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Conservation

Sustainability

Climate Change

The road to development: building a policy case from the grassroots

“In the Camentsa language there is no word for development, politics or religion, but there is the word shabejuakna, which means collective well-being with nature, peace and harmony between people and their environment, spiritual and material balance. This is the only equivalent to development.” Taita Miguel Chindoy, Sibundoy. Quoted in Selva Abierta.

“Nature makes the rules, we make the values” Concepción Matabanchoy, ADC.

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The road to development: building a policy case from the grassroots was written by Hannah Beardon as part of an evaluation of the WWF-Colombia programme.

Front cover image: © Juan Carlos Espinosa / WWF-Colombia

INTRODUCTION

The Amazon piedmont is a global conservation priority, lying within both the Amazon biome and the Northern Andes, it contains enormous biodiversity and provides water to the Magdalena, Pacific and Amazon river basins.

6.7M SQ KM

THE AMAZON
BIOME COVERS
6.70 MILLION SQ KM AND
SPANS EIGHT COUNTRIES
AND ONE OVERSEAS
TERRITORY

WWF has been working since 1995 to support and implement a conservation vision for the region together with local communities, organisations and institutions. When advances were made towards the creation of a new, much-needed road in the province of Putumayo, in southern Colombia, WWF and local partners were concerned about the potential social and environmental impact on the area’s important forest ecosystems and communities.

WWF has considerable experience working with local partners in this and other vulnerable areas to strengthen effective civil society participation in decision-making. With local work and partnerships, complemented by a strong presence in Bogotá and its international network, WWF is well placed to promote constructive engagement between civil society, government and international donors to ensure that local social and environmental concerns are central to road planning and building processes.

As a result, analysis of environmental and social impacts has been stronger, and gains in terms of compensation and mitigation plans and funding have been significantly higher than is usual for this type of project. What’s more, work to improve the quality of local level consultation and participation has strengthened existing social processes and created the conditions for strong monitoring during the implementation stage.

This story reflects on some of these experiences. It looks at where they might lead in Putumayo, and what WWF has learned about dealing with future threats to vulnerable ecosystems and local communities from infrastructure projects.

A LONG-AWAITED ALTERNATIVE TO THE ‘SPRINGBOARD OF DEATH’

“People have been promising a new road between San Francisco and Mocoa since we were kids. It became such a political issue that people stopped believing it would ever happen.”

Jorge Martinez,
mayor of San Francisco

To get to their provincial capital of Mocoa, Putumayo, the people of San Francisco, in the Upper Putumayo river watershed of southern Colombia, need to travel out of their valley, through the cloud forest of the foothills of the Andes and into the tropical climate of the Amazon. Despite being less than 100km, the journey takes over three hours in the best conditions. Buses, lorries, cars and taxis share this road, which is nicknamed the ‘springboard of death’. It is unpaved and sometimes little more than single lane; it clings to steep forested mountainsides with sheer drops of up to 800m, and it’s crossed by streams and waterfalls and prone to landslides in the rainy season.

“Everyone in Putumayo knows someone, a friend or relative, who has died on this road,” says Ilvia Niño, WWF’s coordinator for the area. In the worst single accident, in 1989, approximately 300 people died when an avalanche engulfed a queue of traffic held up behind another landslip.

It’s hardly surprising, then, that for more than 50 years people in the area have been asking for a new or improved road. During every local or regional election, politicians promised that the road would be built during their term of office. People had stopped believing it when finally, in the mid-1990s, the Colombian Ministry of Transport announced that the new road was to go ahead. After so many generations of political pressure, so many deaths and accidents, the road had finally become a national priority.

Amid the excitement and clamour to get these plans put into practice, several voices from civil society, including WWF-Colombia and partners, advised local people to look beyond the good news, to get informed about the potential impacts, ask important questions and ensure they made themselves heard in order to safeguard their communities, livelihoods and environment.

The new road to development

The new stretch of road proposed between San Francisco and Mocoa will be less than 50km long and should reduce the time it takes to travel between the towns to 90 minutes. It follows the route of the Camino Real, an ancient footpath through the forest used for generations by indigenous populations and incoming settlers. A large area of the remaining forest of this part of the Piedmont is situated within reserves, protecting important biodiversity found at different altitudinal gradients.

While the Sibundoy valley (with the settlements of Santiago, Colón, Sibundoy and San Francisco) is a productive agricultural area, life is difficult for many people living along the Camino Real. Without a phone signal or a road in the area, people are cut off from even the most basic services and access to markets. Some people keep cattle, but the poorest make their living from felling trees for timber and charcoal, meaning that the forest reserve is degraded due to the lack of more sustainable alternative livelihoods and a lack of enforcement on the ground.

