

**Name of Project**

"Municipal Environmental Committees as a mechanism for public participation in the Department of Risaralda".

**Location**

Pereira, Department of Risaralda, Colombia.

**Sponsoring Agency/Contact**

Regional Autonomous Corporation of Risaralda (CARDER, in Spanish)

- Contact person with email/phone if possible

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**Background**

- Basic facts surrounding site

The Department of Risaralda is located in the Central region of the Andean region of Colombia, and has an area of 358,598.6 hectares. It has a population of over 919,653 inhabitants and has a density of 256.4 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. Territorially, it extends from the western flank of the Central Mountain Range, with higher than 5,000m maximum height, until the middle of the western flank of the Western Range, including the alluvial valleys of the Cauca and Risaralda rivers (900m). Its area represents 0.3% of the total land area and 27% of the total area of the departments that make up the Coffee Region (Caldas, Quindio and Risaralda). Risaralda limits the North with the departments of Antioquia and Caldas; on the east by the Caldas and Tolima departments; on the south by the Quindio and Valle del Cauca departments, and the West with the department of Choco. There are 14 municipalities under its political-administrative jurisdiction.

- Issue to be resolved

The project started in 2004, when the integration of sectorial and territorial planning was sought through the establishment of common working elements. During the same year, the first environmental committees met as a reproduction of an exercise for the development of the Environmental Management Plan (PGAR) 2002-2012. This first exercise sought the alignment of the institutional action plan with the departmental and municipal development plans.

It was motivated by the pilot of the model for the Municipal Environmental Management System (SIGAM, in Spanish) advanced in 2002 by the Ministry of Environment and the IDEA Institute for Environmental Studies of the Universidad Nacional. This laid the basis for developing a guide for administrative management and an organizational strategy for the management of the affairs and territorial interests of municipal sectors. CARDER made an adaptation of the proposed SIGAM model for Colombia and modified it for the social, geographical, environmental and economic characteristics of Risaralda.

During the second half of 2007, we reviewed the performance of the Municipal Environmental Agendas, where we found implementation of municipal environmental policies was positive, and encouraged updates to the Local Environmental Action Plan of the Environmental Agenda. Participatory environmental organization schemes and coordination were promoted in all municipalities.

In 2009, we undertook the process of strengthening municipal environmental management by encouraging the incorporation of elements of the environmental agenda in the plans of teams that support and streamline environmental management in the fourteen municipalities of Risaralda.

In 2010, we started the systematization of the experience of support processes for municipal environmental management in the department of Risaralda. In 2011, the plan to strengthen local environmental management was approved and incorporated into the integrated management system of the Autonomous Regional Corporation of Risaralda - CARDER.

Since 2004, the Municipal Environmental Committees (MECs) have met periodically (annually) in each of the municipalities in the department where we have sought: accountability; public participation; arrangements and local agreements, planning harmonization and strengthening; and the organization and strengthening of local environmental management.

In late 2008, this experience was recognized by the International Republican Institute and the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Javeriana University as one of the "25 innovative experiences in politics and public participation in Colombia under the framework of the program Building Democracy" who showed in their publications that this was a good practice that should be replicated in the country.

- Past conflicts and community issues

The contribution of experience is valuable in improving various governance problems, for the following reasons:

- The MECs are a tool that encourages public participation in decision making on environmental projects in a decentralized and transparent manner, the identification of priority actions, continuous improvement and resolution of environmental conflicts between people and institutions.
- MECs allow us to solve the improvisation and duplication of efforts in governance, since the implementation of this experience is articulated in planning instruments such as the National Development Plan, the Regional Environmental Management Plan -PGAR, the CARDER Plan of Action, Departmental Development Plan, and the Municipal Development Plans, through which environmental projects are materialized. This harmonization is also important since it allows the department, municipalities, unions and the community, to undertake environmental projects at the local, departmental, national and international levels.
- MECs allowed the installation of SIGAMs and their strengthening through the consolidation of dynamic committees, such as: The Inter-Institutional

Environmental Control Committee (CICA, in Spanish); the Municipal Protected Areas System (SIMAP, in Spanish); the Municipal Environmental Education Committee (COMEDA, in Spanish) and the Local Committee for Disaster Prevention and Attention (previously CLOPAD and today Municipal Council Disaster Risk Management, CMGRD in Spanish).

