015 New settlers cause new conflicts**

Even though settlement was limited to the registered group of *interculturales* in the southern area, the migrating population within the protected area started

to grow and expand beyond the permitted area. New settlers arrived on an informal status hoping to find fructiferous land for agriculture.

The local municipality made clear to them the limitations of settlement in this area and that measures would be taken to address any violation on the limitations. In September 2015 the new settlers showed their annoyance about the regulations on land use and settlement through a 2-day road block and occupation of the municipality.

All these measures were aiming to entirely dissolve the status of Copaibo Reserve as a protected area. Negotiations took place and technical information was provided resulting in deescalating the conflict development. But as FCBC suspected, the conflict had not been finally resolved.

7 **Phase 7: 2018 The conflicts sparks up again**

In spite of the continuous support to local government, the creation of a local Copaibo Reserve Management Team, and the formally approved management plan, three years later, in 2018, the conflict emerged again and stronger than before. Pressure over land in Copaibo Reserve grew as land disputes in the whole Chiquitanía region grew stronger. Massive governmental relocations started to take place in the region and conflicts over land and resources sprang up like mushrooms.

At present, a considerable group of *interculturales* is threatening with new road blocks in Concepción, stronger measures and new uncontrolled settlement groups are about to arrive. Meanwhile the local government is distracted with internal disputes, legal processes directed at the mayor and conflicts over power.

Cross-sectoral approach: Land, gender, peace and justice

At the same time, FCBC wants to find a way so that the *interculturales* could settle without destroying natural resources and respect the needs of local indigenous



Success factors contributing to conflict prevention

- **Acting only through the local legitimized entities**
- **Combining sustainable resource use and economic development through organic production and marketing based on an agreement with a private company**
- **Strengthening regional and international networking**
- **Functioning local governance (during the initial phases)**

population, all the while promoting understanding and a harmonious cohabitation among the people of the Municipality of Concepción. This required economic perspectives for the settlers which were not familiar with the agroclimatic conditions of the Bolivian lowland.

To achieve this objective, a very successful intervention was to connect a private company with the settlers and the local government. AGROSELLER was contacted, as it was known to be a company that works with organic agriculture, so the settlement could be made eco-friendly. In 2017 an agreement was signed between the local government of Concepcion, the settlement communities, FCBC Foundation and AGROSELLER. The company offered to buy all the production of organic products grown in Copaibo Reserve. The new settlers were instructed in organic farming, the local government took territorial control, and FCBC Foundation assessed settlement communities in manners of sustainable forest use. Although the company wasn't able to buy the whole production and to meet all the expectations, the agreement allowed FCBC to establish relationships with the *interculturales*. This had not been possible before. FCBC had been considered as an enemy that limited acting through installing Copaibo as a reserve category.

This shows that conservation of natural resources (SDG 15) and the prevention of violent conflicts (SDG 16) over these resources require economically viable strategies to use these resources sustainably for livelihoods and income (SDG 1 and 2).

Success factors and limitations

Compared to neighbouring Municipalities, land disputes that involve national government settlements

could be kept less violent in Copaibo Reserve and different moments of participatory decision-making could be realized.

All interventions took place through the long-term assessment of local legitimized authorities including representatives of the civil society and *interculturales*. FCBC focused in participatory decision-making and creating impartial technical information. So different solutions could be found and positions could be made more flexible.

The issues in this Reserve were discussed in regional Model Forest network meetings, as the Chiquitanía region is the biggest Model Forest area in the world. In 2017 a network meeting in Concepcion managed to establish a new committee as *Defence Committee for Land and Territory*, where mayors and councillors of more than 10 municipalities signed to participate. These partnerships strengthened the local government and the settlement of conflicts were taken more seriously on a national level.

This process shows us again the crucial role of local governance and functioning institutions. Copaibo Reserve could be well managed and land conflict issues could be treated in a non-violent manner as long as local government was operating and taking on its role independent from national interference. From the moment local authorities were weakened due to powerful national policies favouring migration to the lowlands, the process went down.

The main limitation was the fact that the conflict manifestation took place within the local municipality while the conflict source might have been addressed

far away in how land distribution was managed from central government. Local communities had to stand a conflict they did not originate. FCBC decided to take the settlement resolutions as a given condition that they would not try to change.

Officially, the relocations of population from the highland to the lowland area are due to land scarcity and population overload in the altiplano (Bolivian highlands). Unofficially, it is well known that land tenure and distribution is used as a power mechanism and the national agrarian reform institute INRA is subordinated to political clientelism. Land distribution is a mechanism to change political power relations, especially this year with presidential elections in Bolivia.

Favourable conditions for conflict prevention

Quite important was the role of central government. The management of land and natural resources is a responsibility of central government in Bolivia. A transparent process of land distribution or resource use and coordination with subnational policy levels is required to prevent that land and resources will continue to be strong factors of conflict.

Perspectives of expansion and replicability

In conclusion we consider interventions on local level in land and resource issues are limited as long as there is no transparent integral mechanism to treat these conflict factors including grievance mechanisms. We consider an integral approach must combine climate change, environmental justice and economic aspects. If we make efforts to combine these factors into a long-term land and resource management strategy which is coherent on national and local level, conflicts are more likely to be treated in a non-violent manner.

References and further reading

- Foundation for the Chiquitano Forest Conservation (FCBC) [www.fcbc.org.bo]
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