The native islanders of San Andres, Old Providence and Santa Catalina: Dreaming between two worlds

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ABSTRACT

The Archipelago of San Andres, Old Providence, and Santa Catalina is Colombia's only oceanic and West Indies Department. These islands with a total land area of 57 square kilometers and a population of more than 83,000 are an island microcosm. The landscape includes farmland, tourist centres, isolated traditional settlements in Old Providence and densely populated sectors in San Andres.

Old Providence and Santa Catalina were first settled by English puritans from 1630 to 1641 (Kupperman, 1993). There is no known report about permanent settlement of the island of San Andres.

The imposed continental development model did not consider insularity and the close relationship between native islanders and their marine environment. The impacts of plans and projects designed and carried out by the centralized government have resulted in losses for the island's natural and socio-cultural systems. The most isolated and smaller islands of Old Providence and Santa Catalina have also undergone socio-cultural changes, however cultural homogeneity has been very useful to reduce its negative impacts. Native islanders are aware that they share issues with the people from other islands around the world; similar trends include overexploitation of natural resources, habitat degradation, planning development in the absence of public involvement, poverty and social exclusion.

During the visioning process, the people on Old Providence and Santa Catalina chose ecotourism as their central platform of tourism development and as an essential component for the implementation of the SEAFLOWER Biosphere Reserve. Their aim is to maintain control of their present and future and be the leaders of their own development process. On the other hand, native islanders on San Andres Island – currently an ethnic minority on their own territory – dream about recovering their insularity and identity and sufficient autonomy to own and define their future.

KEYWORDS: Old Providence, San Andres, identity, development process, SEAFLOWER

1. INTRODUCTION

The Colombian Archipelago of San Andrés, Old Providence and Santa Catalina, isolated in the southwestern Caribbean, lies approximately 208 km east of Bluefields, Nicaragua; 720 km south of Grand Cayman; and 800 km west-northwest of Cartagena, Colombia (Figure 1).

The Archipelago is part of a country from which it is geographically and culturally isolated (Figure 2). The actual landmass with a total area of 57 km^2 consists of three major inhabited islands, five uninhabited atolls to the north of the major islands, and two atolls to the south and together with the marine area covers nearly 10% of the Caribbean Sea (CORALINA, 2000a). The Archipelago, declared the SEAFLOWER Biosphere Reserve belongs to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves since 2000.
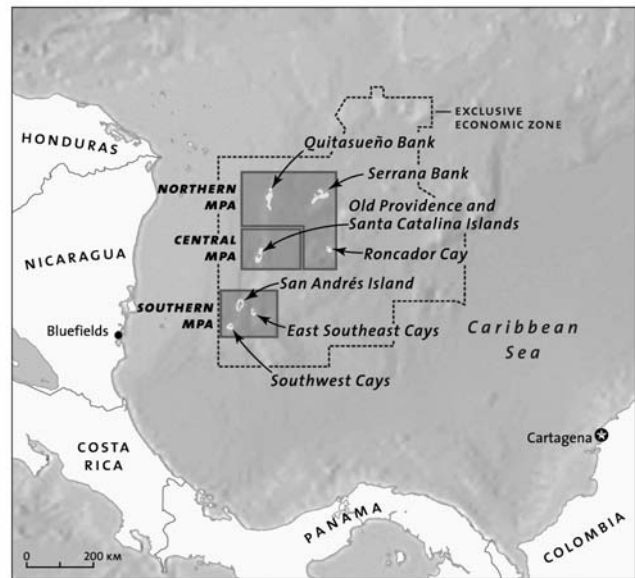

Figure 1. Location of the San Andres, Old Providence and Santa Catalina Archipelago in the Western Caribbean
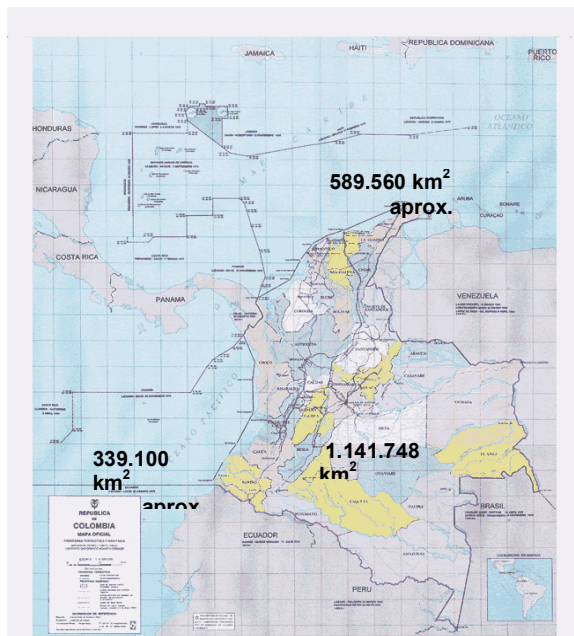Source: Recchia and Mow, 2003

Figure 2. Official Map of Colombia
Source: IGAC, 1996

The reef system of the Archipelago is extensive. One of the largest true barrier reefs in the Americas, the barrier reef off the islands of Old Providence and Santa Catalina alone is 32 km long and covers an area of 255 km^2 (Geister and Diaz, 1997).

The islands' marine resources are used heavily by industrial fishers from the Colombian mainland and poached by vessels from mainland Colombia, Central America, and many Caribbean nations. The tourism industry, the free port shops owned largely by immigrants from continental Colombia and their descendants, and resident immigrants from foreign countries, mainly from the Middle East, and the human settlements (a rather large amount of odd shantytowns – more than 40) are the

principal sources of pollution and sedimentation due to inadequate solid and liquid waste management.

The Colombian Government has increasingly recognized that the management of the tiny remote oceanic islands is complex and that limitations are imposed by isolation, small land area, and distinct culture and social systems. However, they still need to understand that planning and management need to be based on linkages between biological systems - terrestrial, coastal, and marine - and societal systems. Or in other words, the entire islands, their resources and their people need to be considered. Additionally they should also acknowledge that native islanders once had the know-how to manage island natural and social systems and resources and have the right to be owners of their socio-economic development.

Native islanders on both islands are living between two worlds: the one they built until the 1960s based on community input and the one built with ideas imposed by the dominant one-sided continental model of development. To address their development needs, the native islanders from Old Providence initiated and led their own visioning process 12 years ago, their aim was to maintain control of their present and future and lead their own development process. The native islanders from San Andres however are facing serious problems to identify effective options and opportunities towards unity and organization of their people and are thus handicapped to start-up and maintain processes towards a long-term vision and community development. This is the reason why visioning processes on San Andres have been initiated and led by people from outside. The process in Old Providence and Santa Catalina has focused particularly on local initiatives to maintain economic control; in San Andres on recovery of land, identity and culture.

2. THE PEOPLE AND ITS CULTURE

San Andres, Old Providence and Santa Catalina are home to more than 80,000 people of which not all are native islanders. In fact on the larger island, San Andres, where the Free Port actually was the main economic activity, native islanders are a minority in their own territory. They have been outnumbered by continental Colombians and suffer various forms of discrimination due to their ethno-cultural background and survive under marginalized conditions that contrast with the modern world. It is important to point out, that also the poor Colombians who came from the coastal zones – both Pacific and Atlantic – black and white, suffer from discrimination and live under marginalized conditions.

Normally the people from the islands called themselves Natives but to avoid confusion with newborn belonging to the dominant Colombian culture[1], in the mainland they are now known as *Raizales.*

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[1] Native. Belonging to a place.

Of African ancestry, they speak Creole, which has been described as an English-based language with much of Africa and the Caribbean in its vocabulary. An example of a Creole greeting is "Greetins to aal the pëpl av di worl, wi lov unu" (Gallardo, 2003).

