

❖ **Standard 1: Engage key internal and external partners and stakeholders throughout the process.**

Case Study: Multinational Collaboration in Central America

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Purpose and region of analysis

The Selva Maya, Olmeca, Zoque planning unit (encompassed by 18 ecoregions) contains portions of 3 countries in Central America. The team developed several strategies to deal with the difficulties of identifying and working with a diversity of partners in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Criteria/Methods

The approach we used to involve partners and stakeholders in the ecoregional assessment process was to build tri-national and multi-institutional teams throughout the process, increasing the quality of the finished product and broadening the level of buy-in achieved within the region. In order to determine who to involve in the planning process we categorized institutions by the degree of influence we may have with them (Figure 1). TNC decided to first work at the closest level, with already known partners, and then gradually expand to involve other institutions farther out from the sphere of influence to groups such as universities, governments and other NGOs. We did not work beyond these two categories with other sectors such as tourism, energy, or agriculture, which we felt are out of our sphere of influence, and government agencies are better positioned to influence them further. The involvement of these groups will begin in the implementation phase. The full involvement of the near 50 other identified institutions from three countries in the planning process would have increased dramatically the logistics and funds required and not guaranteed buy-in because of differences among groups.

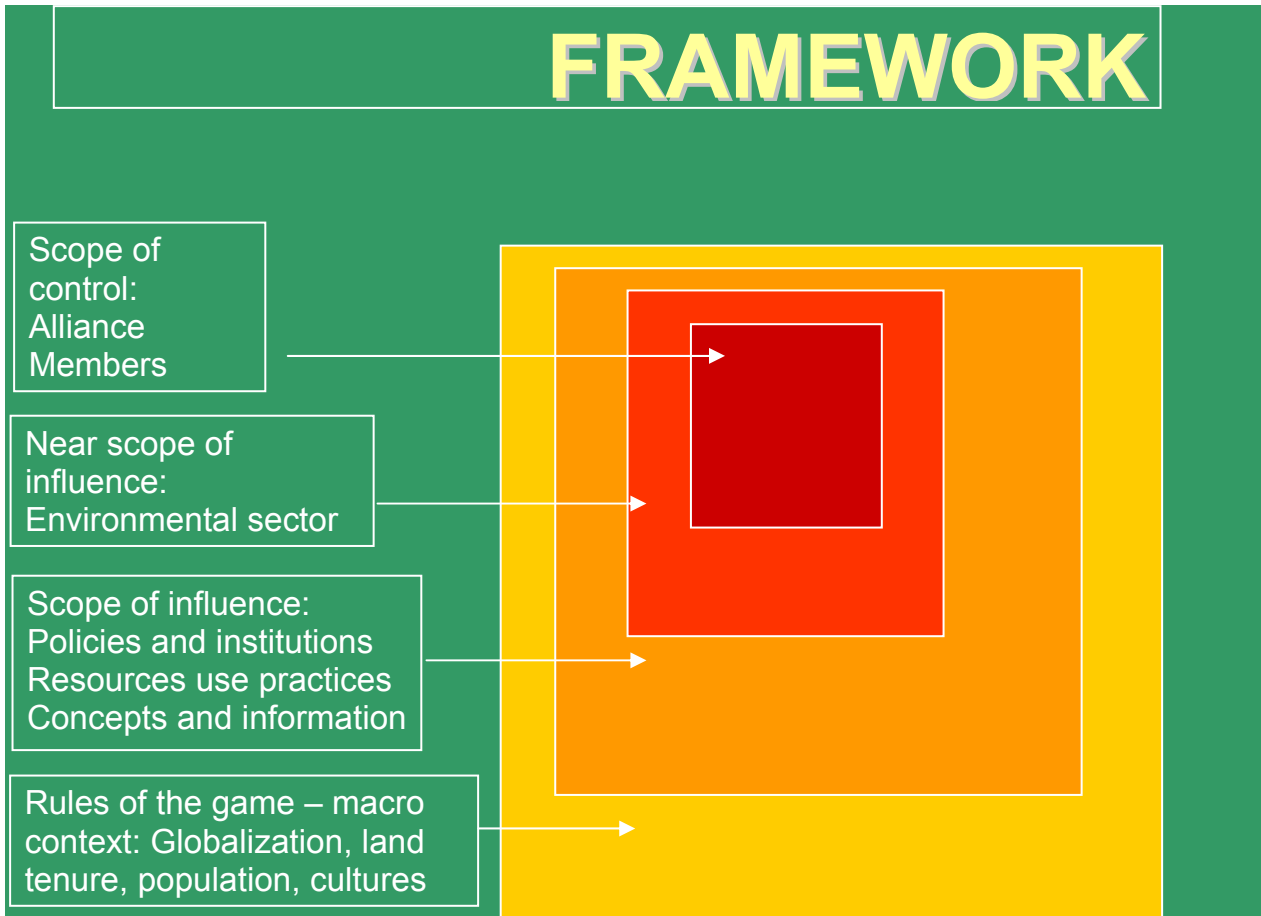


Figure 1: The conceptual framework used to identify partners to involve and the role each would play in ecoregional assessment and implementation.

Several teams were formed to guide various aspects of the planning and implementation process (Figure 2):

Coordinating Team to lead political aspects of the process

The very first step of the process was to convene a meeting to form the coordinating team (April 2002). This team was responsible for determining the methodology and design of the process to follow, approving the workplan, budget and hiring appropriate staff. Throughout the process they supervised activities and made linkages with institutions, decision makers, and scientists. The team was comprised of members from 3 national NGOs (Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatán, Defensores de la Naturaleza and Programme for Belize), 3 US-based NGOs (TNC, CI and WCS), and one academic institution (ECOSUR). It took one year to develop and sign a Team Charter, which defined the purpose, roles and responsibilities of the team and its members. Two year later, the Team decided to invite National Government representatives, from SEMARNAT, MNREI and SEGEPLAN. Official members of the group were the Executive Directors of the NGOs, the regional lead administrators of the US-based NGOs, and officially appointed representatives from government institutions.

