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REPORT OF THE SEMINAR/WORKSHOP "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
FOR THE SOUTHERN REGION OF HONDURAS: OVERALL APPROACH AND
PROJECT ON 'AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION USING SOIL, WATER
AND FOREST RECLAMATION AND CONSERVATION PRACTICES
IN SOUTHERN HONDURAS'"

(Choluteca, Honduras, 11-13 April 1989)

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Preface

This report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Seminar/Workshop "Sustainable development strategy for the southern region of Honduras: overall approach and project on 'Agricultural production using soil, water and forest reclamation and conservation practices in southern Honduras'", held in Choluteca, Honduras, from 11 to 13 April 1989.

This Seminar/Workshop was held in connection with phase II of the ECLAC/UNEP project on technical co-operation for the integration of environmental considerations into development planning (FP/9101-87-93), under the auspices of the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit.

The purpose of this Seminar/Workshop was to analyze a development strategy for the southern region of Honduras that will ensure, by effectively incorporating the environmental dimension, that the process is sustainable in the medium and long term. In addition, the Seminar/Workshop examined a project concerning hillside agro-forestry production using soil, water and forest conservation practices, as a concrete expression of this strategy in one of the most critical areas of the region.

I. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Place and date

1. The Seminar/Workshop "Sustainable development strategy for the southern region of Honduras: overall approach and project on agricultural production using soil, water and forest reclamation and conservation practices" was held at the Hotel La Fuente, Choluteca, from 11 to 13 April 1989.

Attendance

2. Thirty-five persons */ from a number of governmental institutions operating in the southern region participated in the Seminar/Workshop.

Opening and closing

3. Sergio Rodríguez, Head of the Planning Unit for the Departments of Choluteca and Valle, and Carlos Aguirre, Director-General for Territorial Planning, Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget (SECPLAN), addressed the opening meeting.

4. Santiago Torres, representing the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit, Samuel Alvarez, Regional Director of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Aquiles Colindres, Political Governor of the Department of Valle, and Horacio Martínez, Head of the Department of the Environment, Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget, addressed the closing meeting of the Seminar/Workshop on 14 April.

Agenda

5. The following agenda was discussed:

1. Sustainable development strategy for the southern region of Honduras. General outlines and policies;

2. Sustainable development strategy for the southern region of Honduras. Specific strategies by programme-areas;

*/ See list of participants in annex I.

3. Development activities currently in progress or being studied or negotiated in the region;

4. Project on "Agricultural production using soil, water and forest reclamation and conservation practices in southern Honduras".

Documentation

6. The participants were provided with the following documents: "Estrategia de desarrollo sostenible para la región sur de Honduras" (IC/R.742), prepared jointly by the Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget (SECPLAN), Government of Honduras, and by the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit, and "Proyecto 'Producción agrícola bajo prácticas de recuperación y conservación de suelos, agua y bosque. Región Sur de Honduras'" (IC/R.743), prepared jointly by the Ministry of Natural Resources, Government of Honduras, and by the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit. These documents were supplemented by the support documents listed in annex II.

Methods of work

7. The introductory statements on each of the agenda items made by the experts in the plenary sessions were followed by analysis and discussion. The discussion and analysis of the specific strategies by programme-areas were held in two working groups, and their conclusions were discussed in plenary meetings.

8. The discussions were co-ordinated by Carlos Pineda of the Department of Regional Project Preparation, Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget.

Summary of work

9. The introductory statements were presented as follows:

a) General outlines and policies of the sustainable development strategy for the southern region: Fausto Lazo, Head of the Department of Regional Project Preparation, Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget, Government of Honduras.

b) Specific strategies by programme-areas: Santiago Torres, expert from the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit.

c) Development activities currently in progress or being studied or negotiated in the southern region: Mauricio Díaz of the Operative Co-ordination Department, Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget, Government of Honduras.

d) The feasibility study for the project on "Agricultural production using soil, water and forest reclamation and conservation practices in

southern Honduras": Joel Ricco of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Government of Honduras, and Santiago Torres of the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit.

10. Samuel Alvarez and Sonia Oyuela were the rapporteurs for the working groups on specific strategies.

II. CONCLUSIONS

11. It was recognized that it was very important for the region to have a development strategy to guide the actions not only of the State but also of the private sector and non-governmental organizations, together with those of international and bilateral technical and financial assistance agencies.

12. It was noted that the lack of institutional co-ordination was one of the main problems hindering the effectiveness and efficiency of the many activities being carried out in the region. This lack of co-ordination ultimately disables efforts to solve the urgent, concrete problems facing the region. It was agreed that if these questions are not dealt with, the strategy runs a serious risk of failure.