- Through MECs, we achieve an acceptable implementation of municipal environmental policies that advance environmental governance.
- The MECs have streamlined meetings in the municipalities because the methodology allows the participation of all stakeholders in a territory. In addition, this experience has helped avoid holding multiple meetings to address similar issues, and has become the preferred forum for addressing problems and the municipal environmental projection.

### **Public Participation Goal and Level**

- Identify the clear goals and objectives for P2

#### **General Objective**

To provide a space for dialogue, discussion and reflection among public institutions and civil society responsible for environmental management, in order to contribute to the strengthening of municipal and departmental environmental management.

#### **Specific Objectives**

- To submit reports of the environmental management of the CARDER Action Plan effective in the year immediately preceding.
- To submit a report on the performance of the Municipal Environmental Agenda in the year immediately preceding.
- To submit a progress report of the environmental policy of the department.
- To finalize accords, and local and regional agreements for the implementation of programs, projects, activities and/or goals defined in the Regional Environmental Management Plan, the CARDER Action Plan and Municipal Development Plans, aimed at joining efforts for the strengthening of municipal environmental management.

### **Public Participation Approach**

- Describe overall approach and process used

The launch of MECs as an initiative of CARDER (“the Corporation”) since 2004 was aimed at coordinating institutional efforts that allowed the implementation of the Institutional Action Plan of the Corporation, as a planning instrument in which we specify the institutional commitments for the achievement of its objectives and mission, defining the actions and investment to be undertaken in its jurisdiction with the environmental component of the Development Plan for the Risaralda department and the Development Plans of the 14 municipalities (planning instruments for territorial institutions). Meeting spaces were first named departmental environmental committees and then municipal environmental committees. Participants and local and regional development agencies

meet and analyze departmental and municipal environmental issues and elaborate a strategy to deal with the analysis in the framework of common environmental programs among territorial institutions and the Corporation, as the principal environmental authority in the Risaralda department.

In this vein, the environmental committees are fora for the coordination and management of environmental affairs in municipalities with issues, identifying the state of renewable natural resources, designing planning tools and establishing work teams to achieve the goals and projected socially desirable situations.

With all these, MECs have promoted the development of synergies, leveraged capabilities and potential in order to advance a permanent and continuous process that allows municipal environmental management to be concerted, rational and intelligent.

On the other hand, understanding that we are in a changing world, where the actions being carried out in a territory are dynamic, and that modifications and/or new environmental standards emerge, allows for the development of the municipal environmental committees, over time, to be changed, adjusted, adapted and improved, in pursuit of strengthening municipal and departmental environmental management.

Therefore, environmental committees become an essential strategy for the coordination of priority issues for the Municipal Environmental Management, as it provides opportunities for participation, discussion, reflection and expression of issues and concerns of government agencies and environmental civil society. It also guides the development of planning tools such as the Regional Environmental Management Plan (PGAR 2008-2019) called "Risaralda Model Forests for the World," Watershed Listing and Management Plans (POMCA, in Spanish) and the CARDER and Municipal Action Plans (PDM, in Spanish).

Alignment and articulation of the above instruments of environmental planning should eventually be reflected in the municipal environmental agendas, considered the operative instrument for municipal environmental intervention. Another objective of environmental committees is to generate a mechanism of integration, communication and coordination of wills, actions, policies, plans and corporate, community and interinstitutional projects, which have the goal of organized participation of the community in environmental management and the strengthening of environmental awareness ethics, for management of renewable natural resources and sustainable development.

The implementation of MECs, held in each municipality once a year, is led and coordinated by CARDER, through the Directorate General and the Advisory Planning Office. They have the support and cooperation of the local governments, thus creating a climate of coordination, cooperation and feedback, conducive conditions for achieving the massive participation of the community, as well as public and private entities. Also, in partnership with the departmental government, we organize PGAR orientations that have become a directive on environmental issues, under which the department must intervene.

