



# Guatemala

## Communication for the Maya Biosphere

**Created in 1990**, Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve covers 2.1 million hectares, an area roughly the size of El Salvador. It represents 80 percent of Guatemala's protected areas and almost 20 percent of its total territory. Rich in biodiversity, the Biosphere is home to 20 ecosystems, 220 species of birds, and 53 mammal species. It is also the cradle of ancient Maya civilization with 175 archaeological sites, including Tikal, a United Nations World Heritage Site.

When the Maya Biosphere Reserve was created, USAID/Guatemala was a major supporter. The Maya Biosphere Project (MBP) was the focus of the mission's environmental strategic objective: "Improved natural resource management and conservation of biodiversity."

The main components of this project were park administration, sustainable income generation, policymaking, institutional strengthening, and environmental education and communication.

By 2000, a number of governmental institutions and local and international NGOs had started environmental education and communication programs in the Biosphere. USAID/Guatemala and the MBP's advisory committee asked GreenCOM to conduct an assessment of these activities to provide guidance for future funding. Specifically, GreenCOM was asked to:

- Conduct a rapid assessment of current education and communication activities
- Organize a participatory workshop to share the assessment findings and recommendations with the various stakeholders and
- Jointly develop a conceptual framework that would contribute to a unified strategy for education and communication in the Biosphere



## The Initial Assessment

GreenCOM conducted the rapid assessment of Biosphere education and communication activities during a three-week period in 2002. The assessment consisted of a review of documents and materials provided by the various MBR stakeholders; in-depth interviews with approximately 50 key stakeholders education and communication activities; and interviews with other USAID-funded technical assistance teams working in Guatemala City and Peten. The results indicated that:

- Although the various education and communication activities were initiated with good intentions, they were not coordinated and they lacked a unifying theme and consistent message. In some cases, the messages were even contradictory.
- Education and communication strategies had focused primarily on communities within the Biosphere. National, regional, and municipal decision makers and opinion leaders had not been involved, which made it difficult to manage the reserve sustainably and preserve its ecological integrity and economic viability.
- Education and communication interventions were aimed more at changing knowledge and attitudes than at changing behavior. There was a need to redirect activities toward changing people's actions.
- People living in the Biosphere generally had a negative attitude toward the idea of conservation. They felt that the reserve belonged to the government and NGOs and that conservation efforts went against the interests of residents.

The results of this assessment were shared in a workshop with the various organizations that had been involved. More than 30 individuals from 15 organizations took part in a participatory process that led to the following recommendations:

1. **Develop a five-year education and communication strategy for the Biosphere.** This strategy would be aimed toward the three priority audiences—national and regional decision makers and opinion leaders, Biosphere municipalities, and local communities—that have the most impact on the Biosphere.
2. **Consolidate Maya Biosphere Project successes** by developing regional education and communication capacity and by strengthening the organizational and communication capacity of CONAP, Guatemala's national protected areas agency, and the reserve communities.
3. Expand the circle of Biosphere stakeholders to achieve a critical mass of individuals and groups taking positive action for the reserve. Actively involve municipalities, increase participation of women and youth, and forge new partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, community groups, and the private sector.



## Creating a Culture for Support and Conservation

Based on the results of the assessment, USAID/Guatemala and the advisory committee asked GreenCOM to continue working with the Maya Biosphere project team. Specifically they requested that GreenCOM provide short-term technical assistance in the development of a strategic participatory communication strategy aimed at national, regional, and local opinion leaders.

The USAID/Guatemala Environmental Policy Institutional Strengthening Project (FIPA) provided in-country support and funding of the promotional activities and materials in coordination with the principal local counterpart—the national park service’s education and communication director. To develop the communication strategy, GreenCOM conducted regional and national multi-sectoral workshops and formative research with the target audiences.

### Multi-Sectoral Workshops

These workshops were conducted to involve stakeholders in identifying and prioritizing the specific target audiences, potential collaborative actions they could take to support the Biosphere, and strategy messages. More than 30 individuals representing 20 governmental, NGO, and private sector organizations participated. One focus of the workshops was an initial analysis concerning:

- Information and perceptions these target audiences had about the Biosphere
- What might motivate them to collaborate with the promotional plan and support the Biosphere
- Who were the opinion leaders within these target audiences and what organizations did they belong to
- Information about these target audiences (such as research, case studies, key informants)

### Formative Research

A private sector research firm was contracted to conduct a study with 78 national, regional, and municipal opinion leaders—both men and women—in the social,\* private, public, and mass media sectors. The objectives of the study were to:

- Explore the target audiences’ perceptions of the term “Maya Biosphere” in comparison with the term “Maya Biosphere Reserve.”
- Conduct a pretest of a promotional poster, logo, and slogan.
- Develop an inventory of national, regional, and municipal opinion leaders and organizations that could be involved in the strategy in the future.

Three important findings emerged from the study. First, researchers found that interviewees in general had limited knowledge about the Biosphere and its benefits. Most believed that government agencies were responsible for managing it.



\* In Guatemala, the social sector includes NGOs, community-based organizations, the *campesino* (or farmer) movement, and churches.