Surnames such as Howard, Pusey, Smith and MacDonald are traditional British names. Natives from Old Providence claim they are British, because they descended from Henry Morgan, this is how the story was related to Wilson (1973): "Providence people are descended from Henry Morgan and his sailors. Henry Morgan was an Englishman and a famous sailor and a pirate. Everyone was afraid of him and he was not afraid of anyone. Henry Morgan's chief mate was a man called Berelski, a Pole. When Morgan left the island to attack Panama, this Berelski jumped overboard and swam back to the island. He changed his name to Robinson, and the Robinsons are now an important family on the island. Hawkins was also one of Morgan's captains and the Hawkins family is also descended from this Hawkins". The Natives are also descended from black slaves brought from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. Once freed from slavery in 1834, the Natives were soon sole owners of the properties on the three islands.

Photo 1. Old Providence and Santa Catalina. Visioning Workshops, 2006

Native titles are "Bampa" (for grandfather), "Bama" or "Bam-bam" (grandmother), "Beda" (brother), "Ta" or "Tita" (sister), "Taanti" (aunt) and "Con" (cousin) as well as "Pa" and "Ma" (Gallardo, 2003), although they also use the standard titles.

"The Natives are a carefree, quiet and easy-going people who learned long ago to live in harmony with their natural surroundings" (Gallardo, 2003). According to native islanders each island is closed, a world on its own. The existent barriers are not only physical and geographical; native islanders consciously build social isolation to maintain their culture. Insularity is thus seen as a useful tool to preserve ethnic differences: food, architecture, literature, oral traditions, music, religion, art, and language, of which the Creole language remains as key for the recovery of lost Caribbean elements. People have learned to depend on themselves, to be on their own and this makes them special and different. This is the reason why although San Andres people have adopted music, architecture, literature and religion, they could not entirely adopt to the new economic system and have been marginalized and set apart in their own territory. People on Old Providence and Santa Catalina can still live on the island of "yesterday" and carry out some of the activities of the old economy; they can remain independent and still survive.

On the other hand, smallness contributes to tighten the social "cobweb", high sense of solidarity to help each other in every circumstance – lack of job, lack of money to buy food, lack of shelter, extending to protecting "drug dealers and traffic" when prosecuted by authorities are characteristics of small island societies. Backbiting and criticism are also part of their day to day life.

Insularity is also responsible for the fragility of the small islands. However, early settlers learned to deal with the availability of natural resources, water, land and sea and their uses. The alternatives were scarce; self-sufficiency and self-help were important elements towards sustainable islands, since external supplies were few, had a monetary value and cash was not available; creativity and innovation of native islanders were local assets, ideas were also locally owned and put to work for the development of the community.

3. THE COMMON PAST

The Islands were uninhabited up to the time Columbus discovered America; they were often visited by Mosquito Indians from the coast of Central America to trap sea turtles and collect bird eggs and guano.

The islands have been alternately possessions of Spain and Britain, however they were never settled by the Spanish, but by English Puritans (CORALINA, 2000b) – documented as the first settlers – who came and stayed because according to their testimonies "Good stock is plentiful; in fact the soil is exceedingly productive and nature here appears in abundant luxuriance, affording to the animal creation, the greatest profusion, with very little cultivation" (Collett, 1837)[2].

The islands were part of the Captaincy of Guatemala, afterwards they were placed under the Viceroyalty of New Granada, which later became Colombia. No Spanish government was ever set up on these islands.

In 1822 the Archipelago became part of Colombia, apparently there was an act of voluntary submission; some historians report evidence that the islands were however occupied to secure allegiance to Colombia from native islanders.

During 90 years thereafter native islanders were "virtually left alone"; they were self-sufficient and organized, had their own education, religious and justice systems. Then in 1912 the Colombian government made its first attempt to draw native islander "nearer" to the mainland by creating a political jurisdiction called intendancy[3] and instituted a policy of colonization and Colombianization, imposing the predominant mainland Spanish language, religion and cultural expressions.

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[2] As described by a member of the Royal Navy in May 1837
[3] Political-administrative government in which the Head of Government is designated by the Central Government

The major shift for the island of San Andres came in the 1960s after the dictator General Rojas Pinilla declared the islands a free port in 1953. The construction boom included airport, port, hotels and shops as well as housing for the immigrants, and brought along not only domestic and construction workers but also jobs that were against the identity, individual character and customs of native islanders. The illusion that San Andres is the free port of opportunity resulted in massive immigration of disadvantaged individuals and entire families.

The history of the smaller islands of Old Providence and Santa Catalina was very different, since they had no major role to play in this new economic system imposed by Colombia, because of their isolation from the main island; migration, uncontrolled growth and environmental as well as ecological damages were not as severe as on San Andres. The people in Old Providence and Santa Catalina maintained their natural and cultural assets; they have won many battles to keep out large tourism development projects planned by outsiders, such as time-share; for the majority of natives from Old Providence and Santa Catalina it is not a privilege to be an employee

The changes in the number of inhabitants show the magnitude and impacts of decisions taken by the President of Colombia, far away from the Archipelago and the interests of native islanders: in 1952 they were 5,675 inhabitants in San Andres, twelve years after, in 1964 the number was 16,731, it had more than tripled; in 1973 there were 22,989 and reached nearly the double amount in 1988, it had increased to 42,315. Today they are more than 83,000 inhabitants.

The commercial tourism model defined by the free port collapsed in the early 1990s when Colombia took major macroeconomic decisions and loosened national trade restrictions.

4. THE SOCIO-ECONOMICS

Access to land and sea and the fruits they delivered, opportunities to farm the land and raise animals, as well as fish were equitable. The increasing demand for land, water and food by outsiders and their monetary capacity to purchase these, brought an opportunity for native islanders to exchange a good standard of living, co-operation and solidarity, abundance of food and scarcity of money, for a low quality of life, disowned from land, poverty, selfishness, lack of food and discrimination and leave them as "aliens" in their own territory.

Land use has been significantly modified from agriculture to housing and the infrastructure to satisfy the demands of uncontrolled growth, and with it the landscape has also been modified from one dominated by the natural scenery to one dominated by a man-made "landscape" with concrete buildings and shanty towns.

Swamps have been filled up and replaced by an airport, a port and "barrios" for the large areas needed to provide housing for the new residents at the cost of reducing the productivity and health, and destroying the habitat of the coastal and marine ecosystems.

Native islanders contributed to the loss of the ownership of their territory by forgetting the real value of land given to them by their slave ancestors and practically giving up their valuable "birth right" for low-value Colombian pesos; their lack of entrepreneurial spirit and financial skills led them to make short-term investments in vehicles such as second hand automobiles brought from Miami – with high gas consumption and maintenance costs - and boats which were used as taxis to take commercial tourists around. During the "economic boom" of the free port, up to the early 1990s, these vehicles could be easily replaced once destroyed by salt spray, however the increase in number of taxis[4] reduced the income of taxi drivers and their capacity to maintain this activity.

Native islanders also stopped living off the land, set aside their skills in agriculture and fishing and primary production. Primary production closely linked to self-sufficiency on the islands was replaced by the service sector. Since food production decreased, import of canned goods and other less healthy products increased thereby contributing to the establishment of a new economy that would soon lead to narrowing the opportunities for survival of the native islanders.

Native islanders kept on being their own masters until they lost their means of self-employment and became employees and vulnerable to unemployment.

The tourist industry employs nearly 50% of the work force (native islanders are not well represented) while 37.48% are employed by the public sector (Connolly, 2000). In the year 2000 the national government imposed a new local administrative structure which led to severe cuts in the number of government jobs and worsened the already poor economic situation of native islanders, holders of the majority of the government jobs. The unemployment rate is estimated at 53.6%; almost 50% of the population has less than the World Bank's poverty criterion of US $1 per person per day (van't Hof, 2001).

4.1 Natural resources

The well developed barrier reef surrounds the islands to the north-northeast. In Old Providence the reef system covers approximately 255 km^2 and includes lagoons, sea grass beds and mangrove swamps.

Photo 2. Barrier Reef

Photo 3. Mangroves in Hooker Bight

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[4] Once the construction boom was over, the construction workers coming from the mainland had to find new ways of livelihood and took over this niche until then once only occupied by native islanders

The research and monitoring component of the SEAFLOWER Biosphere Management Plan contributes to increase knowledge on biology and ecology of commercial species such as queen conch, spiny lobster and the black crab and key species such as sea turtles, snappers and groupers. The Archipelago is at the edge of the western flyway. The islands are also home to a wide variety of resident and endemic reptiles, insects and other invertebrates. Bats are the only reported terrestrial mammals (Howard et al., 2003).

The vegetation in the islands is classified as tropical dry forest. At the present time, 374 plant species have been identified which are distributed between 93 families; 70% of which are native with 23% known to be introduced (González et al., 1994).

4.2 Environmental services

Human activities are poorly managed; additionally local governments do not have waste management systems put in place. The garbage production on San Andres is approximately 100 ton/day and the open air dump has reached its capacity. Land is scarce and there is no known plan to address this problem. The greater demand for water and the lack of "water culture" of the immigrants – lack of awareness and good practices towards the use of water – are the causes for the overexploitation of the aquifers and the pollution of groundwater and coastal waters. Coastal water from a nearby mangrove swamp was used to cool the machines that produced the electricity in an open cooling system; this hot, oil polluted water discharged into the enclosed mangrove swamp destroyed almost 50% of the mangroves in Hooker Bight.

Photos 4, 5 and 6. Threats to the island ecosystems

The carrying capacity of water and public services limits current tourism development projects. Beaches and hills were exhaustively mined to provide contractors with sufficient building materials. This caused great damage to all island ecosystems – coastal ecosystems, watersheds and forest, the entire coastal zone of an island.

4.3 Social environment

Problems are over-population, spreading urbanization and the growth of shantytowns, as well as poverty, drug addiction, and inequity. The population expansion also created new problems relating to public health, education and security, and lack of social and environmental justice. There is despair and people struggle for scarce resources and opportunities. This situation is aggravated because the moral and ethical values of native islanders have also been adjusted to suit those of the newcomers; native islanders exposed intensely to the elements of the Colombian culture have begun a new process of adaptation and assimilation of their traditional Anglo-Caribbean culture. However many native islander groups, aware of the struggle between the two worlds and the consequences of the complete loss of their identity and extinction as an ethnic group, have risen up against the growth and socio-economic system imposed by the Colombian government and have made serious attempts to reaffirm and protect their people. Pastors of Baptist and Adventist churches are leading an initiative to take an active stand on issues related to native rights, equity, land and sea tenure, and self-determination; it is intended to unify and mobilize native islanders the way it was done by civil rights movement in the southern United States (CORALINA, 2000a).

A few successes are reflected in the Colombian Constitution of 1991: native islanders now have the legal protection granted to national ethnic minorities. The Colombian Constitution acknowledges English as the mother tongue of the native islanders and grants the archipelago two official languages - English and Spanish. It also states that native islanders have the rights to the lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used, and establish on them the management and governance system that best suits their cultures and social needs (CORALINA 2000a). However, this has not yet been recognized by the Colombian Government and its institutions. The policies are developed instead to integrate or assimilate native islanders into the model of the national culture of the dominant majority. Many national policies and programs are leading consciously or unconsciously to the destruction of the culture of native islanders. This minority group – even on its own territory – needs special policies to protect, promote and further its culture.

Many successes have not been sustained; frustration and blaming each other are obstacles to unity. Native people have to take the necessary steps to get organized and by so doing gain more control over their own land and resources, and to recover a standard of living in accord with their native tradition.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Community planning process

The approach includes a collection of methods, which together provide a decision-support tool. They include:

- Stakeholders' analysis - the identification of stakeholders' interests enables participants to understand the constituency of the three islands and ways to engage stakeholders at all stages of the process;

- a visioning process involving many participants at different levels and stages;

- focus groups and forums;

- interviews;

- needs and assets assessments;

- participant observation;

- public information and outreach events;

- research through surveys, questionnaires; and statistical research/data analysis.