To develop joint municipal environmental interests, it is necessary to identify the role of the participating teams:

- Inter-institutional Environmental Control Committee (CICA): Guides the development, capacity building and training activities for effective control of wildlife trafficking. This committee is accompanied by the Military Forces of Colombia (FFMM, in Spanish), the National Police, secretaries of government, municipal green offices, among others.
- Municipal System for Protected Areas (SIMAP): It is responsible for designing and implementing strategies for the protection and preservation of strategic ecosystems, in conjunction with the support and cooperation of the communities living in the zone of influence of protected areas.
- Local Committee for Disaster Prevention and Response (CLOPAD): responsible for coordinating government agencies, security and relief to implement plans, programs and projects for effective risk management. Today it is called Municipal Council for Disaster Risk Management -CMGRD.
- Municipal Committee for Environmental Education (COMEDA): This committee oversees formal, non-formal and informal environmental education. It also permeates the educational process in the Municipal Environmental Management System in order for everyone to speak the same language and establish common goals.

- Describe why this approach was selected

This mechanism was created as a tool that serves as a mechanism for public participation and accountability, allowing stakeholders to discuss and come to agreement regarding environmental issues. It also provides accurate and timely information to public and private sector entities and the community at large about environmental projects that materialize in a given territory, with the participation and direct input from the environmental authority and the respective local authority.

The initial focus of environmental committees was to achieve the integration of sectorial and territorial planning to find common goals, and were initially named departmental environmental committee and later municipal environmental committees.

However, Article 79 of the Constitution states that it is a right of citizens to participate in decisions affecting the environment, which is regulated mainly through public participation mechanisms established in Law 99 of 1993<sup>1</sup>.

### **Specific Public Participation Tools and Techniques Used**

- Describe how stakeholders were identified and convened

The environmental committees are a way of considering the interests of large population groups in environmental management without political, social, religious, gender and age distinction, among others. This makes them different, as the right to enjoy a healthy environment is in the hands of communities, through their participation.

Given the above, they have identified relevant stakeholders for the development of expertise, which include:

Local authorities, public utilities companies, public agencies, educational institutions, security and relief agencies, the special administrative unit of the national park system, civil society and NGOs, among others.

At this point, we should also highlight the call or invitation to participate in the municipal environmental committee, led by the Corporation and local governments.

**Stakeholder that invite and lead**

- Municipal mayor
- Secretaries of the municipal government offices
- Regional Autonomous Corporation of Risaralda -CARDER

**Supporting Actors (facilitators)**

- Municipal Environmental Management Unit -UGAM
- SIGAM Committees: CICA, COMEDA, SIMAP and CMGRD.

**Proposed Participants for Environmental Committee:**

- Honorable City Council
  - CARDER
  - National Police
  - Military Forces
  - UMATA or its equivalent
  - Productive Organizations
  - Social and community organizations
  - Minority ethnic communities
  - Academic sector
  - Public Entities: District Attorney, Comptroller, etc.
  - Public and health services
  - Productive sectors such as: Committee of Coffee Producers, Colombian Cattle Federation -FEDEGAN, National Colombian Avicultor Federation-FENAVI, Mining, Pesticides, and primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in general.
  - Supporting Committee Members of SIGAM: UGAM, COMEDA, SIMAP, CICA and CLOPAD
- Describe what specific activities and techniques were used, and how they were customized to fit this audience and goal

Environmental committees have previous and specific technical activities. Below we detail the steps in prior preparation:

1. The Planning Advisory Office (OAP) of the Corporation leads the development of the activity and thus identifies the responsible technical team. In this sense, OAP establishes contact with the municipal planning office for it to identify the necessary competencies for the environmental committee.
2. The technical team conducts internal meetings to define the methodology to be applied in the MEC, which is consolidated in a working document containing: introduction, definition of the environmental committee, overall objective, specific objectives, methodology to be followed (guidelines for the development of the committee, agenda, supporting actors, proposed participants, inputs, outputs,

internal coordination schemes, supporting documents and tentative schedule for conducting environmental committee meetings). This document is shared with CARDER's Planning and Management Committee, where the methodology is validated.