“People from Minchoy don’t have time to think about changing their lives for the better,” explains Yolanda, a San Francisco town councillor with family in Minchoy. *“Nowadays they have to walk for a whole day to find trees to cut down, beyond the track where horses can go.”*

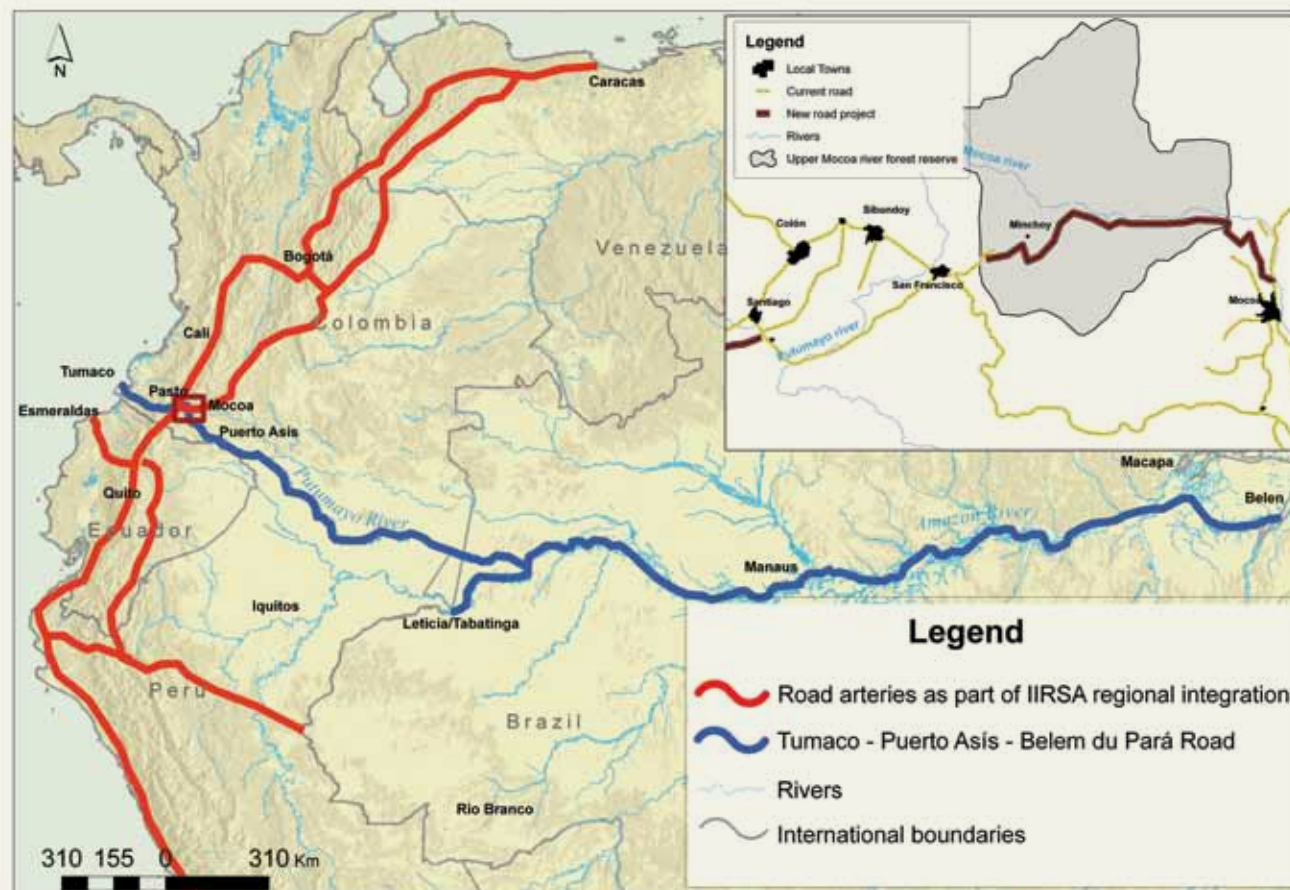
“This road was sold to us with three big lies: that it is only for local benefit; that it has been brought about by local politicians; and that it will bring economic benefits to the community.”

Carlos Hernan Castro,
Ecotono

People in villages like Minchoy stand to gain a significant amount with the new road: vastly improved access to services and markets; and the potential for new investors or customers for their natural resources, goods and services. However, there is also a lot of uncertainty as people worry that they might lose access to their lands, for which many don’t have official title, and others are concerned that the forest will be further degraded.

Mining licences have already been issued to explore deposits of gold, copper and marble in the area, a prospect that will become more viable once the road is built. And if the road does not bring alternative livelihood options, it will make markets for wood and charcoal closer and more accessible, accelerating deforestation.

People are suspicious of organisations advising caution or pressing for stronger measures against negative social or environmental impact. They worry that the road construction will be stopped, or that the alternative will be to lose their land or livelihoods to an extended forest reserve created in the name of greater ‘protection’. *“There is a lot of confusion in rural areas,”* Doña Ana, a Minchoy resident says. *“Companies have already come to take samples for mining and people think that they will be invaded by prospectors. Some are selling their land, because they are worried they will be evicted by force later if they don’t, but others are saying this won’t happen.”*



Route of the existing and proposed Pasto-Mocoa Road, Putumayo

The Pasto-Mocoa road project (a 46km stretch of road) is just one small part of a much larger scheme to improve infrastructure connections across the entire continent, creating a crucial link between existing roads which connect the provincial capitals of Nariño and Putumayo, the national capitals of Ecuador and Colombia, and link the Amazon with ports on the Pacific and the Atlantic coasts.

As the new road will affect the Upper Mocoa River Forest Reserve, compensation mechanisms include the expansion of the reserve (in grey on inset), as well as the creation of an Integrated Management District near Mocoa, where productive land-uses would be allowed under a sustainable production systems.



DEFINITIONS OF WEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

“The conservation of our ecosystems shouldn’t just be the responsibility of the Colombian government. We each have to play our part.”

