

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
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Project Title	Participatory approaches for the conservation of the mangrove forest in the coastal center of Veracruz, Mexico
Application ID	40560-2
Date of this Report	29 Nov 2024

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
To characterize and analyze the perceptions, interests, and power relations of the social actors involved in the coastal lagoon system of Mandinga (CLSM), Veracruz, Mexico, around conservation.				
To identify the interests and rationalities of the social actors in the CLSM that support the conservation of the area.				
Document and analyze the process of dialogue, reflection, and collective action aimed at the management of participatory strategies for the conservation of the CLSM ecosystems, mainly the mangrove.				The process of participation through dialogue, reflection and action with local groups is medium term. In this sense, it is necessary to continue working with local groups towards the co-design of participatory strategies for conservation in the CLSM, so this objective has been partially met.
Sensitize and train local staff in the monitoring of mangrove birds such as Boat-billed Heron				

(<i>Cochlearius cochlearius</i>) and Muscovy Duck (<i>Cairina moschata</i>) in the CLSM.				
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). From the description and analysis of the socio-ecological scenario of the CLSM as part of objective 1, we were able to identify the key social actors interested in community improvement and mangrove conservation. These actors coincide in having little representation and power in decision making towards conservation. Therefore, it is essential to continue working with them.

b). It was possible to analyze and document learning and integration with two local groups (municipal agency and educational sector) interested in conservation through culture and education. This was part of one stage of the CLSM mangrove conservation project.

c). Through the biological monitoring and nesting experience of the Boat-billed Heron and the placement of 8 Muscovy Duck nest boxes, we were able to train 7 local people from Mandinga and Matoza and La Aguada in the CLSM wetlands. Two people are adults and 5 people are adolescents.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

One of the difficulties was to approach certain social sectors of the CLSM to learn about their interests in conservation: (a) business developers of the Riviera Veracruzana and (b) the municipality of Alvarado. This was due to a physical and socioeconomic barrier. This difficulty was addressed by indirectly characterizing these social actors with academic literature and other available sources.

Another difficulty has been the almost null interest and little participation of other local sectors, such as organized fishermen, tourism service providers and ejidatarios. This is due to their purely economic interests in the projects. These sectors were only considered as informants at some points of the project.

The third difficulty has been the contextualized methodological design applied with the two local groups. Since I am in the process of learning participatory methodologies, there have been constant theoretical and methodological challenges in the context of Mandinga. This was addressed with the accompaniment of my tutorial committee and other experiences in coastal areas that nurtured the Project.

Finally, we had the difficulty of building the nest boxes for Muscovy Duck in a timely manner, because the person from La Aguada was not able to support us at the end of 2023 because of his work. This was addressed in early 2024 and the boxes were placed in March 2024.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

Participation was through two local groups in the communities of Mandinga and Matoza, Veracruz. The groups are made up of: (1) organized women from the

municipal agency and improvement board; (2) directors of basic education, including kindergarten, elementary and telesecundaria. We conducted a series of workshops (N=10) and follow-up and reflection meetings (N=11) with both groups where we addressed different topics framed in a self-diagnosis and linkage with other organized groups in the Gulf of Mexico. The direct benefits for the Mandinga groups were: (1) generation of key information for a group self-assessment, in order to identify weaknesses, threats, strengths and opportunities for organizational and community improvement; (2) linkage with organized coastal groups to address various socio-environmental issues, particularly with the formation of the "Southwest Gulf of Mexico Reef Corridor Network"; (3) experiences in obtaining funding for cultural conservation projects; (4) support for recognition as a people of African descent.

On the other hand, the participation of young people and children has been good. Workshops were held in kindergarten, elementary and high school. These consisted of: (1) 3 workshops related to Boat-billed Heron nesting in the Mandinga mangroves; (2) 7 workshops on coastal birds and training in the use of binoculars, bird identification guides, bird biology and ecology, and ethical practices in bird watching; and (3) 5 bird watching tours. The direct benefits have been the environmental awareness of the participants, learning how to monitor and observe birds. It should be noted that, the local organization "Monitores Mandinga" formed in 2018 and suspended between 2020 and 2022, was retaken in 2023, so the training is through that organization.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, the participatory work plans with the two local groups of Mandinga and Matoza will continue, as we have built a strong bond of trust and have aligned goals and interests. Likewise, the work with adolescents and children will continue, through the local organized group "Monitores Mandinga" in charge of sensitizing and training people of these ages in the non-extractive use of birds. All these activities are interrelated to develop participatory strategies for mangrove conservation in Mandinga.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

The plan for sharing the results has been as follows:

(1) For the participating local groups. Sharing information with the groups has been constant, since in each workshop the information generated was presented in simple materials and then organized and presented in more visual materials. In the case of the directors of basic education, we have a shared document with the follow-up of the activities; (2) For the community of Mandinga and Matoza. I have participated in the festivals "Oyster Fair" 2023 and 2024 where I shared the progress of the project, where I included the description of the socio-ecological scenario, a timeline of the socio-environmental history of Mandinga and the work with the basic education schools; (3) For the scientific communities. Two texts were written, a scientific article on the analysis of the socio-ecological scenario of CLSM and a book chapter where we describe this scenario from the perspective of peace, with proposals from the daily activity to cultivate a culture of peace towards participatory conservation in Mandinga; (4) For adolescents and children. Through workshops in kindergarten, elementary and high school, we communicated the nesting record of Boat-billed Heron, elaborated an infographic on this nesting phenomenon and an infographic on the placement of nest boxes for Muscovy Duck in the CLSM wetlands.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

One of the next steps is to direct the Project towards the co-design of participatory strategies for community improvement and mangrove conservation with the two local groups of Mandinga and Matoza, through education and culture. Also, the articulation of different sectors, particularly with non-governmental organizations and academia (for example, the formation of the "Southwest Gulf of Mexico Reef Corridor Network"). One of the opportunities has been the search for Afro-descendant recognition by the Mexican federation, which will contribute to strengthen links in collaboration networks with other organized groups in Mexico and Latin America that have carried out territorial care and biocultural conservation work.

On the other hand, the next step is to continue with the training in biological monitoring of birds with adolescents and children, in the search for funding for materials (binoculars) and support from other civil organizations that have done birdwatching work from Monitores Mandinga. This as part of a bird culture through education. As a whole, this will help to build agents of change for conservation in Mandinga.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes, The Rufford Foundation logo was used in academic presentations, presentations to elementary schools, and outreach materials. Publicity for The Rufford Foundation was only among graduate students.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Jordi Toto: assistant in workshops and meetings.

Laura Velazco: photographer, assistant in some workshops and meetings.

Cristian Rebolledo: public relations and support in some meetings.

Krystyna Paradowska: doctoral thesis director.

Evodia Silva Rivera: doctoral tesis co-director.

Jhossimar Cruz: support in the Muscuvy Duck project.

Martha Rivera Huerta: municipal agent of Mandinga and Matoza, logistics support and liaison with the municipal government sector.

Óscar Andrade Huerta: boatman with interest in bird monitoring. He was the person who supported us with the boats in my master's work.

Eréndira Cruz: psychologist who is a member of the civic association "Encuentro, Red Mexicana de Acompañamiento Teparéutico".

10. Any other comments?

The funds obtained by The Rufford Foundation through its Rufford Small Grants have been of significant help for the development of this project, which derives from my doctoral thesis. I am very grateful for this type of funding.