Projects anywhere, but especially on small islands, require the active involvement of all players to be truly sustainable, those that have a lot to win or loose by decisions taken about the present and the future of a given community. It is the only way to receive the input of a broad range of ideas, experiences and in fact to allow all participants to enhance their knowledge and provide elements towards the whole picture of island development and to take decisions about the future they want to experience. It is the job of natives to get together and share their everyday, knowledge and experience with each other to develop the direction of the entire community who will be part of that future.

Native islanders of San Andres, Old Providence and Santa Catalina have different interests and carry out a variety of activities as part of their daily lives. Sharing and understanding these will help all involved create, own and implement a common vision.

Photo 7. Visioning workshop. Old Providence, 2006

As islanders and sea people it is probably easier to look at the visioning process with its ups and downs as follows: a) the island is drifting at sea - they have no idea where to start much less where they are bound for, there is nothing useful they can do, they are on their own; this is a wonderful beginning for new discoveries; 2) it is complex, the stakes are high, islanders, however test things they think are useful, not sure of doing the right things; 3) islanders begin to validate each others' reality, and create their own conditions for interaction; they share understanding about the things that work – they may be not be self-sufficient at this point; 4) there is a shared picture of the island, different from the one each participant had at the start, now they are ready to make things happen – the dynamics or emotions of drifters once they see land, even if still far away; 5) anxiety is still a source of energy to begin the hard work, this includes mutual support, creativity and taking responsibility; 6) many have not taken part in the process, many are now committed, but their task and responsibility is to decide who has to be brought on board and when and how to transmit hope to achieve their commitment.

5.1.1   San Andres

Many plans have been produced for the development of the islands during the three last decades following a top-down approach however, these have not been implemented. Improvised programs carried out by national and local institutions have led to environmental degradation and a loss of ethnic identity and resulted in tensions between native islanders and continental immigrants. Among other reasons for this are language and cultural differences and exclusion from social and economic benefits (CORALINA, 2000a).

Photo 8. Visioning workshop. San Andres, 2006

The relations between native islanders and the national government are tense. Natives' rights to traditional fishing grounds (CORALINA, 2000a) are not recognized and respected, they have lost local control over the primary use of island resources and opportunities for natives to work in tourism locally are non-existent. The choices are between hard work, low-pay jobs on board cruise ships or hard work, extremely high-pay trips to traffic with drugs between Colombia and North America.

Since the Corporation for the Sustainable Development of San Andres, Old Providence and Santa Catalina (CORALINA) began functioning in 1995, the agency has been working to introduce new governance systems to administer the islands. CORALINA has worked continuously with and for the community; the community is subject to its own development and therefore has a right to take active part in the decision-making mechanisms.

One of the key roles CORALINA has played locally in decision making is empowering grassroots organizations through education and training. The efforts to strengthen local capacities and skills to plan and manage the SEAFLOWER Biosphere Reserve and MPA were understood as long-term programs with ups and downs. The programs encouraged learning by-doing in a two way process: the community taught natural resource and social science specialists about their traditional low cost methods to the use of marine and coastal resources, specialists in return shared new concepts and approaches to environmental management.

5.1.2   Old Providence and Santa Catalina

The planning process of Old Providence and Santa Catalina was triggered by decisions taken without the involvement of the community to build large scale time share condominiums and dive centers owned by outsiders on Old Providence. Individuals, business men and women and community groups felt that the consequences and impacts of these decisions on the cultural, social, economic and political setting of the island society would be mainly negative and far reaching and most likely only be the beginning of the replication of the growth model imposed on native islanders in San Andres.