Patricia Jojoa, ADC local coordinator, La Cocha

The confusion faced by people living in Minchay is normal in a context such as rural Colombia, where the rule of law and implementation of policy are so often undermined by violence, intimidation or corruption. The struggle for power and control – between the legitimate government, paramilitary and guerrilla groups, and legal and illicit industries – too often translates into insecurity and powerlessness for people in rural areas.

Participation in democratic processes is not a reality for most people, who have little information about the larger context of decisions and actions affecting their local area, little understanding of their own place in the national development vision, and little experience of seeing politicians’ promises translate into real changes on the ground.

Against this backdrop there are vibrant social movements defining their own versions of development, as the story of Asociación para el Desarrollo Campesino (Peasant Development Association, or ADC) below, illustrates.

Engaging with the internal planning process

The Colombian Ministry of Transport, first started planning the new road between San Francisco and Mocoa in 1986. After 10 years of planning and consultation, they presented plans to the Ministry of the Environment for approval. However, these were rejected on the grounds that such an important and vulnerable area needed a stronger environmental assessment and environmental safeguards.

The plans did not resurface until over a decade later, in 2008, with a stronger emphasis on forest protection, grounded in rigorous research and analysis of the area. The standard environmental impact assessment was funded by the government, but the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which would be providing the loan for the road, funded two further studies: one to develop a management plan for the affected areas of forest reserve; the other a regional strategic environmental assessment to look more widely at regional and indirect impacts of the proposed road. This is the only example of an infrastructure project in Colombia where more than the legal requirement for impact assessment has been commissioned. In part this was a result of the implementation of the IDB’s new environmental safeguards policies, but it was also a measured response from the IDB to widespread criticism (including from WWF) of weak environmental assessment in projects commissioned under the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA).¹

WWF was keen to be involved in this research and planning process to ensure that the outcome would be the most environmentally-friendly road possible, which would open up opportunities for local participation and the promotion of local knowledge and interests.

WWF worked with the implementing agencies, including Instituto Nacional de Vías (INVIAS), to strengthen these aspects in the design and monitoring of the research. They worked with local partners to support capacity for effective

¹ IIRSA is the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America, agreed on by all 12 governments, and aimed at promoting transport, energy and communications infrastructure at a regional level.



The approved design for the road is among the most environmentally friendly, financially costly and technically complex in Colombia.

local participation and engagement in the process. They also worked with the IDB, and with other organisations such as the Bank Information Centre in Washington, Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos (ILSA) in Bogota and through WWF’s Amazon network initiative² to facilitate learning from the local level and ensure that the voices fed into the development of stronger environmental criteria in the IDB.

This strategy makes the most of WWF-Colombia’s strong relationships on the ground – not only to ensure that appropriate conservation strategies are developed locally, but also to strengthen the policy environment for sustainable development and conservation nationally.

A national vision: removing bottlenecks to trade and integration

As a result of the studies, the approved design for the road is among the most environmentally friendly, financially costly and technically complex in Colombia. In a country with so many priorities and needs, it is hard to understand why this small, local road is worth so much investment.

But, looking at a map of the regional transport infrastructure, the significance becomes clearer. This 46km stretch of road is just one small part of a much larger scheme to improve infrastructure connections across the entire continent, creating a crucial link between existing roads which connect the provincial capitals of Nariño and Putumayo, the national capitals of Ecuador and Colombia, and link the Amazon with ports on the Pacific and the Atlantic coasts.

On either side of this new stretch of road, INVIAS have been improving, widening and resurfacing roads which connect it to Pasto and on the other side to the Colombian capital Bogotá and key ports on the Amazon.

The continent-wide scheme of which this is part, the IIRSA was set out by the continent’s leaders in 2000 to ‘minimise internal barriers to trade and bottlenecks in infrastructure and regulation and operation systems that support regional productive activities’. In this vision of development, an integrated Latin America will have a stronger position in international trade, which will distribute benefits throughout the region and help to protect the region from global market fluctuations.

The national government is investing in this vision, wishing to open up the country to economic investment and activity as the route to employment and better standards of living for Colombians. This development vision is based on the assumption that freer movement of people and goods will lead to improvements in standards of living in general. The same arguments are made to support infrastructure development at local, national and regional levels.

However, WWF is not only concerned about the environmental costs of these initiatives. By accompanying local partners over the years, they’ve learned that local development does not automatically follow infrastructure projects, and that local participation is essential in order to mitigate and avoid negative environmental and social impacts.

² WWF’s Amazon network initiative aims to promote a different development paradigm across the Amazon biome that will assure critical features (forest cover, biodiversity and climate) are maintained. We’re working across the eight countries and one overseas territory of the Amazon biome.



“Heading to the city would just broaden the belt of misery there.”

Conchita Matabanchoy

A local vision: live, love and be happy

Compare this vision with the world view expressed by Conchita Matabanchoy, and it sounds like two completely different Colombias. Conchita lives in a house in the forest next to the lake La Cocha; her only access to the outside world is via boat across the lake to the road-connected village of El Elcano. What she cannot grow on her land she buys with money from breeding guinea pigs (a local delicacy), or from the few ecotourism visitors to her private forest reserve.

