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STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY-BASED WATER GOVERNANCE

In Honduras, the dry season entails high temperatures, food shortages and devastating forest fires. Addressing these challenges requires the strengthening of watershed management authorities, where public and private actors verify compliance with water management policies and plans in their geographic area, and whose legal declaration is based on the official delimitation available in the “Agua de Honduras” platform.

For Emy Vásquez, environmental analyst at the General Directorate of Water Resources, Secretariat of Natural Resources and Environment (DGRH/SERNA), the platform contributed to this end: “A total of 110 watershed management councils have been legalized at the national level, and to that end, the **Agua de Honduras platform was a crucial tool.**” These councils are comprised of representatives from local governments, civil society, associations, water boards and savings/credit funds, among other municipal organizations, which makes them highly participatory and strong. The platform was developed by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (now part of the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT) through inter-institutional cooperation agreements with SERNA and has received conceptual and financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as well as the Swiss Agency for Development (SDC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



OFFICIAL OPEN ACCESS INFORMATION

The Agua de Honduras platform is managed by SERNA and contains official information on the country's water resources, such as climate, hydrology, water demand and quality, and hydrographic delimitations. In fact, the data on hydrographic delimitations facilitated the legalization of the councils through the resolutions specified in Ministerial Agreement No. 0840-2019. The role of the governmental platform **Agua de Honduras** was fundamental to establishing the councils: “Previously, community stakeholders were left out because the actual hydrographic delimitations were unknown, **but now land-use planning and water resource management can be performed easily** thanks to the different analyses that can be carried out,” said Francisco Hernández, technician of the watershed department of the DGRH. Before the councils existed, community engagement was minimal: “When a project came along, people were used to paternalism, but now there is voluntary work, **counterpart contributions of up to 50%, and some councils created a green fund** with local contributions and talk about environmental compensation,” said Melkis Maradiaga, chair of the Goascorán River Basin Council. This shows that the establishment of councils strengthens community-based water governance.

GREEN LEVERAGE

For Francisco, the information provided by the platform strengthens the capacities of the watershed councils, and this translates into leverage for project and resource mobilization: “Information such as water demands and data generated through various scenarios validate the funding requests for climate adaptation projects that the councils submit to municipal corporations or donors.” To which Emy added: **“The councils determine the water supply in the dry season and use this information to undertake mitigation actions.** For example, in the Sampile Watershed, Choluteca department, they used the platform information to identify the best location for a dam that will be built this year.” In the Mesoamerican Dry Corridor, councils are taking advantage of cooperation projects, as Melkis mentions: “They prioritize and disseminate in their communities the projects to be co-financed by municipal and donor funds and also implement them.”

The empowerment of the different local stakeholders has been critical for all of this to happen, as is the case of the Curarén Mayor’s Office, according to Williams Jácome, watershed technician: “In the past, we had to travel to the capital city and go to public offices to request information about our territory; **now we have easy access to a wide range of information and other valuable data** that Agua de Honduras provides for free.”



ENVIRONMENTAL DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

In addition to facilitating the organization and empowerment of watershed councils, the information provided by Agua de Honduras took them to a higher level: “Before, the geographic maps were of low resolution and outdated. **Today, the country has detailed maps for 25 watersheds, 133 subwatersheds, and 6,845 micro-watersheds** throughout the national territory,” said José Del Cid, researcher at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT.