



Community-Based Management of Environmental Challenges in Latin America

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COMET-LA reached the halfway mark

The Community-Based Management of Environmental Challenges in Latin America project, funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme of Research and Development (FP7), COMET-LA project, is half-way there and now enters in its final stages with the final phase of scenario-planning.

During the last period, the COMET-LA Team has developed and tested a framework to characterize Socio-Ecological Systems (SEs) adapted to the local population needs in the three case studies: Water Management and Biodiversity in Colombia; Forest Management in Mexico and Coastal and Marine Management in Argentina. After a comprehensive analysis of different SEs characterization methodologies, it was found that *Ostrom's Framework for Sustainability* is the most suitable framework for COMET-LA project. Despite of it, the framework had to be adapted because its 8 subsystems composed by 53 second level variables were too wide and diffused for the case studies. Finally, 132 variables were defined, filled out and studied in the three case studies, with an especial effort in knowing how the SE resources are influenced by the environmental challenges.

This wide characterization was critical to carry out the next project stage, the Prospective Structural Analysis (PSA). The PSA enabled the identification of the most influential variables for internal and external stakeholders in each community and Socio-Ecological System. Thanks to the MICMAC modeling system interaction among these variables could be analyzed and the influence and dependence relations were identified. This study is very important and sets the basis to develop the final project stage, the scenario building. At this moment, the James Hutton Institute (JHI) is setting up a scenario building methodology, which will be debated during the next team meeting in February 2014.



PSA workshops in Latin American

All these methodological tools are being adapted to the local conditions. In these adaptations play and will play a decisive role the creation and development of the COMET-LA learning arena, conformed by scientists, social entities, the local population and the decision-makers.

The learning arena is producing multidisciplinary knowledge and, thanks to the partner features, the common learning is strengthened. Among others, knowledge about climate variability, participative methodologies, gender approach, Red List criteria and MICMAC mathematic functioning has being shared.

The learning arena has obtained great advances also at the local level. Some examples could be the case of Colombia, where young people from Community Councils were trained as co-researchers. In this way, they owned the project methodologies and this made their involvement easier. In Argentina case, COMET–LA opened a *space for dialogue* creating huge interest among the stakeholders who showed their interest and commitment in the community management and therefore in their natural resources governance. In the case of Mexico, COMET-LA has opened opportunities to those groups that normally were not actively involved in participation processes, as young people or women.

So far, the process has provided useful learnt lessons. Firstly, it can be highlighted the inclusion of bottom-up processes in the working methods. Bottom-up process allows involving local stakeholders in the strategies and the development of the learning arena. This approach includes the use of tools to enhance participation of all stakeholders and allows the results to be returned to the community.

Another learnt lesson is the role of existing social structures to develop these kinds of methodologies. The results obtained with COMET-LA are closely linked to the initial situation of the social structures in each case study. COMET-LA methodological tools have so far operated more effectively in those communities with a better social cohesion. On the opposite, a greater effort was needed to create a climate of trust between the actors in the most individualistic communities.

Finally, COMET-LA face important challenges in the last year of its implementation. One of them will be to find out the way to link nature conservation with population wellbeing, because in most of the case studies the care and protection of nature doesn't generate direct economic benefits or incomes. Sustainable governance models should link sustainable management and local livelihood.

In a domestic level, COMET-LA has to strength the links between local and scientific knowledge for a better understanding of the local and global necessities to finally obtain a better understanding on how to improve the conservation and natural resources sustainable management.



Colombian co-researchers



Women's workshop, México



Debate space open with COMET–LA in Argentina



Training in climatic variability



Dissemination of COMET-LA methodological tools

The Methodological Framework to Characterize SES developed by COMET-LA is available on line

The report “Locally-adapted tools for the Characterization of Social Ecological Systems” is now available in COMET-LA website. The report gather up the work developed during the project implementation and offer a useful and appropriate for different scales methodological framework to characterize SES at the local level. The document also includes the learnt lessons derived of its implementation in the three study cases, the advances and difficulties found during the process and some recommendations to solve them.

Local view about environmental deals

The reports “Stakeholder vision on problems and drivers related to environmental challenges” for each study area are also available. These documents collect the works obtained in 2013 throughout the methodology Prospective Structural Analysis implementation.

[Download Mexico's report](#) / [Download Colombia's Report](#) / [Download Argentina](#)

The COMET-LA learning arena was presented as a participative tool research in the workshop “Participative Research regarding Rural and Agricultural issues: Approach, Design and Assessment”

The COMET-LA coordinator, Dr. María del Mar Delgado, takes part of the Expert Group that participated in this workshop. The workshop was organized by CGIAR (International Agricultural Research Advisory Group), IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development) and Eurforic Service and took place in Oxford from 9 to 13 December. This workshop is part of CGIAR strategies in order to identify participative research tools to be used in its future research.

During the workshop different tools and methodologies to involve stakeholders in research regarding biophysical, social, economic and political factors were analyzed. The workshop assistants were highly interested in COMET-LA learning arena structure and its three circles. It was recognised its innovative approach that allows involving local communities and civil society as research member team. The Coordinator highlighted the innovative research approach, under which the European Commission funded COMET-LA: *Research for the benefit of civil society*.

Broadening the learning arena

COMET-LA has produced various briefings to disseminate the results of the knowledge and learning sharing among the interdisciplinary project team.

These documents can be downloaded in COMET-LA website and include several issues: how to create local co-researchers groups, the influence of gender approach in nature resources sustainable management, climate variability scientific view and the use of participative methodologies for Socio Ecological Systems characterization.

[Download the briefings](#)

COMET-LA in Mexico, Colombia and Argentina

During the last semester, the COMET-LA team was very active working with the communities. The results obtained in the Prospective Structural Analysis were presented to the stakeholders involved in the three countries.

The efforts of the Mexican partners in the dissemination and communication of results to all the communities of Santiago de Comaltepec (Compaltepec, la Esperanza and San marín de Soyolapam) is remarkable. Furthermore, during the visit of the COMET-LA International Team the indigenous radio XEGLO recorder four special programmes about the project where the COMET-LA members participated. The programmes have been disseminated in more than 21 radios of the indigenous Oaxaca radio network.



Colombia's team has kept working with the methodologies in the community through the co-researchers. This has fostered an environment of trust, ownership and support for the project by the local communities, fostering the enthusiasm towards achieving the objectives of COMET-LA.

Finally, Argentina carried out a series of periodic measurements of the beaches profiles as well as oceanographic measurements in Claromecó beach (Buenos Aires province). The aim of these measurements is to know the coastal dynamics and to gather geomorphologic, oceanographic and meteorological data relevant for the comprehension of climate variability interactions. Furthermore, the children drawing competition "*How do you imagine the future of your community?*" has finalized and the winners were chosen.



Advancing towards scenario-planning

During the autumn of 2013, the James Hutton Institute Team have work hard designing the 'common methodological framework' that will be used to guide scenario-planning by the COMET-LA communities in 2014. The aim of this process is to support adaptive management, in the face of future change.

Thinking about the future, even when there is great uncertainty, is thought to be very useful for aiding people to collaborate and plan actions. However, there are many methods and ways to do it, not all of them suitable for the COMET-LA context. Therefore, JHI has been reviewing the very extensive and varied literature on scenario-planning. They have identified and selected methods that could be suitable for participatory work with the communities in every case study site, and that: 1) allow links with the previous work carried out in COMET-LA; 2) reflect updated best practices in scenario-planning. The methodology should encourage the interactions between the COMET-LA researchers and the communities, in order to maximise the mutual learning, dialogue and collaboration.

A methodological proposal was circulated between all partners just before Christmas 2013 and will be discussed by all the partners at the 2014 COMET-LA methodological meeting, in February.

INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF COMET-LA

COMET-LA takes part in the European Research Agency for Environmental Research for Horizon 2020

The scientific conference “Science for the Environment” took place on 2 and 3 October 2013 in Aarhus, (Denmark), organized by Aarhus University and the Partnership for European Environmental Research (PEER).

The COMET-LA Coordinator, Dr. María del Mar Delgado, and many other researchers from the European scientific community participated in this meeting. The conference aim was to identify the gaps of knowledge and the needs and priorities that Horizon 2020 should include to face the most pressing environmental problems within the *Societal Challenge 5 (SC5): Climate Action, Environment, Resource Efficiency and Raw Materials*. The gathered priorities and recommendations were presented to the European Commission.

COMET-LA participated in the Researchers’ Night of the UCO

The 27th of September the University of Cordoba joint to the more than 200 European cities that simultaneously host the Researchers’ Night since 2005, an initiative within the PEOPLE Programme (7th Framework Programme of the European Union).

The aim of the Researchers’ Night is to attract lay people to science. The COMET-LA team participated in one of the micro-meetings where different Spanish and Colombian representatives of COMET-LA, showed to the audience some aspects of the management of environmental challenges Latin America.

The journal “International Innovation” highlights some of COMET-LA achievements

María del Mar Delgado, COMET-LA Coordinator, describes the main advances in COMET-LA, mainly in the characterization of Argentina, Colombia and Mexico’s Social Ecological Systems and in the main variables influencing sustainability. She also anticipates project’s next steps for making scientific methodologies more applicable at the local level and for upscaling of the results to be used by other SES and areas.

