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REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP ON "THE ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION IN
INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE
SOUTHERN REGION OF HONDURAS (DRI-SUR)"

(Tegucigalpa, 30 March-1 April 1987)

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Foreword

This report presents the conclusions and recommendations of the workshop on "The environmental dimension in Integrated Rural Development Projects in the Southern Region of Honduras (DRI-SUR)", held in Tegucigalpa between 30 March and 1 April 1987.

This workshop was held in connection with the ECLAC/UNEP project on "Technical Co-operation for the Incorporation of Environmental Consideration in Development Projects and Programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean", assigned to the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit.

The workshop was jointly organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget (SECPLAN) and the Ministry of Natural Resources of Honduras.

The purpose of the workshop was the incorporation of the environmental dimension into development projects, and in particular to examine into the Integrated Rural Development Project for the Southern Region of the country, which is at present being prepared by an interinstitutional technical group co-ordinated by of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

To attain this objective, presentations were made of the experience acquired on the topic and complemented by the background documents indicated in annex 1.



b) The environmental dimension in the DRI-SUR Project:

- i) Prefeasibility study of the agricultural and forestry production component of slopes on which soil, water and woodland recovery and conservation are practiced;
- ii) Institutional aspects of the formulation and implementation of the project.

c) Environmental policies of international development financing agencies:

- i) The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB);
- ii) The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI).

The working methodology adopted provided for presentations of each of the items of the agenda by specialists, followed by plenary sessions at which analyses and debates took place.

Officers

6. The debates were presided over by the following officers, Miguel Enrique Nolasco, of the Ministry of Natural Resources, René Gamero, of the Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget, and Santiago Torres, of the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit.

Outline of work

7. The presentations were made by the following specialists:

General features of environmental management in development planning: Mr. René Gamero, Head of the Forestry, Fishing and Environment Unit of SECPLAN, Government of Honduras.

Environmental legislation in Latin America and the Caribbean: Mr. Raúl Branes, Co-ordinator of the Regional Programme on Environmental Legislation (PR-5) of the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ORPALC) of UNEP.

Prefeasibility analysis of the environmental component of DRI-SUR: Mr. Santiago Torres, Consultant to the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit.

Institutional aspects of the formulation and implementation of DRI-SUR: Ms. Edith Laricos, Co-ordinator of the technical team responsible for drawing up DRI-SUR, Ministry of Natural Resources, Government of Honduras.

Environmental policy in IDB: Mr. Tomás Muñoz, Vice-Representative of the Bank, IDB-Honduras.

Environmental policy in CABEI: Mr. Mauricio Athie, Environmental Consultant to the Central American Bank for Economic Integration.

II. CONCLUSIONS

8. It was recognized that it was difficult to introduce the environmental dimension into planning, in particular on account of its transectoral and multidisciplinary implications. Furthermore, mention was made of the problems which arose from the lack of linkage between the interests of the different social actors in order to allow the environment to be more effectively incorporated.

9. It was underscored that the National Development Plan contained proposals implying a more explicit incorporation of the environment: mention was made of the need for better knowledge and more rational use of natural resources, the need to develop appropriate technologies, the importance of achieving a development process signifying a state of territorial equilibrium as a requisite for sustainable development of natural resources and of the environment, and finally, the importance and need to start up a process of participative management of development. It was also mentioned that it was vital to take advantage of local or regional knowledge and capacity within a pattern of decentralizing decision-making.

10. With regard to environmental legislation, stress was placed on the inefficiency of existing legislation. Moreover, it was highlighted that in addition to developing appropriate legislation, it was necessary to tackle problems by their economic and social roots. It was pointed out that it was important to draw up an environmental legislation programme, and that the present was a particularly opportune moment for doing so, as the country was in the process of revising legislation in this area.

11. With regard to the introduction of the environmental dimension into the DRI-SUR Project, the incidence of the region's environmental problems on its possibilities of development was also highlighted. There had been a gradual deterioration of the river basins which make up the region, starting in their highest reaches, which, under pressure from the peasant population, had been affected by a rapid process of deforestation, erosion and desertification. Water had become an increasingly scant resource and its supply had become increasingly irregular, with intermittent cycles of drought and flooding. In addition to pressure from the peasant population, the problem was also the result of the attitude adopted by major producers, who made irrational use of soil for livestock raising by overburdening the carrying capacity of hillside ecosystems.

12. The coastal region is also affected by the overall situation in the region, as the mangrove swamp ecosystems and hydrobiological resources have

deteriorated. As the impact of DRI-SUR will be greatest on hillside zones, it has been proposed that a major environmental component of the project should be the introduction of programmes for agricultural and forestry production based on soil, water and woodland conservation practices.

13. One feature which was stressed in respect of the evaluation of this type of project was the importance of comparing its forecast results with those produced were it not to be carried out. Stress was placed on the lack of information relating to environmental phenomena taking place in the region, which hampers any adequate assessment of the benefits of the project.

14. In addition, particular analysis was made of the importance of laying down clear and explicit criteria for defining the policy in respect of subsidies linked to the project, particularly in respect of technical assistance, soil conservation works and reforestation.

15. Examination of the prefeasibility of the component of DRI-SUR analysed produced positive and satisfactory results, and revealed that reclaiming and environmental conservation:

- i) were economically profitable;
- ii) contributed to generating productive employment and significantly increased the income of the peasant population in an activity marked by high unemployment and underemployment of labour;
- iii) saved scarce resources such as capital and foreign currency, and
- iv) made viable sustained development over time, simultaneously finding a response to the most pressing needs of the local population.

16. Stress was placed on the considerable importance of active, conscious and systematic participation by peasants throughout the whole of the process, and special emphasis was placed on their capacity to generate development in the region, on the basis of adequate training and assistance allowing them to realize their potential.

17. As far as the institutional aspects of the development and possible implementation of DRI-SUR are concerned, the following features were emphasized:

- i) the importance of project co-ordination to ensure active participation by the various institutions and agents;
- ii) the difficulty engendered by the fact that a number of institutions assign marginal personnel which do not adequately represent the policies of the institution, thereby leading to avoidable delays and need for constant reformulation;
- iii) the existence of interinstitutional rivalry in respect of the executing agencies, which hampers work and jeopardizes the integral conception of the project, and
- iv) instability in the team working on the project, marked by high turnover, a phenomenon which harms the efficacy and efficiency of the team and the quality of the project.

18. The workshop also had the opportunity to familiarize itself with and debate the environmental guidelines which had been incorporated by the international financing agencies operating in the country, particularly those of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI). Generally speaking, both organizations agreed over the need to ensure that the environmental dimension was incorporated into the initial phases of project formulation, in order to allow alternative means of achieving the project's aims, with the lowest possible environmental impact, to be put forward. It was also pointed out that it was desirable that measures contemplated to mitigate damage should be adequately and opportunely programmed and budgeted.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

19. The workshop put forward the following general recommendations:

a) Other meetings of the same kind should be promoted in order to increase awareness of the issues at stake among technical and management personnel in government agencies, private organizations and associations.

b) Progress should be made in setting up mechanisms to ensure that in assessing the performance or results of projects in the country analysis was made of their present or past repercussions (favourable and unfavourable) on the environment, even if environmental considerations had not formed part of the formulation stage. Simultaneously, mechanisms for disseminating the relevant reports should be set up, in order to publicize the results and to help avoid errors being committed in future projects.

c) All participants in the workshop were called upon to make a conscious and systematic effort to further the incorporation of environmental concerns in their work and daily life.

d) An effort should be made to seek out ways and means of ensuring that national and international, public or private institutions financing development projects in the country devote a percentage of the budgeted funds to environmental conservation.

e) UNEP and ECLAC should seek out and put forward operational mechanisms allowing societal participation through independent institutions, such as the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras (UNAH), the Honduran Ecological Association (AHE) and the Committee for the Conservation and Improvement of the Environment, in order that programmes and projects carried out by international organizations in the country could be more effectively supervised.