It is a very tranquil existence, but Conchita explains that 30 years ago the people living around La Cocha lived from logging and charcoal, which the whole family would produce and the men would take to local towns to sell. Too often they would spend the money on drink, and then secure loans on the following week’s produce to buy the basic goods their families needed. *“Children didn’t have time to be children,”* she recalls, *“they worked with their families from when they turned four, and women’s roles in the household were not recognised.”*

Behind this misery was a lack of self-confidence, a history of abandonment of communities and broken promises from politicians, and a culture which aspired to urban education and achievement and looked down on their own small farmer peasant identity.

Conchita always believed that her community was capable and intelligent, and that their environment could provide for their well-being and happiness. She believed that heading instead to the city would *“just broaden the belt of misery there”*.

So, by diverting their gaze from the urban centres, Conchita and her neighbours developed a view of development which better suited them, built on their own resources and skills. They promoted equal participation of women, men and children. They organised themselves according to traditional pre-Colombian decision-making and participation structures, called mingas, and taught themselves skills for organic farming and sustainable natural resource management.

ADC has grown from this, and now runs education, advocacy, communication and technical assistance programmes to promote and support sustainable rural livelihoods in the area.

“Traditional development forgot about the concept of well-being”, explains ADC director, Vicente Revelo. ADC supports rural people to manage their lands sustainably, applying traditional knowledge, practices and species, as an alternative to being poor in the city.

They encourage people to balance productive use of their lands with conservation, joining up to the network of private reserves. And they prepare children to take on the responsibility of looking after their environment, working with schools to make learning more appropriate to their context.

This vision of development is unashamedly rural in outlook, and difficult to reconcile with a national vision which necessarily includes urban development and international trade. But the ADC’s vision is not entirely inward-looking and local. A network of small private reserves presents a workable complement to larger public protected areas, especially in areas where implementing protection policy and legislation is dangerous on the ground. *“Transformation starts from the individuals, their families, their local communities,”* Vicente Revelo says.



In Colombia, privately owned reserves are an important way to increase, link up and complement the coverage of the network of protected areas.



Communities need to be informed about the potential impacts of infrastructure projects in order to take action.

“WWF have opened opportunities at national level, helping us to find partners in other countries and to construct regional processes and platforms.”

Ricardo Morillo, ADC

But this transformation builds the capacity of people to influence decision-making and to “reclaim tradition as part of public policy”.

Conchita explains how her minga had responded to a threat to dam Cocha lake to build a hydroelectric facility, providing water for Pasto and electricity for the region. “We looked for friends to give us tools to defend the lake,” she says. And they learned how to understand the dynamics of megaprojects and use legal mechanisms to state their case.

The dam was stopped. And through ADC’s efforts, with WWF’s support, the lake has been declared a Ramsar site, recognising it as a wetland of international importance. However, the threats remain, and Conchita is aware that they need to continue to watch, learn and respond to them, promoting their vision of sustainable development.

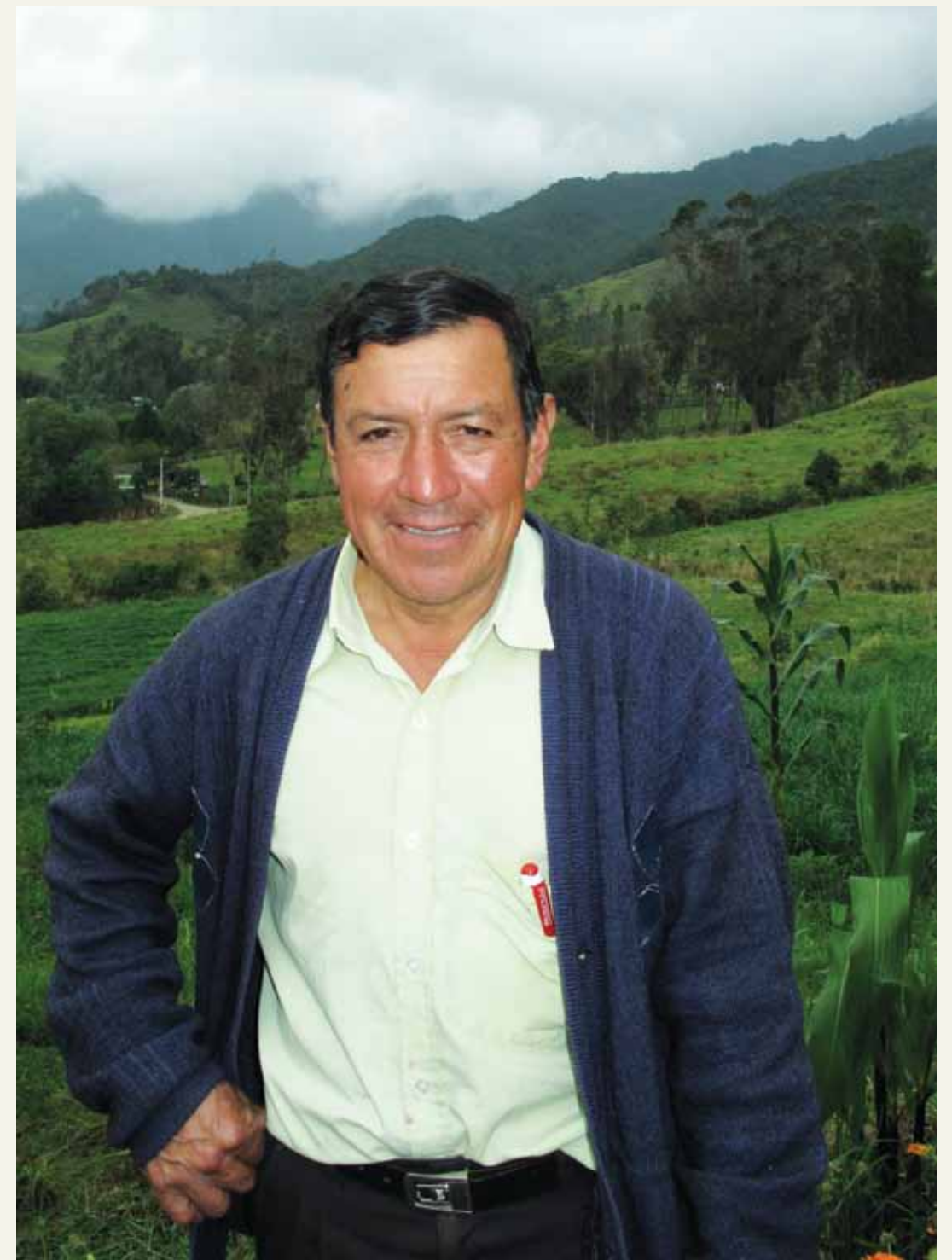
With its focus on conservation and sustainable livelihoods, ADC is a natural partner for WWF in the area. This type of partnership ensures that the work is rooted in local processes and knowledge, and is linked to work on policy at national and international levels. And it has enabled ADC to expand its vision, make links to other organisations, and be better prepared to respond to different threats and opportunities – including the Pasto-Mocoa road process. Ricardo Morillo, from ADC, explains: “WWF has not only supported our work, they have opened opportunities at national level, helping us to find partners in other countries and to construct regional processes and platforms.”