13. It was concluded that, besides the problems directly connected with inter-institutional co-ordination, the regional planning system is not working with even the slightest degree of effectiveness. Some of the reasons for this problem are the lack of clear leadership from the Departmental Planning Boards, the gradual loss of credibility of these Boards as a key element of the planning system —since they meet only very irregularly— and a lack of commitment on the part of the authorities of the various State institutions in the region with regard to the proper role of these Boards.

14. This situation is being further aggravated by the increasingly marked separation between the State structure, organized around activity sectors, and the concept on which the Departmental Planning Boards is based. Each government sectoral institution makes its own independent plans, while meeting centralized guidelines, practically eliminating any possibility of meeting needs that might arise outside the strictly defined planning scope of each institution.

15. Beyond institutional limitations, it was recognized that although the region indeed has critical problems it also represents a significant development potential at the country level. The various regional agents must rise above pessimistic and negative attitudes, and propose practical solutions to the existing problems on the basis of a rational and sustainable use of the region's natural resources.

16. Another aspect that was pointed out as a factor in the potential success of the strategy in guiding and promoting regional development efforts was the political will to support it and to back the specific measures suggested in it. In this connection it was noted that such political will exists and was reflected by the preparation of the strategy responding to a specific request from the National Congress, to which the Executive Power, had offered a

favourable response, as reflected in the document under discussion in the Seminar/Workshop.

17. Generally speaking, and taking into account the recommendations contained in part III, the strategy that was discussed and analyzed by the participants in the Seminar/Workshop was considered satisfactory with regard to its general guidelines and policies and the specific strategies suggested for each programme-area, i.e., for the hills and mountains, the valley, the coast and the border areas.

18. It was felt that the project "Agricultural production using soil, water and forest reclamation and conservation practices in southern Honduras", in view of the recommendations contained in part III, correctly followed the specific guidelines of the strategy for the corresponding programme-area.

19. It was also concluded that the main thrust of the regional strategy made it advisable to separate the project from the project on integrated rural development for the southern region of Honduras (DRI-Sur), in accordance with the criteria for the programme-areas. Accordingly, the project on hillside agricultural production using conservation practices, submitted for the consideration of the workshop, appeared to be institutionally feasible. It was important for potential beneficiaries to participate in the preparatory stage of the executive project, to ensure the cultural viability of the project itself.

20. From the technological point of view, it was agreed that existing experience in the region on the main technological features of the project ensures that it will be perfectly feasible, since the observed increments in the yields of traditional crops as a result of incorporating conservationist works and agronomical techniques and practices have actually been quite sizeable. In any case, as noted in part III, since the particular conditions on each farm vary considerably, it is advisable to do a sensitivity analysis of the project for each farm with respect to the variable yield, whose average value as used in the project calculations might be somewhat overestimated.

21. Lastly, it was noted that, although the type of solution contained in the project under discussion is perfectly feasible for the coverage in question, it cannot be considered an exhaustive solution to the environmental and developmental problems of the hill and mountain areas. The State will have to take additional actions to deal more fully with the urgent demands of the rural population of the area.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The seminar workshop made the following general recommendations:

a) The Departmental Planning Board mechanism provided for in the Planning Act must be strengthened, as a concrete element of support to regional development efforts, both directly and by enhancing the region's capacity to negotiate with agents outside the region. It is therefore

essential for the heads of the governmental institutions operating in the region to take a much more committed attitude towards the Boards, and to refrain from sending their subordinate staff to represent them without giving them enough authority to take decisions and make commitments;

b) One or more mechanisms must be established to allow for greater permanence and instability for individual experts and technical teams in the various regional institutions in order to ensure continuity in the strategies and policies that are defined as most appropriate for development;

c) It is absolutely indispensable for central teams from the Ministry of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget to provide greater support to their departmental offices, which act as technical units for the Regional Planning Boards; only with such support can the Secretariat play a protagonistic role in the process of planning regional development so that the Boards will become effective mechanisms for the co-ordination and concertation of efforts;

d) It is desirable, while recognizing the existing capabilities of national teams, to continue having the support and technical assistance of the Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit in the tasks of operationalizing the strategy under the specific programmes and projects and monitoring their execution; this is true both for the particular strategies of the different programme-areas and for the general environmental management policy envisaged in the overall strategy for the region.

23. The Seminar/Workshop made the following recommendations in relation to the general features and policies of the sustainable development strategy for the southern region of Honduras;

a) More use should be made of tax incentives, a type of instrument largely unheard of in the region. These incentives could be particularly useful in the promotion of development activities involving a rational and sustainable use of the region's natural and environmental resources;

b) Greater emphasis should be placed on the need to establish programmes to keep the information on regional trends up-to-date, both for the traditional variables of economic activity and social situation and for the status of natural resources and the environment; accordingly, it is extremely important to promote and conduct continuing research to expand and improve knowledge about the available resources and the ecological factors determining their sustainable use;

c) More detail should be provided on the standard approaches to environmental quality, specially in relation to both quality control of water supplies and the use of agro-chemicals and pesticides;

d) Participative development management should be stressed, giving more weight in the strategy to the concept of local development, in which discussion of the environment plays a fundamentally important role;

e) Institutional development policy should take into account the imbalance between the institutional capabilities of the two departments in

the region; the position of the Department of Valle is much weaker, which adversely affects its ability to negotiate for the allocation of resources. Since the most critical development and environmental problems present themselves in this Department, a way of enhancing these capabilities must be sought as soon as possible.