20. The workshop put forward the following specific recommendations concerning the Southern region and the DRI-SUR Project:

a) Efforts should be made in the region to promote the substitution of crops which are particularly harmful to the environment, such as cotton, by others necessary to the population and the national economy, such as sorghum, soya and others.

b) Efforts should be made to ensure that in executing the DRI-SUR Project a systematic and accessible record was kept of experience, and meticulous scientific studies should simultaneously be carried out in order to gradually

acquire greater and deeper knowledge of the technologies applied in environmental restoration and protection.

c) The training component of the project should incorporate an intensive training programme in prawn farming, prior to establishing prawn-farming units among the peasants benefiting from the project.

d) The more ambitious goals should be set in respect of the soil conservation and reforestation objectives contained in the DRI-SUR Project, in order for it to exert greater influence not only over the objectives of environmental recovery and conservation, but also over the levels of production and productivity and over levels of employment and income among the peasant population living on the hillsides.

e) An effort should be made to ensure adequate co-ordination among institutions, private enterprises and non-profit-making organizations in respect of DRI-SUR, to avoid duplicating efforts and undertaking action contrary to the project's environmental objectives.

f) It should be stressed and guaranteed that the technological solutions adopted by the project have a high endogenous content and that, consequently, they are easily adoptable by the producers concerned, and also essentially labour-intensive and, of course, suited to the environment.

g) The necessary mechanisms should be established in connection with the project to draw up an up-dated and reliable register of pesticides and agricultural chemicals employed in the area.

21. The workshop put forward the following recommendations in respect of environmental education and training:

a) IDB and CABEI should increase their efforts to train technical personnel in the environmental sphere in the country, and particularly in aspects linked to the incorporation of the environmental dimension in the formulation of development projects.

b) A study should be made of ways of establishing the periodic edition of bulletins and reviews in the country with a particular focus on the incorporation of the environmental dimension into the various kinds of development projects. It should be circulated among the general public, but particularly designed for institutions responsible for formulating and supervising projects or for helping to carry them out.

c) Pressure should be brought to bear to ensure that the environmental dimension be included into the programmes or curricula of the basic, secondary, technical and higher or university studies.

d) The firm support of the country's mass media should be sought in order to carry out an ongoing and sustained campaign for conservation and restoration of the environment and of the natural resources of the nation.

e) Efforts should be made to improve the environmental conditions of schools in order to provide students with a suitable environment for learning,

thereby strengthening national awareness of sanitation, environmental management and beautification.

22. The workshop made the following suggestions in respect of institutional and legal issues linked to the environment:

- i) an effort should be made to identify ways of persuading the National Commission on the Environment and Natural Resources, by institutional and legal means as well as by the pressure of public opinion, to effectively move into action and to ensure that its policies be incorporated into the activity of the different ministries and public-sector organizations and private-sector firms;
- ii) proposals should be made for State institutions directly or indirectly involved in environmental conservation to establish a unit or section made up of suitable personnel and especially devoted to ensuring that the environmental dimension be effectively incorporated into the institutions' work;
- iii) more dynamic environmental management on the part of the Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget should be recommended;
- iv) the environmental bill under preparation should contain a clause establishing sanctions for those agencies or recipients of credit who fail to comply with the terms of the loan relating to environmental management, and
- v) the creation of an association of civil-service professionals working in areas linked to the environment should be encouraged, in order to speed up the exchange of experience and facilitate interinstitutional co-ordination in these areas.

23. The workshop put forward the following recommendations in connection with the problem of deforestation in the country:

- a) The full rigour of the law should be brought to bear on those who start fires and destroy woodland.
- b) National policy on the exploitation of woodland should be readapted, and establish among other things the obligation for sawmills to reforest, maintain and take care of areas cut; this obligation should be extended to landowners in general. Peasant groups should devote an area of their settlements to reforestation, and improve, conserve and take care of it.
- c) Housing companies and/or institutions should be obliged to create a wooded area in every project, be it urban or rural, and to be responsible before the communities concerned for improving, conserving and watching over it.
- d) An effort should be made to find means of establishing a wooded area in every town and city in the country in order to conserve the environment of its inhabitants.

e) A policy of reforestation should be developed involving active participation by the population through its organizations. In particular, peasant organizations should take part in the preparation, implementation and supervision of national reforestation policies.

Annex 1

SUPPORT DOCUMENTS PRESENTED TO THE WORKSHOP

- Incorporación de la dimensión ambiental en la planificación, E/CEPAL/G.1242, Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit, 24 April 1983.

- Nicolo Gligo, Medio ambiente en la planificación latinoamericana: vías para una mayor incorporación, E/CEPAL/ILPES/R.46, 11 June 1982.

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