The first actions of the created Civic Movement were awareness-raising, outreach and training among local inhabitants and public agencies; training topics included the Colombian legal framework for the protection of the native communities of the San Andres Archipelago and methods to apply participatory approaches granted in the Colombian Constitution of 1991. They also developed mechanisms to ensure that as stakeholders they had representatives on planning, consulting and management boards that were able to truly represent their constituencies and to ensure sufficient feedback.

As a joint effort, the Ministry of the Environment of Colombia, the Municipality of Old Providence and Santa Catalina, the Civic Movement and many individuals and organizations worked during 8 months using diverse methodologies to plan and carry out a long-term (20 years) development plan that emphasized the promotion of gender equity, the diversification of income-generating opportunities, and the improvement of local environmental conditions. The Municipal Development Plan was adopted as the development policy for the Islands by Municipal Decree 011 of 23 November 1994.

In order to support the implementation of the plan, CORALINA[5], the Ocean Conservancy and Conservation International along with ECOASTUR[6] and other local stakeholder groups and grassroots organizations carried out planning

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[5] The environmental agency for the Archipelago
[6] A local NGO

processes that resulted in the formulation of three major plans between 2001 and 2004 – master, action and marketing – which serve as blueprints for the development of ecotourism in Old Providence and Santa Catalina. There is a need to attract more visitors to the islands to increase the income of local business owners, to successfully implement ecotourism and at the same time reduce extractive uses of marine resources.

5.1.3 Participation

Native islanders are part of the islands systems – both ecological and societal -, meeting their needs without exceeding carrying capacities is a major role of decision-making and good governance. The uses of the primary island resources - coastal and marine - remain under an open-access regime and contribute to conflicts between local users. The main conflicts are between divers and artisanal fishers and between industrial fishing companies and all local stakeholders. They are also minor conflicts among artisanal fisher groups derived from the use of illegal or unsustainable fishing gears by some fishermen.

User groups do not trust each other neither do they trust government agencies. CORALINA aimed at building trust with all stakeholder groups as a first step towards working together in ecosystem management.

There is a need to continue working with the major users and build capacity for them to participate in management and work together. Thus the fundamental task facing resource managers in the San Andres Archipelago is to select the most appropriate methods to mobilize participation, build capacity and strengthen non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and increase effectiveness and compliance by promoting stewardship, self-empowerment, and awareness, this will indeed benefit grassroots community groups.

The Providence Foundation aims at enhancing the on-going community participation program to support training, education, financial and technical assistance in independent project development, and create enabling conditions to allow natives to create their own model of development that offers new income sources based on rational use and management of the Archipelago's natural resources.

5.1.4 Education

Before CORALINA began its activities in 1995, native islanders and other stakeholder groups were not a part of the decision-making scheme in the Archipelago. The conventional top-bottom approach was widely used by all government agencies. People were not aware of their natural and social surroundings; they did not know the values of marine and coastal resources and their significance for the islands and its people. Within this framework,

CORALINA tasks included design and implementation of outreach programs to reach all groups – children, youth, women, teachers, fishers, divers, etc.; training modules for beginners with basic concepts such as coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds, biodiversity, ecosystem, habitat, and methods for participatory planning and management (Mow et al., 2003).

Short workshops with active involvement of participants were designed to avoid people getting tired and maintaining their interest throughout the process. A special program was designed to increase the awareness of school children, which included field trips during the holidays Children and youth are important allies, because they share the messages more easily than adults; they can also address adults in a more open and uncomplicated manner, achieving more attention. The mouth-to-mouth communication works fairly well whenever you get engaged and committed children and youth to actively participate in outreach campaigns.

6. CHALLENGES

The visioning process in the San Andres Archipelago has to be based on a wide range of environmental, economic, and cultural situations within the overall definition of a tropical small island marine ecosystem. Local realities and limits must be recognized, these include inadequate public services and infrastructures, social problems including poverty, drug addiction, inequity, a centralized political system, and lack of native benefit and management autonomy; as well as the need for institutional transparency and respect for the community's input. To begin a successful and long-term process within this context requires local ownership and direct involvement of as many as possible. Native islanders need to carry out an organized process – without any aid from outside – to define themselves, share their realities, views, interests and concerns. They should also understand that there is no need to wait for and expect that "the one omnipotent leader" will born; there is however the need for many community leaders to provide true meaning and purpose in the journey towards a better future for all islanders. The process is very useful to facilitate the dynamic of the leader group and follow through on the huge amount of work, time and emotional engagement required to bring a vision to life.