Meet the **COMET-LA** family

Latin America is often referred to as a mega region and managing its environmental services there generates significant challenges. Professor María del Mar Delgado explores current efforts to support community-led activities and how these can be translated to other parts of the globe.

COMET-LA is a research project that aims to understand the complexity of environmental systems in Latin America. It focuses on the characterization of Social Ecological Systems (SES) and the main variables influencing sustainability. The project involves a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from different countries in Latin America, including Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico.

The project has several key objectives, including:

- Understanding the complexity of environmental systems in Latin America.
- Characterizing Social Ecological Systems (SES) and their main variables.
- Developing methodologies for the study of SES.
- Applying these methodologies to different SES in Latin America.
- Up-scaling the results of the project to other SES and areas.

The project has already achieved several milestones, including the publication of scientific papers and the organization of workshops and conferences. The next steps for the project are to continue the characterization of SES and to develop more applicable methodologies for the study of SES.

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INTERNATIONAL DISSEMINATION OF COMET-LA

X Biodiversity Forum of the CeUICN

Community-based Management of Natural Resources and Climate Change Challenges have been the main focus of the *X Biodiversity Forum of the Spanish Committee of IUCN*: “Designing sustainable governance and management models for the sustainable management of natural resources to face environmental challenges” held at the University of Cordoba (UCO) on 24th and 25th of September.

The Forum brought together American and European experts facing a common problem and a major challenging issue, climate change, such as bridging positions between the needs of society and scientific research, or the involvement of citizens in climate change adaptation strategies.

The Forum exposed many different positions and very heterogeneous solutions from the scientific and academic visions and from a social and gender perspective, through various practical examples of adaptation to climate change in both Latin America and Spain.

During the Forum, the research tools used in the project COMET-LA were presented: those related to the characterization of the social-ecological systems using the Ostrom’s framework, and to the use of Prospective Structural Analysis (PSA). Furthermore, partners of CiVi.Net, COBRA and ECO-ADAPT projects presented their actions and outcomes on Community-based Management. [Read more](#)



COMET-LA visibility in meetings and congresses

During the second semester of 2013 COMET-LA was present in different meetings and congresses. Posters about the project were exposed at the *CONAMA Local 2013* and in the *World Wilderness Congress, Wild 10*, both in Spain. In the case of Argentina, posters were exposed in the *IV Meeting of Marine Conservation Young Leaders*.

One of the *CONAMA Local* conclusion was that environment can be a development engine for municipalities. COMET-LA agrees with this idea, pointing out the need to find out local governance models for the natural resources sustainable management that provide wellbeing to those communities that better preserve their nature. Regarding *Wild 10*, it is an international forum that joins together conservation experts from all over the world and it is dedicated to increasing awareness about the importance of local conservation and traditional knowledge.

The Argentinean Oceanographic Institute (IADO) presented the poster “Perception of stakeholders about climate change in Bahia Blanca estuary” during the *IV Meeting of Marine Conservation Young Leaders* which took place in the Patagonian National Centre of Puerto Madryn in October 2013.

NEWS OF THE PROJECT

Workshop on Application of categories and criteria of the IUCN Red List

The Spanish Committee of IUCN, in collaboration with the Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation (IUCN Med) offered a workshop on “applications of categories and criteria of the IUCN Red List”. This training, which took place on September 26th at the University of Cordoba, was part of the learning arena of COMET-LA and trained researchers on the standards for identifying threatened and vulnerable species within their local areas.

See workshop video



Researchers of COMET-LA make an interesting film about Payment for Ecosystem Services

This Simpleshow created by the James Hutton Institute and GRID-Arendal helps to explain Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes. It has been produced as part of the James Hutton Institute - UNESCO Global Dialogue on Water Ecosystem Services.

PES schemes are attracting an increasing interest as mechanisms to improve conservation and achieve sustainable development outcomes. PES initiatives aim to reach mutually beneficial agreements between providers and users of ecosystem services, entailing a reward mechanism for ecosystem managers for maintaining or improving the provision of the services valued by beneficiaries. While evidence is still being collected on how benefits from PES can be sustained, they are numerous schemes currently in place in the world. The James Hutton Institute is researching on the current challenges of PES.



See video

ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

- From 13 to 15 February

Steering Committee meeting in Faro (Portugal)

- February

Dissemination of COMET-LA in the Newsletter of the FAO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean: Family Agriculture

- From February to June

Implementation of the scenario-planning methodology in the case studies

- From 23 June to 13 July

COMET-LA team's field work in Latin American