50%

**THE NEW ROAD WILL
REDUCE JOURNEY TIMES
FROM 3 HOURS TO 90
MINUTES**

From dependency to self-sufficiency

After decades of commuting to the city to work and shop, Marta and Luis got involved in their local minga, and got advice on how to start a kitchen garden, on using organic techniques, growing fruit and, eventually generating income from their land. Now they are able to live entirely from their land, which they run as a productive private reserve. “We are no longer ashamed of what we are, we are proud to be peasants. I am happy in the country and we want for nothing.” Marta told me, “Now my neighbours ask me how to do things, and what ADC teach me I like to teach others”.



© HANNAH WILLIAMS / WWF-UK

Luis, who with Marta, got involved in his local minga and lives entirely from the land.

ADC SUPPORTS RURAL PEOPLE TO MANAGE THEIR LANDS SUSTAINABLY, APPLYING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO BEING POOR IN THE CITY.

Confronting threats with information

Comuna 10 is a suburb of Pasto which has expanded rapidly and chaotically over recent years, in part to accommodate people displaced by conflict. A new bypass was planned to go around Pasto to connect to the Mocoa road, and ADC supported the local community association to participate effectively in the legally-required consultations held by the road-building contractor.

The community discovered that the road was going to cut off and displace important water systems, many of which are not represented on official maps. Eventually, the Comuna 10 association managed to negotiate a route and compensation package which greatly reduced losses to the community and to affected families. And the association was able to influence the design of local access roads. However, this process was not easy. Rather than a constructive conversation with the contractors, there was a game of cat and mouse, with adjustments to the plan raising new concerns, requiring more adjustments and so on.

This example highlights the importance of working at different levels to ensure that infrastructure projects are planned and implemented appropriately. ADC, through WWF and ILSA, has access to information about policies, plans and processes which could have direct or indirect impacts on its area. Local organisations need this support to identify and effectively use opportunities for participation and influence over local planning. Organisations like WWF can contribute tools and information for analysis. But more than that, they can also leverage influence to ensure that these legally-binding settings for participation are respected. In the case of Comuna 10, the contractor would probably have continued without listening to the community. But the influence of the IDB and others meant that the government agency INVIAS ensured this did not happen.

BRIDGING THE GAPS, ALIGNING THE VISIONS: THE ROLE OF WWF

“Nobody will conserve the environment on an empty stomach.”

Carlos Chingal, Fundación Opción Putumayo

WWF works for conservation and sustainable development, and recognises the Andes-Amazon piedmont as a strategic, globally important conservation priority that is also highly vulnerable. They have been working with those who control and manage land use, including local authorities, indigenous groups and owners of private reserves, to promote conservation and sustainable natural resource management.

But in Colombia, management plans and protected areas are not enough – reserves cannot be policed

by weak institutions, and natural resources cannot be protected if people’s livelihoods depend on exploiting them unsustainably. As such, WWF has increasingly been working on governance issues, to ensure that forests are managed in ways which are sustainable. And in ways that take into account the needs and knowledge of the people who live in and from them.

The local WWF team in Mocoa is led by Ilvia Niño with ADC and other local partners such as Ecotono, another local NGO working on social and environmental issues. They have been helping local groups to organise, work together and construct their own vision of sustainable local development as a basis for dialogue and collaboration with local authorities for land planning and management. One of the biggest initiatives from WWF and partners in the piedmont has been the School for the Conservation of the Andes-Amazon Piedmont, organised in collaboration with the National Parks office. This brought together 67 leaders from 40 organisations and provided them with the information, skills, tools and setting to analyse and plan together in regional working groups.