A voluntary start-up steering team could help set up the space or forum to identify effective options and opportunities towards unity and organization of the native community and begin recovering trust between native people. An option is to adopt a learning-by-doing approach with simple agreements to promote local empowerment and move people into concrete action.

The process should open up positive attitudes and create awareness that the potential for cooperation is far greater than the differences of opinion and views. The island offers a whole world of real choices to work together, create an engaging vision islanders want to own and become part of, challenges old and young, men and women equally, it becomes a "household process".

7. CONCLUSIONS

The Archipelago of San Andres, Old Providence, and Santa Catalina is a Colombian territory. The cultural and linguistic characteristics of native islanders are different from those of mainlanders and closer to the Caribbean islands colonized by the English. Until the free port declaration in the 1950s, Colombia was absent from the islands, islanders governed themselves and did it quite well. Due to insularity, smallness and isolation islanders learned to survive on their own: their socio-economic lifestyle can be described as self-sufficient and independent, an egalitarian and classless social structure, essentially no technological development, a productive economy based on artisanal fishing and agriculture, a high quality of life (it was indeed a high standard one compared with the Colombian mainland and other western Caribbean societies) (Wilson, 1973), a system with no monetary wealth, and good management practices - particularly in the management of soil and freshwater resources, and solid and liquid waste. Native islanders are currently pursuing the recovery of traditional knowledge on conservation and self-sufficiency patterns; they are increasingly working towards the reestablishment of their subsistence economy - agriculture, small animal raising, and artisanal fishing.

Native islanders do not trust local and national public workers with their top-down planning and management approaches. Native islanders demand institutional reforms that take into consideration their traditional needs, knowledge, and request for autonomy in public management. Their priority is to increase national ownership[7] of local visioning processes as a mechanism to gain support and confidence from all stakeholder groups and improve the effectiveness of the development programs. The recent report from Mow (2005) on the visioning process carried out in Old Providence and Santa Catalina in the early 1990s suggests that implementation has been unsuccessful because of lack of government commitment and support. For example, efforts to create enabling conditions and put into practice the Integrated Ecotourism Action and Marketing Plans for Old Providence and Santa Catalina depend for their success on the existence of broad-based political and private support. This requires the building of partnerships not only at the local level, but also at the national level, since major players in the Colombian tourism industry such as airlines and large tour operators are national-based. Without these elements, put together and interacting closely, the tourism plans remain as blueprints on shelves and desks and do not have possibilities to be carried out.

In San Andres, Old Providence and Santa Catalina, CORALINA institutionalized bottom-up approaches for planning and management and increased local ownership and leadership, generating significant pressures on the national government, and thereby elevating concerns to a broader national forum.

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[7] Put it on the national priority agenda

A visioning process is about multi-level leadership. Because it is a process, it is never done and can be replicated at all levels – island-wide, neighborhood, schools, churches, etc. It is permanently moving from ideas, maybe even vague ones, to concrete ones, to action that can generate tangible results and impact the lives and livelihood of islanders. In the process it is important to involve stakeholders in discussion with each other. During the process, the capacity of local people needs to be strengthened to develop common ground of the type of island they are seeking to achieve and of the role each individual, each organization and the community play in its construction. An important characteristic of the islands' vision is the ownership by all stakeholders of the common ground. The diversity of opinions and of perspectives that characterize the various stakeholders should encourage all participants to take part in the visioning process; diversity should also be strengthened during the process.

Forums, meetings and workshops, as well as informal encounters are needed to give space and voice to individuals and organizations whose views and realities would otherwise not be shared by others. Coalitions and partnerships are important to take day-to-day action towards the common future.

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