3. The technical team for institutional planning management generates information on the investment and implemented activities by program and project in the Corporation's Action Plan for each of the municipalities in the year prior to the environmental committee meetings.
4. The Corporation's technical team, in coordination with municipalities, compiles a table designed under the plan for strengthening local and regional environmental management, with information and investment actions related to the environment carried out by the Corporation, and the respective municipality, in the year immediately prior to the completion of the environmental committee meetings. It also establishes dates for the implementation of an accountability event with the mayors, with the goal of transparency.
5. The Corporation's technical team holds external readiness meetings for MEC meetings, to which we invite each municipality in the Risaralda department.
6. The Corporation and municipal administrations invite participants through different communication methods.
7. Participants register in a list and meeting minutes are created and approved by the members of the Corporation's senior leadership. The information is then published in the CARDER website at [www.carder.gov.co](http://www.carder.gov.co) under municipal environmental committees.
8. The Corporation's technical team consolidates the commitments made during MEC meetings. The directors then designate, based on their background, those responsible for meeting the environmental requirements. The follow up to evaluate implementation of the requirements is undertaken by the Planning Advisory Office.

Specific guidelines for the development of the agenda of the municipal environmental committees:

Activity	Subject	Specific Guidelines
Municipal Environmental Committee Meeting	Atmosphere	CARDER explains the rules to guarantee participation in the environmental committee meeting.
	Welcome	CARDER General Director and Municipal Mayor
	Presentation of reports	CARDER will present the environmental management report for the year prior to the environmental committee meetings.
		Presentation of SIGAM's successful experiences.
	Plenary	Proposals, concerns and issues will be written down as they are expressed by participants. Information will be organized by strategic lines, programs and goals.

Activity	Subject	Specific Guidelines
	Questions and Answers	The senior leadership, led by the General Director, will answer questions and concerns shared during the plenary and organized within the format available to participants, established by CARDER. If necessary, other Corporation staff and contractors may answer questions. The municipal mayor will respond to questions under his knowledge.
	Environmental committee meeting closing	

### Result/Outcome

- Did the public participation achieve the goal?

The main objective of the environmental committee meetings is to provide a forum for dialogue, discussion and reflection among public institutions and civil society responsible for environmental management. Performance can be seen reflected in the community participation during the development of MEC meetings and that is recorded in the meeting minutes.

Participation of public and private institutions, as well as civil society, allows for the establishment of agreements and commitments. These provide feedback to CARDER's management, especially when developing its Action Plan, as well as the Action Plan for the municipal environmental agendas. This encourages the prioritization of local community needs.

These conditions are favorable to the extent that they allow the identification of collective needs of community, sectors and the region. These issues, expectations and needs of different social groups are recorded in the minutes, databases and the local environmental action plans of the municipal environmental agendas.

We have also noticed that communities are getting more invested in environmental issues. Therefore, CARDER and the Risaralda department have seen a resurgence of community environmental leadership in people of all ages and walks of life. These people see the environment as a key success factor because natural resource and biodiversity problems and possibilities can determine local development.

- How did public participation improve the decision or outcome of the project?
- Difficulties can arise during coordination with local authorities. We are able to coordinate better through motivation and greater institutional presence in the municipality. Motivation is achieved through meetings and workshops, such as a workshop to strengthen local environmental management held in Pereira in April 28, 2011. This workshop had participation of environmental leaders and representatives from SIGAM from the 14 municipalities in the department of Risaralda, as well as through SIGAM's permanent meetings.



Likewise, the development and continuity of this experience aims to:

- Promote environmental planning and organization to guide and strengthen environmental management in the municipalities of Risaralda.
- Strengthen the Municipal Environmental Management Systems (SIGAM2), through technical support teams: SIMAP, CICA, COMEDA and CMGRD.
- Support the development of the Regional Environmental Management Plan (PGAR), the Departmental Development Plan (PDD), the Municipal Development Plans (PDMs), CARDER's quadrennial Action Plan and the Local Environmental Action Plan of the Municipal Environmental Agenda, among others.
- Strengthen municipal environmental management for the improvement of the welfare of the Risaralda population.
- How did public participation improve relationships, trust, and credibility?

The experience has resulted in:

- Interacting with over 1,500 people on an annual average, as in, for example, more than 3,000 people in 2012 in the process of formulating the Institutional Action Plan 2012-2015 "for Shared Environmental Management". Furthermore, the number of participants increases when collaborate with other related exercises, such as the Departmental Environmental Forum in 2011, in which 250 people participated.
- Having the SIGAM adopt by agreement of the respective municipal councils in 12 of the 14 municipalities of Risaralda; and all municipalities have local environmental coordination teams and their respective Municipal Environmental Agenda.
- Having a proposed methodology documented through the systematization of the process of strengthening local environmental management, allowing for the design of the Plan for Strengthening Local and Regional Environmental Management.
- Developing general monitoring schemes for municipal environmental agendas and their developed environmental action plans.
- Promoting public participation in the various environmental committees, facilitating dialogue between public and private institutions and citizens.
- Strengthening the committees that enhance SIGAM, incorporating into their plans of action items contained in municipal environmental agendas.
- Strengthening training, and capacity building in environmental issues.
- Developing and publishing teaching materials on environmental issues.
- Strengthening environmental management meetings and project management.

