

A national collaborative model to promote local resilience:

The Strategic Inter-Institutional Agenda in Guatemala



Working together to create resilient communities, the Partners for Resilience³ (PfR) identified a significant opportunity to increase collaboration between the governing bodies in Guatemala. Partners for Resilience joins the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), the Executive Secretariat of the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (SE-CONRED), and the National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP) in the creation of the Strategic Inter-Institutional Agenda, endeavouring to reduce the vulnerability of rural communities with an integrated approach.

Author: Raquel Sigüenza¹
Editor: Carina Bachofen²

The lack of inter-institutional coordination in Guatemala is a nationwide problem; not only apparent in organisations centrally, but also with its regional delegates. However, MARN, SE-CONRED and CONAP have found an opportunity in their mandates to work together to reduce vulnerability of rural communities.

Until 2012, MARN, SE-CONRED and CONAP had been working with a certain level of coordination concerning disaster risk reduction, but they lacked the room to comprehensively address their respective policies, strategies and laws in order to maximize their impact on the most vulnerable communities in Guatemala. Overlapping efforts and the inefficient use of the limited resources of the institutions were evident. This is the context in which the Partners for Resilience⁴ identified a significant opportunity to stimulate collaboration between the aforementioned governing bodies, while testing an integrated approach that includes Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), and Ecosystem Management and Restoration (EMR.)

The Strategic Inter-Institutional Agenda: an example of nationwide collaboration

The creation of a Strategic Inter-Institutional Agenda (AEI) between institutions with specific mandates was no simple task. Challenges were met, and overcome, related to a range of matters such as the adaptation of technical processes and planning tools, as well as finding the backing from the respective legal departments—within the institutions themselves, and on municipal and community level.

The AEI was birthed as a space for dialogue in which to seek common goals between public policies and institutional strategies. Its objective is to facilitate the



1. Technical Coordinator, Wetlands International Guatemala.

2. Technical Advisor, Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre.

3. With the support of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, five humanitarian, development and environmental organisations created the Partners for Resilience (www.partnersforresilience.nl) alliance in 2011 to reduce vulnerability of communities in different countries, and to design lessons how to strengthen community resilience. The programme – which is represented in 9 countries on 3 continents, and with the collaboration of 70 NGOs – has a €40 million budget at its disposal, making it the largest of its kind.

4. In Guatemala, the PfR partners include Cáritas Zacapa Diocese/Cordaid, the Guatemalan Red Cross, CARE/Vivamos Mejor Association, Wetlands International, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre.



implementation of collaborative models at a national level for specific actions in the field. It is the greatest accomplishment of Partners for Resilience in Guatemala in the matter of political advocacy at national level; it is the umbrella that links and prioritises other PfR initiatives and results expected in the country.

The core programmes of the AEI include: 1) Articulating public policy and strategies; 2) Strengthening inter-institutional capacities, and 3) Reducing vulnerabilities (social, economic, environmental, political, and educational). The AEI has resulted in a common understanding among the governing bodies⁵, and a more unified language to address a national problem, when previously only individual perspectives were heard.

Laying the groundwork for the Strategic Inter-Institutional Agenda

At least three conditions needed to be met in order to create the AEI. The first was to wait for the correct political moment. The beginning of Partners for Resilience in Guatemala coincided with the Presidential elections, which brought about changes at the highest levels in the Ministries and State Secretariats. PfR expertise dictated the proper conditions and timing for an AEI between the appropriate government institutions.

The second, and possibly most important, condition was to initiate meetings with officials (individually, at first) to fathom their political will concerning process harmonization and the possibility of a collective effort.

The third was to maximize the pre-existing contacts that the Partners for Resilience had with certain key members of the technical

departments of the institutions. These persons became “ambassadors” within their respective work places of the integrated approach developed by PfR, and promoted their efforts to their superiors.