From mid 2008 to the end of 2009, WWF organised five workshops covering strategies for citizen participation and land use planning, communications, identification of threats and pressures on the area, and designing ways of working and information based in local issues and analysis.

The workshops were interspersed with meetings of regional roundtables to put the learning into practice. The ‘school’ also organised a small ‘conversatorio’, a process that WWF has implemented in several contexts. It enables local people to meet formally with local authorities, make proposals, negotiate, and reach agreements for actions that support conservation and sustainable development. At the event, 15 agreements were signed, dealing with issues including protected areas, land titling, livelihoods, climate change adaptation, and food security for indigenous groups.

The regional working groups are still in operation, bringing together different actors to define a common vision for their area, influence local decision making processes and carry out joint activities such as: land-use planning, the implementation of sustainable production systems and practices, capacity building workshops, and forming citizen watchdog mechanisms on infrastructure development.

“Through the regional process, people were able to see their land in perspective and realise the contribution that they can make.”

Felipe Garcia, Fundación Equilibrio

This vision and analysis enables the community to form a stronger, more unified and sustained response to the threats facing their environment, culture and livelihoods. The road between Pasto and Mocoa, though much wanted by local people, poses just such a threat. WWF is an important partner, not only because they provide local support, information and technical capacity, but also because they can make links to policy processes nationally and in Washington.

WWF-Colombia’s policy team aims to strengthen environmental criteria in government policy and promote an integrated and functional understanding of conservation, and compensation for environmental impacts. Juan Carlos Espinosa is the infrastructure policy officer for the team. He keeps track of initiatives that might threaten areas of high conservation value, and links policy influence to work on the ground.

Ilvia Niño explains: *“The policy office in Bogotá plays a very important role in our work. We each get the information that the other can’t get. We speak to each other a lot because otherwise we would lose that bridge.”* Not only does this inform and direct local level actions such as capacity building processes and citizen watchdog mechanisms but it also enables greater impact at national and international levels. For example, through WWF’s Amazon initiative, Juan Carlos was able to bring to bear lessons learned from other road building projects, especially under IIRSA. In this way, he could ensure the quality of the Pasto-Mocoa design, consultation, social and environmental assessments, and further implementation.

“There will be more projects, we can’t avoid it. But we have to make sure that our people benefit.”