24. The Seminar/Workshop made the following recommendations with regard to the specific strategies proposed for the various programme-areas:

a) In relation to programme-area 1 (valley):

i) Priorities should be set for the crops which are being promoted as export crops and speedier progress should be made towards gaining a more thorough knowledge of the characteristics and potential of the soil; the objective should be to zone the crops and carefully plan agricultural diversification in the area; at the same time, more stress should be placed on promoting industrial production oriented towards adding value to the products and resources derived from crop farming;

ii) With regard to the implementation of an irrigation programme, and since water is a scarce but essential resource for the adequate development of the coastal area, it is necessary to apply a programme of consciousness-raising, promotion and training about modern, efficient irrigation techniques; these include, of course, the establishment of strict standards for the use of agro-chemicals to prevent soil and water contamination;

iii) In view of the situation affecting the agrarian reform groups located in this area, the technical and credit support systems must be revised so that the assistance is suitably adapted to the capabilities of each beneficiary; as for the institutional capability of providing technical assistance to these sectors in the region, co-operation accords or agreements should be signed between the National Agrarian Institute (INA) and the Ministry of Natural Resources;

iv) In respect of the marketing component associated with the strategy for promoting agricultural exports, it is necessary --among other measures-- to establish a storage policy, offer tax incentives, simplify administrative procedures for exporting, support producer prices and encourage the establishment of co-operatives for providing services associated with exporting (packing, etc.).

b) In relation to area programme 2 (hills):

i) It is enormously important to regularize the landholding situation, granting full land ownership to the tenant farmers, which would facilitate, inter alia, their access to institutional services, such as credit and technical assistance;

ii) To prevent the deterioration of the ecosystem, energy alternatives should be found, biogas should be used or the cost of electricity should be reduced, incentives should be created so that the

farmer will derive direct benefits from the exploitation of the forest, and the development of appropriate technology should be promoted;

iii) With regard to water management, a system for monitoring and controlling the quality of water should be established; a health code and general water act should be adopted as soon as possible; an effective and practical system should be established for controlling the use of pesticides and fertilizers, promoting the use of organic fertilizers;

c) In relation to programme-area 3 (coast):

i) Development and reserve areas should be defined to ensure the effective protection and preservation of existing resources, compatible with a contribution by this area to the short- and long-term development of the region;

ii) There should be established, within the process of strengthening sustainable development of the resources of this area, all possible measures to ensure the effective protection of small- and medium-scale producers and fishermen;

iii) A specific programme of institutional support should be developed to supervise the management and effective control of the use of the coastal forest (primarily the mangrove trees);

iv) In relation to generating alternative economic activities to alleviate population pressures on resources, conditions should be created for promoting tourism (e.g., providing water systems, hotels, restaurants and basic services) in ways that will not harm the environment.

d) In relation to programme-area 4 (border):

i) It was emphasized that there was a need to develop non-formal education programmes through the communications media (radio, television, etc.) to strengthen national identity and sovereignty.

25. In relation to the project "Agricultural production using soil, water and forest reclamation and conservation practices in southern Honduras", some of the basic figures should be revised, particularly those concerning the estimated average crop yields and the real costs of reforestation, incorporating the problems of losses and replanting requirements. It was concluded that an appropriate way of incorporating these recommendations would be by conducting sensitivity analyses.

Annex I

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED AT THE SEMINAR/WORKSHOP

a) Working documents

- "Estrategia de desarrollo sostenible para la región sur de Honduras", Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit; Secretariat of Planning, Co-ordination and the Budget, Government of Honduras, ECLAC, LC/R.742, March 1989.

- "Proyecto 'producción agrícola bajo prácticas de recuperación y conservación de suelos, agua y bosque. Región sur de Honduras'", Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit; Ministry of Natural Resources, Government of Honduras, ECLAC, LC/R.743, March 1989.

b) Support documents

- "El medio ambiente como factor de desarrollo", Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit, Estudios e Informes de la CEPAL, No. 75, LC/G.1549-P, February 1989.

- "Planificación y gestión del desarrollo en áreas de expansión de la frontera agropecuaria en América Latina", Joint ECLAC/UNEP Development and Environment Unit, ECLAC, LC/G.1542-P, March 1989.

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