As a result of the consultations facilitated by Partners for Resilience, it was decided to work on two levels simultaneously: 1) at a political level, including the authorities in the institutions, and 2) at a technical level in order to build and reach an agreement on the proposal that would later be presented to the Ministers, Vice Ministers and Executive Secretaries. The inter-institutional cooperation became official with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Nonetheless, since the approval of said letter could take time and losing the initiative’s momentum until it was confirmed at the highest political level was deemed undesirable, the parties agreed to work simultaneously to finalize the legal document and to create the AEI with the technical teams. At this time, all parties agreed on the importance of a continuous flow of information at local and national levels to achieve the desired impact.

Developing the AEI

The Partners for Resilience developed a **stakeholder map** – strategic and priority stakeholders – to facilitate the creation of an AEI. Although many government stakeholders had links with the Partners for Resilience (e.g. the National Forest Institute, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Alimentation), the decision was made to carry out actions with the DRR/CCA/EMR governing bodies. The Partners for Resilience deemed that based on the capabilities and timeline of the Programme it was best to have a limited scope with greater

5. Government institution representatives. In this particular case, it refers to the organisations participating in the AEI: MARN, SE-CONRED and CONAP.

national impact. The possibility was not discarded of having the other institutions join the process initiated with the AEI in the future; process initiated with the AEI in the future.

"It is usual for institutions like CONAP and MARN to work together. However, we also have SE-CONRED to include risk management. I believe this proposal will strengthen the inter-institutional relations and will help to make the use of the resources available to all three organizations more efficient."

César Vinicio Montero, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN)

Based on the mapping results, a **space for dialogue** was opened with the national and regional governing bodies, as well as with the other identified key stakeholders. In January 2013, Partners for Resilience held a **National Forum "Approach to a Comprehensive Perspective on Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation, Ecosystem Management and Restoration with National and Regional Stakeholders."** The forum included over 90 participants from various sectors who contributed to identifying the priorities and work opportunities in collaboration with PfR.

An outcome of the Forum was the need to reach convergence and to identify priorities between the Climate Change, Risk Reduction and Biological Diversity National Policies that can be translated into specific actions at municipal and community levels. This was a key step in the drafting of a strategic agenda between MARN, CONAP and SE-CONRED.

The Partners for Resilience suggested the possibility of hiring a key strategic person to guide the creation of the joint agenda along with MARN, SE-CONRED and CONAP. Instead of hiring an expert in DRR/CCA/EMR a **professional with knowledge and experience in facilitating collective processes between government and civil society** was sought. The selection process for this position, which would have national impact, was executed in cooperation with the other agencies. Because of time constraints and the need to have a person specifically focused on political advocacy, having someone fully dedicated to this task made all the difference.

The methodological and conceptual foundation was laid in August 2013 with the **participation of central and regional delegates from all three institutions**, as well as the critical work path for the AEI. It was agreed that there would be three central programmes. The workshop and following meetings exposed the need for a harmonized vocabulary, for example, for the definition of mitigation actions, since MARN and SE-CONRED interpret this differently.

The AEI draft, which was brought about with the technical team formed by the three governing bodies and PfR, was forwarded to the authorities of the institutions. A **high profile political dinner** was organized to that end. The Vice Minister of MARN, the Executive Secretary of CONAP and the Delegate for the Executive Secretary of SE-CONRED confirmed their support and gave their vote of confidence to continue with the work in progress.

Attendees to workshops and meetings repeatedly requested specific actions in the field using key tools and approaches; therefore it was decided to **fine tune the AEI draft to include an Action Plan**. This Action Plan not only was instrumental in the formulation of a final version that was formally delivered to the authorities; it also has become the framework for other PfR efforts. These include: regional work groups on climate change; providing training to and improving working conditions for Local Coordinators for Disaster Reduction (COLRED); a certification programme; and educational



The PfR Programme reaches the highest levels to mobilize resources

In October 2013, Cordaid organized a workshop with the Cáritas Zacapa Diocese and the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) on *"The Role of Civil Society in Disaster Risk Reduction; an integrated approach."* This workshop was part of the Forum concerning Civil Society Policy organised by the World Bank, held along with the Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The main topic was to obtain a better understanding of the need for greater cohesion between Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Ecosystem Management Restoration. The AEI was perceived as an example of how synergies between government and civil society can be created, thus working jointly in the search for community development. It has also opened a door for the PfR Programme to reach the highest levels of influence and expand to other communities not currently included in the working areas.



modules focussed on PfR's integrated approach. Such efforts generate greater credibility and trust in the AEI and boost their institutionalization and appropriation in the long term.