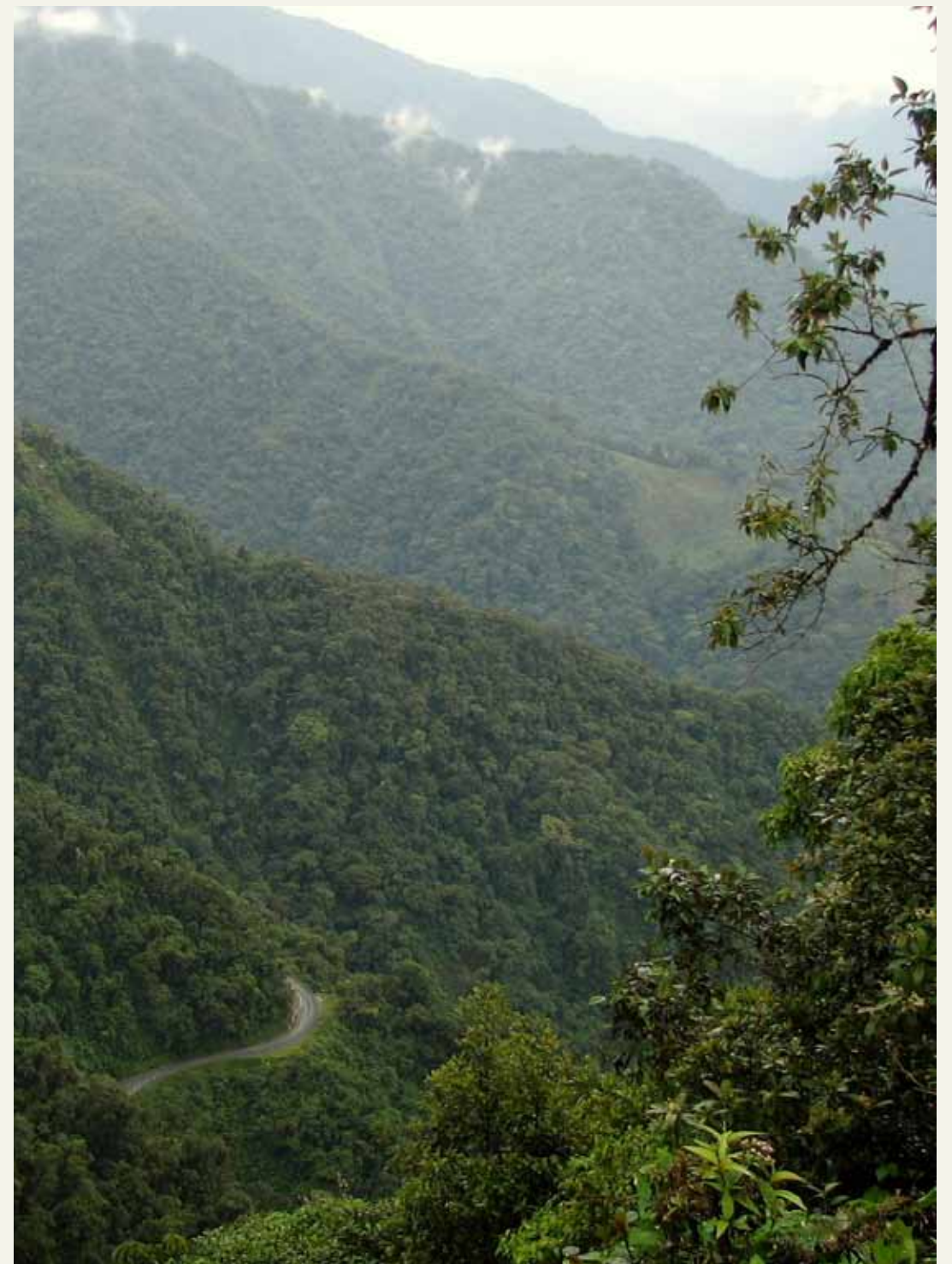
Francyled, Villalobos

Learning the hard way

Francyled knows from experience how important it is to participate in road-building plans and assessments. Prior to this process, a road connecting Mocoa with Bogotá was built right through her community of Villalobos with no consultation, compensation or explanation. *“We learned the hard way,”* she says, *“but now if something like that were to happen here we would say no. We would go to them, demand information and make sure that we didn’t lose out.”*

Francyled took part in the WWF School for Conservation as the leader of the Villalobos women’s association. Now she’s part of the working group for her area. Also involved is Juan, who works for the National Parks Service. He says that groups in the area used to be disorganised: *“We were taking joint actions, but we didn’t have a clear direction or route. With the regional working group we got all the local organisations together, gave them tools for analysis and planning, and saw where it went from there.”*

“There will be more projects, we can’t avoid it. But we have to make sure that our people benefit,” Francyled explains. *“Now we have a vision for our area, and this is the basis for our influence and decision-making.”* The working group does not currently have outside sources of funding, but people are still meeting in their own time, using the resources of participating groups and organisations.



Most of the forests along the existing (and proposed) San Francisco-Mocoa road are still well preserved. Good governance is needed at local and regional levels to ensure their future conservation.

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MISSION ACCOMPLISHED?

6%
PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
LOAN ALLOCATED FOR
INTEGRATED SOCIAL
AND ENVIRONMENTAL
MANAGEMENT PLAN,
COMPARED TO 1% ON
EQUIVALENT IIRSA
PROJECTS.

‘WWF worked hard to ensure that local people participated in the plans for the new road. With their aim of getting an integrated plan that would deliver conservation objectives, has WWF’s mission been accomplished?’

After a lengthy process, in 2008 the two environmental assessments were finalised and combined with the forest management plan to create the Sustainable, Integrated Social and Environmental Management Plan (PMASIS). The plan has funding of US\$12 million, which is 6% of the total road loan from the IDB. This is significantly more than equivalent IIRSA projects, which allocate as little as 1% of funding to environmental and social management plans.

The analysis fed directly into the engineering design of the road, resulting in a road with a high number of viaducts to reduce the physical impact on the area. The PMASIS includes immediate actions, such as an inventory of families living in the area to facilitate compensation measures. It is underpinned by wide-ranging commitments to increase and protect the forest. Its implementation will be managed by a variety of government institutions including, in large part, the local environmental authority Corpoamazonia.³

The reserve will be expanded from its current size of 34,600ha to over 76,000ha, to compensate for land lost directly to the new road. This will also connect it to other protected areas to the north. Areas of the reserve that have already been degraded and turned to productive use, including Minchoy, will become Protected Productive Forest Reserves to protect people’s livelihoods. And an integrated management district will connect a total of over 130,000ha of different protected areas around the road near Mocoa.

Alongside the expansion and integration of protected areas, the plan sets out a range of actions and measures to ensure that the designation of the reserves results in the protection of species, ecosystems and cultures, and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods. The forest management plan recognises the need to research and protect endemic and vulnerable species and avoid deforestation through the control and monitoring of natural resource use.

The other important element of the plan relates to the development of sustainable and participatory management, strengthening local institutions and indigenous organisations and supporting the development of alternative and sustainable livelihoods. A new fund will support the long-term management of the reserve. It will include loan money and contributions from Corpoamazonia, as well as income expected from productive activities and deforestation avoidance credits.

The plan is comprehensive, and WWF’s work with allies and partners has helped to ensure that unprecedented attention has been paid to environmental and social concerns. And that local organisations are prepared to participate in, and monitor, its implementation.



New infrastructure development can lead to increased deforestation, impact on watercourses, and can bring with it many other drivers of deforestation such as new people moving into previously uninhabited forest.

It has been an important opportunity for the IDB to learn how to support infrastructure development that is the least harmful to the environment, and for WWF to build constructive relationships with civil society, government and multilateral institutions. Most important, the communities in the affected area have the opportunity to deal with some of their biggest problems, which underlie the threats to the forest.

Among the potential direct impacts of the new road are deforestation of high conservation value areas and impacts on watercourses. The indirect impacts, which could potentially be even more significant, could include: immigration and new settlements along the road, displacement of local communities, especially those without land titles, concentration of land property among a few outsiders, establishment of unsustainable productive systems and impacts on local food security.

³ Corpoamazonia is the regional environmental authority of the southern part of the Colombian Amazon (the provinces of Amazonas, Caquetá and Putumayo).

FROM POLICY TO TRANSFORMATION: ENSURING QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION

“We can let it all happen to us, or we can make sure that plans take into consideration our needs and our culture.”

