Reflection paper

Landscapes of hope in Peru

Fighting poverty by sustainably managing natural resources

Fred Prins

The PRODERN programme

From April 2012 to November 2018, the Peruvian Ministry of Environment and the Belgian development agency Enabel implemented a 13 million euro programme for economic development and strategic management of natural resources in the regions of Apurimac, Ayacucho, Huancavelica, Junin and Pasco (PRODERN) under a governmental cooperation agreement concluded between Peru and Belgium.

PRODERN aimed at reducing poverty of men and women living in the five regions, through the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and biological diversity, and considering the needs of future generations. More specifically the programme wanted to contribute to poverty reduction through the promotion of sustainable development and sustainable use of natural resources, aimed at improving productivity, competitiveness and access to markets for local communities.

Peru is one of the most mega biodiverse countries in the world, with 28 of the 32 world climates, and 84 of the 117 life zones. It is also home to the fourth largest area of tropical forest in the world, as well as 70% of the world’s tropical glaciers. Despite this richness, Peru is the third most vulnerable country to climate change, a situation further aggravated by loss of vegetative cover and deforestation, primarily provoked by uncontrolled expansion of the agricultural frontier and illegal logging and mining. Approximately a fifth of the total population lives in rural areas, and is directly dependent on natural resources, which underpin their livelihoods. An estimated 40% of the rural population still lives in poverty, and 12% lives in extreme poverty. The interrelation between environmental degradation and poverty is well documented, as is the vulnerability of the rural poor to climate change.

It is for this reason that environmental management in Peru is seen as one of the keys to poverty reduction.

Strategy

The programme strategy focused on strengthening the capacities of subnational governments and local communities to effectively implement national development and environmental policies so as to promote sustainable economic development. PRODERN adopted a climate-smart multifunctional landscape approach, which placed an emphasis on three key aspects:

- Environmental and territorial governance;
- Implementation of pilot conservation and sustainable development actions;
- Environmental education.

Gender issues, interculturality and social inclusion were incorporated into the programme strategy, considering the importance of women and local cultural diversity, ancestral knowledge and traditional practices.

A complementary element to the strategy was a process of coaching in order to strengthen the capacities of the PRODERN team. This resulted not only in developing a better common understanding of the key concepts of the programme, but also in developing a stronger team spirit.
Finally, in order to ensure that the results of the programme were appropriated, transferred and institutionalised by the partner organisations and beneficiaries, an exit and sustainability strategy was implemented.

The flexibility to define, interpret and adjust the programme strategy over time allowed the PRODERN team to plan and implement its activities in a more comprehensive and coherent manner in line with its objectives. It also allowed the programme to adapt to changes over the course of time at the national, regional and local levels.

**Governance**

The programme sought to strengthen governance at three key levels: the regional government level, the local government level and the landscape level.

A total of 5 regional governments and 31 local governments were provided with technical assistance to strengthen their capacities in environmental and territorial governance. The focus of the programme was on mainstreaming national environmental policies and planning instruments within the regional and local government planning and budgetary processes. PRODERN’s strategy addressed three key factors that have a direct influence on environmental governance:

1. Environmental planning instruments;
2. Coordination and consultation mechanisms;
3. Environmental information systems.

PRODERN concentrated its actions on strengthening the capacities of regional and local governments in environmental and territorial management, and to promote natural resources conservation and sustainable development. Key to this was to strengthen the planning and budgetary processes of these governments so as to ensure the allocation of public financial resources for sustainable ‘green’ economic growth initiatives based on integrated natural resources conservation, and away from large-scale infrastructure projects, which unfortunately are often challenged by governance issues.

In order to ensure greater transparency and good governance, special attention was given to strengthening public spaces of coordination and consultation, in particular regional and municipal environmental commissions. These commissions, mandated by law, are official public consultation bodies that are led by the regional or local governments and are composed of private and civil society actors. They discuss regional or local government policies and plans concerning economic development and environmental conservation.

In addition to this, much effort was made to improve environmental information systems at the regional and local government levels, in line with the National Environmental Information System, so that informed decisions could be made concerning environmental and territorial management, and also with a view to monitor and evaluate conservation and sustainable development initiatives implemented by these governments.