Impact to date

Since 2012 the AEI has made an impact in the following ways:

- Bilateral legal instruments existed between governing bodies, yet there was no such agreement between the three institutions. Having the AEI ratified with a Memorandum of Understanding not only makes this official; it also supports the necessary steps to make it sustainable.
- In addition to the funds provided by Partners for Resilience, all three governing bodies are to mobilise resources, by way of an innovative profile presented to potential donors, members of the private sector, and other government agencies.

Expected impact

The AEI is to become a staple mechanism for the coordination, development, and harmonisation of the tools preferred in the collaborative model to drive and cultivate the transference of the learning efforts jointly and with a greater local impact. Equally to the Partners for Resilience, each of the governing bodies, in their own words, hope to benefit in a variety of ways:

The **Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARN)** expects the AEI to be a useful tool for the execution of several

components of the Climate Change Framework Law, such as adaptation, vulnerability reduction, and mitigation, thus aiding their regional delegates with local agendas to implement the necessary actions with municipalities and other stakeholders in the field. This platform is to become a work base for joint formulation and identification of response measures, project proposals for vulnerable areas, and capacity building to interpret climate change scenarios.

The **Executive Secretariat of the National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (SE-CONRED)** sees the AEI as an opportunity to define joint action lines from its own mandate and policy instruments to create a culture for disaster risk reduction with the goal of building resilient communities.

The **National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP)** deems it important to continue the development of collaborative models to preserve biodiversity as a tool for climate change adaptation. The preservation of biodiversity ensures the continued self-regulation of ecosystems, which will aid the reduction of socio-environmental vulnerabilities in communities, complying with local knowledge to develop adaptation models according to their worldviews.

The ultimate goal of Partners for Resilience is to promote an integrated DRR/CCA/EMR approach to benefit the vulnerable communities in Guatemala. The AEI is a coordinated response to the implementation of collaborative models in the field.

Challenges and Opportunities

After analysing the creative process for the AEI, the following challenges to its sustainability have been marked:

Challenge 1: Harmonised criteria, tools, rulings and joint opinions will meld and evolve, allowing the creation of groups specialised in the prioritised topics. Institutions have to take ownership of this harmonisation to prevent government agenda changes that would block the implementation of a sustainable collaborative model at a local level.

Challenge 2: Reaching consensus concerning the types of necessary mechanisms or institutional arrangements is essential. When the implementation of the collaborative model has been decentralised, it will prove to be viable in the long term. Other factors contributing to sustainability include: turning the AEI into specific activities as described in the 2015-2016 Annual Operational Plans (for the governing bodies), and making the resulting structure official.

Challenge 3: Finalising the Action Plan at central level and implementing it locally and/or departmentally from national level is the optimal way to reflect the experience. This will depend on the installed capacities and on the resources available in the institutions.

There are, however, significant opportunities that must be seized upon:

Opportunity 1: The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the governmental bodies –MARN, SE-CONRED and CONAP– will contribute to the promotion of the integrated approach in the Alliance from a national-to-local approach and vice versa, using the Action Plan as their guide. The letter will also ensure sustainability beyond the Partners for Resilience programme in Guatemala.

Opportunity 2: The AEI is expected to become an attractive platform for fund management and collection, supported by and in alignment with national and international cooperation. Initially work will begin in territories within the Alliance (Chiquimula, Izabal, Quiché, Sololá and Zacapa), but given the ownership and official nature manifested by the governing bodies, it is expected to be replicated to a greater scale and not merely to go beyond the geographical borders of the Partners for Resilience programme, but to transcend in time after it has ended.