Jorge Martinez, mayor of San Francisco, Putumayo

“Only when a process is your own can you understand the long-term communal gain.”

Carlos Chingal, director of Fundación Opción Putumayo

WWF has progressed a long way towards meeting their original policy objectives of strengthening and broadening analysis and assessment of the various impacts the new road will have. But the development of people’s awareness and capacity to engage with these issues, and the opportunities provided by the new plans and funds, mean that the process is not at the end, but at a new beginning. WWF’s approach, to support and strengthen local processes for sustainable development and natural resource management, has strengthened participation in the development of the PMASIS, and undoubtedly

the quality of the final outcomes. But community leaders in the piedmont consider that this approach continues to be crucial, to ensure the quality of implementation of the plan.

The PMASIS is the biggest opportunity to scale up home-grown sustainable development processes, to inform and influence local development activities. The plan includes funds for research and monitoring of natural resource use, strengthening local governance, citizen participation in planning and monitoring, support to indigenous communities, and a ‘plan to improve quality of life through sustainable production projects’. These parts of the plan are mostly managed and implemented by Corpoamazonia, and much will depend on its management approach and vision of development, and its capacity to engage and support community-based organisations and processes.

If Corpoamazonia works with existing social organisations and processes, like the regional working groups and mingas, the road investment could have a positive long-term impact on the area. *“We don’t want them to come to us with a specific plan for our area, but to see how they can support what we are doing,”* says Javier Burbano from local NGO Fundación Opción Putumayo. *“The money must be used to consolidate local processes.”*

But if, as many local partners fear, the plan is delivered by a top-down project management approach, there is a real danger that the whole process will only be an investment in dependency, and the long-term positive impacts of the road will only be delayed and minimal.

This type of dependency has been the experience of many of the local leaders and groups, where projects supply funds and materials to implement an activity or encourage a type of behaviour, with no continuation of impact after the funding ends. Carlos Chingal, director of Fundación Opción Putumayo, has seen this approach to development funding in his home area near San Francisco: *“People get very impatient for personal gain because the processes are coming from outside, they are foreign. Only when a process is your own can you understand the long-term, communal gain.”*

WWF has a constructive approach, experience in capacity building for sustainable management and production, and a wide range of allies and partners. All of this gives them an important role to play in ensuring that the PMASIS creates sustainable transformations, rather than short-term gain and dependency.

“This kind of work is incremental: the more successful you are, the more demand there is.”

Carlos Hernan Castro, Ecotono

Javier Burbano is clear about the role WWF could play: *“WWF should influence the context to be more participatory, and provide a minga with technical and financial support and information for analysis. They should support capacity building so that people know what they want, so that each reserve has a good management plan. And they can help find the right organisations to support the engagement by communities as watchdogs of infrastructure development.”*

The work of WWF and their partners has helped local organisations to participate fully and effectively in consultation and planning processes. These same approaches are still important as the plan is implemented, to ensure strong and effective participation, and awareness of the wider context for local development. However, while continuing to support participation in local planning processes, there is a greater need now for local partners to develop skills to manage projects, influence policy and, in particular, monitor the spending and implementation of the plan, the use of natural resources and, crucially, the impact of the road.

Several of our partners in the piedmont have been developing information and communication elements to their work. ADC works on participatory communications and communications technology. Ecotono has been involved in producing a regional newspaper called Socivil, which covers civil society issues including the road negotiations and assessments.

Carlos Hernan Castro from Ecotono considers that this will be an important area of work in this coming stage: *“Of all our work with WWF, the greatest impact came from the communications training. When people report for themselves they can be much more effective at monitoring what is going on in their area.”* People need to be able to monitor spending and report on changes, impacts and learning. But they also need channels to share this information widely, and to make sure that mistakes are corrected and lessons learned.

“Good monitoring in this area will demonstrate that infrastructure development does not have to work against conservation and the environment.”

Jose Ignacio Muñoz

As Margarita Flores from the legal and advocacy organisation ILSA points out, this kind of monitoring will be important for a long time to come: *“When there is oil and hydroelectric expansion in the area in the future, people need to be able to link it back to the road,”* she warns. And, because of this, *“civil society capacity for monitoring is supremely important, as there are no resources for external organisations to monitor over 15 to 20 years”*.

The director of Corpoamazonia, Jose Ignacio Muñoz, has a more hopeful view: *“Good monitoring in this area will demonstrate that infrastructure development does not have to work against conservation and the environment,”* he asserts. Either way, WWF needs to continue to support local partners in their work to collect and analyse data. They also need to feed learning and evidence on the impact of the road and the effectiveness of the PMASIS back to policy-makers in the government and the IDB, to improve future policy and planning.

Amazon infrastructure

100%
RECYCLED

6.7M SQ KM

The Amazon region covers 6.7m sq km. It spans Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela.

GRASSROOTS

WWF supports participatory decision-making systems at the grassroots level on critical infrastructure initiatives in the Amazon.



1ST

The Pasto-Mocoa road is the first infrastructure development project in Colombia that included specific plans to minimise direct and indirect social and environmental impacts, and to minimise direct impacts on sensitive ecosystems.

1990

Every year since 1990, between 17,000 and 27,000 sq km of the Amazon rainforest has been deforested. That's equivalent to clearing an area almost the size of Belgium each year.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

wwf.org.uk and wwf.org.co