Science Team formed to decide methodologies and tools and to analyze data

The Science Team was comprised of 23 scientists whose expertise covered all taxons, distinct geographic areas and countries. Scientists belonged to the aforementioned institutions, plus five additional institutions (Universidad San Carlos de Guatemala, Universidad de Tabasco, Universidad Veracruzana, Pronatura Veracruz, Green Hills). Inclusion of these additional institutions increased the extent of buy-in for the ecoregional assessment in the region. This was the most active team which met regularly and held frequent conference calls and active communication.

Strategies Committee

The purpose of the Strategies Committee was to analyze base information for strategy development and refine and revise strategies proposed during the Strategies Design Workshops (November 2004 and April 2005). The team included 11 experts in political and technical aspects of conservation planning and implementation. Four national NGOs, three government representatives and TNC staff (Propeten, Amigos de Sian Kan, Pronatura Veracruz, Programme for Belize, Propetén, TNC, CONAP, SEMARNAT and MNREI) were represented on the team. Six out of nine institutions were new to the process, further again broadening the level of buy-in achieved in the region.

Alliance for Conservation

Finally, all institutions who participated in the process, agreed at the November 2004 workshop to form a wider Alliance to ensure implementation of the plan. The Alliance will be formalized by expanding the original Team Charter to include other NGOs and as a working group under the umbrella of the Tri-national Agreement signed by the three Protected Areas governmental institutions (signed agreements among governments are far more complicated and it was decided to use an already in place mechanism).

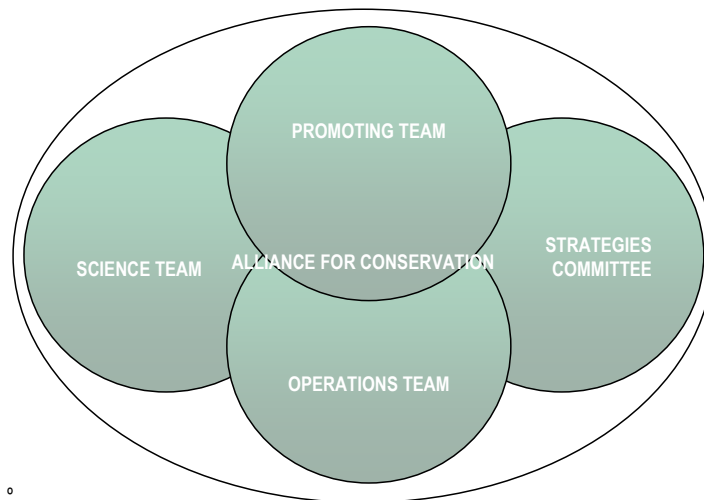


Figure 2: The organization of staff and partners in the Selva Maya, Olmeca, Zoque planning unit later forming the Alliance for Conservation.

In order to build alliances with partners and stakeholders and identify members for the described teams, TNC hosted formal local and nationwide presentations. These were followed by bilateral visits to institutions determined to be key to the process. Finally, the team worked to formalize the partnerships through a signed agreement. This team developed three agreements customized to suit the range of possible partnerships. The types of agreements and the relationship it defined are as follows:

- The Coordinating Team has a formal **Team Charter** defining the purpose, areas of collaboration, roles and responsibilities of seven organizations. This charter is aimed at broad-conservation activities, including and beyond conducting the Ecoregional Assessment.
- Information producers and managers, such as NGO's, universities, government agencies or relevant projects signed a **Letter of Authorization**. This letter defined the terms of the use and restrictions on data and information shared (recognition of author rights, limits to distribution of restricted information, no commercial use, etc.).
- Governing agencies and facilitator and other entities that define policies and strategies of environmental sector and related economic ones (infrastructure, energy, tourism, agriculture) signed a **Letter of Endorsement** and appointed a high level official to serve as representative in the process.

Products/Outcomes

- Obtained National Governments endorsement at both technical and high official levels
 - We conducted formal presentations to different government institutions, such as Protected Areas Agencies, Forestry Departments, Environmental Ministries. The mechanism used to formalize it was a letter of endorsement and the official appointment of a representative official to the process. Throughout the planning effort we have kept good communications sending updates, holding more presentations, and inviting formal participation of their experts in the Science and Strategies Committees.
- Operationalized partners and liaisons in every key location:
 - 3 capital cities: Guatemala, Mexico and Belize.
 - Seven Mexican and one Guatemala State Capitals
- Achieved wide-public communication of the planning process
 - 13 Multi-institutional presentations in each city within the planning unit
 - 25 Bilateral visits and negotiations to key institutions such as government agencies and universities
- Identified opportunities/mechanisms to use/adopt the ERA by decision makers.
 - Land use zoning processes in Mexico.
 - National Gap Assessments.
 - Belize National Protected Areas System Action Plan and Policy
 - CONAFOR's Incentives for Conservation Program.

- Ensured appropriate participation of and communication with stakeholders along the planning process
 - This was a key strategy, given that near 120 scientists participated in technical workshop, reviewing the information compiled and generated, ensuring their understanding of the process, quality of the information and buy-in of the products. In addition, all institutions who participated along the process, as a result their involvement, decided to form the Alliance for Conservation.
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