Opportunity 3: Reduced vulnerability is expected to become one of its common elements, since the platform created and supported by PfR and the three governing bodies has become a space for inter-institutional coordination and implementation of shared actions and priorities. It will also be necessary, however, to continue the search for balance between the implementation of global, national, regional, and local actions, closely related to and focused on community resilience.

“When we bring together our lines of action and our work plans with this Strategic Agenda, we maximise the existing resources, but we also reconsider our government budgets and align them to other local work agendas at inter-institutional levels. We believe our budgets are sustainable in the short- and medium-terms. This can be attractive for future –long-term– cooperation.”

Benedicto Lucas, Executive Secretary, National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP)



"If we don't work hand in hand, soon there won't be any biodiversity left to preserve."

Ángela Leal, SE-CONRED Director of Comprehensive Risk Management, at an academic forum held in March 2014 during the visit of the Executive Secretary of the Biological Diversity Convention.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

The experience gained with the creation of the AEI has brought about several suggestions for other initiatives or programmes that seek to promote an integrated approach and/or inter-institutional collaboration in the future. More specifically, the lessons learned throughout the process include:

- The importance of having an internal political advocacy strategy prior to starting any processes with external parties.
- AEI appropriation at a high political level in the governing bodies is key. The trust earned by PFR's associates because of the concrete results reaffirms the positive attitude shown initially by the authorities.
- The Partners for Resilience agreed the AEI Action Plan should include a limited amount of results, as long as these had a positive impact to ensure credibility of the process.
- Other stakeholders must be included – e.g. the authorities in MINECO⁶, MINFIN⁷ and SEGEPLAN⁸ – to have more influence on State budgets in order to provide the AEI with permanent and sustained funds.
- The development process was initiated centrally by the institutions, but the participation of the regional delegations proved to be highly effective within the definitions of the AEI.

Therefore, links with said delegates must be maintained and strengthened in the field.

- Communication tools are an ideal complement, as was demonstrated by the video⁹ produced by Cordaid's Pool of Trainers, which brings the AEI message to other countries and audiences.
- It is important to include quantitative results and indicators to monitor the impact of the actions implemented by other initiatives similar to the AEI.

It is worth mentioning that the AEI has benefitted from certain innovations. The inclusion of SE-CONRED to work hand in hand with traditional environmental institutions, and to visualise the relevance of their management and restoration of ecosystems, was a novelty.

Collective efforts tend to be time consuming and complex processes, yet enriching as well. The AEI is no exception. As a result of the Agenda, the impact, innovations, and conclusions which Partners for Resilience will provide the country, will develop into – and be extended by – State vision. The challenge would have been impossible to overcome without the commitment and unity of the three governing partners and the Partners for Resilience, contributing to the comprehensive development of the vulnerable communities in Guatemala.

6. Ministry of Economy

7. Ministry of Finance

8. Guatemala's Secretariat of the Presidency for Planning and Programming (SEGEPLAN)

9. AEI video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVU22msH1oU&feature=youtu.be>



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Cruz Roja Guatemalteca



CARE



Contacto:



Cruz Roja Guatemalteca | veronica.rivera@cruzroja.gt
+502 2381 6565 Ext. 147

CARE | caregt.caregt@ca.care.org
+502 2331 4575 – 2360 4801

Asociación Vivamos Mejor | info@vivamosmejor.org.gt
+502 7762 0159 – 7762 0160

Cáritas Diócesis de Zacapa | caritaszacapagt@gmail.com
+502 7941 2230 – 7941 2179

Wetlands International | wi.guatemala1@gmail.com
+502 2331 4575 – 2360 4801

www.partnersforresilience.nl

[f /alianzaporlaresiliencia](https://www.facebook.com/alianzaporlaresiliencia)

E-mail: pfrprogramaca2@gmail.com