PRODERN adopted a climate-smart multifunctional landscape approach
At the local landscape level, the emphasis was placed on the generation of territorial agreements for the conservation and sustainable use of essential environmental goods and services, such as native biodiversity and agrobiodiversity, and forest and freshwater resources. Territorial Management Committees were created so as to allow stakeholders to share views and reach a consensus on key conservation and development issues.

**Governance**

- 5 regional governments and 31 local governments with strengthened capacities for environmental and territorial governance, with agreed development plans approved and implemented.
- 8 million euro public funds invested in environmental and territorial management by regional and local governments, ensuring sustainability of programme initiatives.

**Pilot conservation and sustainable development initiatives**

PRODERN implemented pilot actions in fifteen landscapes, seven of which were associated with protected areas. The finance mechanism for these pilot actions was a competitive fund, for which PRODERN organised two calls for bids inviting private or public institutions (cooperatives, NGOs, universities, etc.) to present their proposals based on general concepts developed by PRODERN. A total of sixteen pilot projects were financed by PRODERN’s competitive fund, for a total of 1.6 million euro.

The pilot initiatives fell into two basic categories:

1. Sustainable agricultural production systems;
2. Conservation of environmental goods and services.

The initiatives related to sustainable agricultural production systems focused principally on products of the native agrobiodiversity: agroforestry, cocoa, potatoes, quinoa, tropical fruits, native fish, alpaca (wool), guinea pigs and vicuña (wool). Technical assistance was provided to improve the production systems, placing emphasis on ancestral knowledge, recuperation of local cultivars or varieties, certification, value chains and commercial agreements.

Initiatives related to conservation of environmental goods and services focused on recuperation of highland moors, pastures and wetlands, and conservation of Amazonian forest and freshwater ecosystems, which were aligned to initiatives promoting sustainable agricultural production systems. In addition, a tourism initiative aligned with the protection of the Andean condor was implemented with great success. PRODERN also promoted the establishment of two mechanisms for the payment for hydrological services and one informal mechanism as well as an incentive mechanism for the conservation of native potato varieties.

PRODERN assisted with the establishment of two alternative conservation systems. The first one oriented to the declaration of a cultural landscape, and the second one for the establishment of an agrobiodiversity conservation zone.

**Conservation and sustainable development**

- Management plans for eight protected areas.
- Three schemes for the payment of hydrological services initiated and formally recognised.
- Conservation and sustainable development initiatives implemented in fifteen landscapes, seven of which in buffer zones of protected areas.
- Nine agricultural production systems improved, with a focus on conservation of native agrobiodiversity, strengthened value chains, certification and commercial agreements.
- More than thousand families directly benefitted from the technical assistance provided by PRODERN.
- 78 local associations were strengthened and formally recognised by their regional governments.
- Average family income directly increased by a minimum of 15% as a consequence of project-supported activities.

**Environmental education**

The environmental education component of PRODERN focused on these aspects:

1. Implementation of integrated environmental educational projects;
2. Mainstreaming the environmental approach in institutional management instruments;
3. Strengthening the capacities of education staff (professionals, school heads and teachers).

The environmental education component was integrally applied in each of the priority landscapes of the programme, and was closely tied to the pilot conservation and sustainable development initiatives supported by PRODERN. A total of 174 teachers and school heads in 34 pilot primary and secondary schools benefitted from environmental education training, as well as 28 education professionals in the respective units of local educational management, the Regional Directorates of Education and the local municipalities.

Each of the 34 schools was provided with technical assistance and material support for the implementation of educational projects in which students learned and applied new knowledge about environmental management, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, biological diversity and environmental services.

With the transfer of responsibilities for environmental education passed from the Ministry of Environment to the Ministry of Education, PRODERN also transferred the results and experience of its environmental education work to the Ministry of Education as part of its exit and sustainability strategy.
Environmental education

• 34 primary and secondary schools implement environmental education programmes, with support from PRODERN.
• 174 teachers and school heads trained.
• 28 education professionals trained.
• Some 500 students directly participated in environmental education activities and school projects.

Contributors

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For more information on PRODERN
http://prodern.miam.gob.pe

PRODERN videos