## Lessons Learned

- How can this experience help others to design better public participation?

There has been interest from other regions to know of this experience in greater detail. Among them are the Reventazón Model Forest delegation of Costa Rica, who visited the city of Pereira on August 16-18, 2011 for an information exchange, and the Regional Autonomous Corporations that make up the Coffee Region Ecoregion (CORPOCALDAS, CRC, CORTOLIMA, CVC) who have learned about the experience over the last two years in order to replicate it.

During 2010 and 2011, we conducted the codification and publication of the process of strengthening local environmental management developed by the CARDER in the municipalities of Risaralda. With this systematization we have sought to identify and recognize skills, abilities and lessons to improve the performance of local environmental management in each of the municipalities of Risaralda.

The systematization process seeks to provide the necessary tools to staff and contractors of the entity so that there is traceability during implementation of environmental policies. In other words, the process identifies the steps needed to support local environmental management.

This process serves as a reference and input for other individuals and development agencies (other Autonomous Regional Corporations, departmental governments, municipalities, NGOs, etc.) that can study the experiences and lessons learned by CARDER, thus minimizing risks and difficulties that might arise.

- What worked well and why, how can it be replicated?

One of the greatest achievements generated is in the implementation of the experience, a process through which knowledge is transferred, and is also a tool that generates new knowledge, skills and lessons. The main lesson is defined through the formulation of the Plan for Strengthening Local Environmental Management, which summarizes CARDER's achievements, progress and difficulties in interacting with communities, institutions and sectors that enhance local development. With the plan we have gathered the following lessons:

- Design methodologies for the development of MECs. This involves defining working time, designing formats or meetings for the consolidation of information, and being clear in defining entities and/or convening participants.
- Recognize the need to carry out a preparatory stage in each of the municipalities in order to advance all actions necessary to finalize the agenda for each of the environmental committee meetings. For example, defining the themes to be discussed in the agenda, the themes of each presentation and the presenters, and coordination of logistical support, among others.
- Define formats or meetings required for achieving the identified goals. For example: attendance lists, format of meeting minutes, and a chart to develop action plans of the municipal environmental agendas.

- Recognize the participation of institutions and the public as essential for decision-making and development of environmental programs, projects and implementation activities. In this regard, it should be noted that public participation becomes the structural axis of environmental management.
- Collaborative work between the environmental authorities and local authorities is fundamental.
- Environmental management is an ongoing, permanent and shared process, and must have the support and assistance of every local and regional stakeholder.
- What did not work and why, how can it be avoided or limited?
  - The volume of commitments arising from environmental committee hampers their immediate attention. However, the Corporation, through its agencies, has staff and contractors to follow up on them in the short term. In addition, after analysis at the level of the Planning and Management Committee, and consistent with the goals of the Action Plan, there are obligations where the Corporation commits to provide financial resources, which is also identified in the Action Plan of the respective municipal environmental agenda.
  - The convergence of stakeholder agendas means that the schedule of MEC meetings should be modified. This situation has been overcome thanks to the definition of the agenda developed under the Plan for Strengthening Local Environmental Management, which allows for flexibility for the development of a new schedule.
  - Changes that occur in municipal administrations, regarding the lack of continuity of staff and/or contractors in charge of a unit or a process, has been a factor that has interfered with the normal development and implementation of the project. These have generated institutional attrition and delays in carrying out actions and goals. Technical, operational and financial capacity of small municipalities have also hindered the implementation of the experience to some extent.
  - The lack of a documented and institutionalized process by the municipalities of Risaralda. Social and institutional investment is seen as a key success factor to the extent that there are territories that accept and are more invested in the initiative.
  - The environmental agenda becomes a development agenda. Environmental issues have become important elements of the local and regional development agendas, hence the acceptance and participation in the Municipal Environmental Committees.