Second, the study found that the term “Maya Biosphere” had more resonance with the target audiences because it seemed to refer to nature and the natural world of the Peten, the governmental department where the Biosphere is located. By contrast, the term “Maya Biosphere Reserve” was perceived as a formal, limited area that the government and environmental NGOs managed. Because of these perceptions, the term used in the promotional materials was “Maya Biosphere.”

Finally, the interviewees were skeptical about the promotional materials. The poster, for example, met with general approval only among municipal opinion leaders. At the regional level, only some leaders approved of it, and at the national level it was generally rejected. Because of pretest results, the poster was totally redesigned.

The research and workshops formed the basis from which the Maya Biosphere Project team developed the strategy. The objectives of this strategy were threefold.

- 1. Increase knowledge about the Maya Biosphere and its benefits.** Reframe people’s perceptions of the Biosphere by emphasizing its social, economic, and cultural benefits in addition to its environmental benefits to build a wider sense of ownership. The slogan “Maya Biosphere, Protecting It Is to Our Advantage” (*“Biosfera Maya, Protegerlo Nos Conviene”*) summarized this new approach.
- 2. Build coalitions for collaborative action** among the public, private, and nongovernmental sectors that respect and promote the application of the Biosphere legal framework and master plan. Strengthening civil society would be an added benefit.
- 3. Increase financial support and investment** in the Biosphere in ways that respect the Biosphere legal framework and master plan.



The strategy was targeted toward national, regional, and municipal decision makers and opinion leaders in the government, private sector (especially businesses related to tourism), social sector, and the mass media. It had three elements: the Maya Biosphere Goodwill Ambassadors, a set of attractive promotional materials with a unified message, and media training.

## Maya Biosphere Ambassadors

The heart of the communication strategy was to increase the number of nodes \* negotiating and implementing sustainable solutions through the training and support of Maya Biosphere Ambassadors. The Ambassadors would catalyze, facilitate, and strengthen coalitions and collaborative actions among the public, private, and nongovernmental sectors and civil society. Opinion leaders of the various stakeholder groups identified in the workshops and formative research were invited to become Ambassadors and receive a three-day training in presentation skills, negotiation, and working with the mass media.

Five three-day training sessions were conducted during which 78 men and women from 45 organizations were certified by the national park system as Maya Biosphere Ambassadors. The focus of the training was how to utilize the Maya Biosphere promotional kit to make persuasive presentations and to facilitate collaborative actions to support the Biosphere master plan with individuals and groups in their sectors.

At the end of the training, each Ambassador developed a work plan and made a written commitment to achieve specific goals. For example, the representatives from the *campesino* (farmer) movement committed to sharing the information about the internal zones of the Biosphere with their organizations and to encourage them to negotiate for lands within the buffer zone rather than the core zone.

The representative from one of the leading regional tour agencies committed to promote tours outside of Tikal, thereby extending the amount of time and money tourists spend in the region. He also committed to visit several leading tourism agencies in Guatemala City to encourage them to do the same. The representative from the Guatemalan

Congressional Environmental Commission committed to making a presentation to the commission to ensure that its plans and activities followed the Biosphere's legal framework and master plan.

For many of these opinion leaders, the training sessions were the first time they had learned about the internal zoning of the Biosphere that defined the type of land use permitted. It was also the first time they had sat around a table with people from other sectors and discussed the potential for a common future. Each session resulted in the participants enthusiastically asking the park service to host regular meetings where they could share experiences and lessons learned.



A foldable poster with a map of the Biosphere was developed for the Ambassadors' promotional kit.

\* Nodes may be individuals, groups, institutions, communities, government agencies, businesses, partnerships, NGOs and coalitions.

Attractive promotional materials with a unified message were developed by a local advertising agency with direction from GreenCOM and the director of the national park service's education and communication department. The heart of these materials was the Maya Biosphere Ambassador promotional kit, a briefcase of materials including:

- A six-minute promotional video
- Three PowerPoint presentations, each designed for a specific audience (national and regional opinion leaders, municipalities, and the social sector).
- The same presentations in overheads and laminated cards
- A CD with all of the materials
- A Maya Biosphere Ambassador manual that summarized the training the Ambassadors received.
- *Guide to Your Presentations* to remind Ambassadors of key messages.

In addition to the Ambassadors' kits, other Biosphere promotional materials were developed, such as:

- A brochure summarizing key messages from the video and presentations (English and Spanish)
- Three different posters with a photo of the Biosphere, its logo, and a list of benefits the Biosphere provides
- A poster-size map of the Biosphere that also explains its zones and their uses. (Formative research found that Guatemalan maps did not show the Biosphere.)
- Stickers with the Biosphere logo
- Maya Biosphere caps
- A 30-second television spot aired on national television newscasts for three months
- Three radio spots aired on one national and three regional radio stations for three months
- Two attractive traveling exhibits
- Billboards with artwork and messages from the posters that were placed on roads leading to and inside the Biosphere and on the three highways leading from the capital.

The national protected area service sponsored two events to launch the campaign—one in the Peten and one in the capital, Guatemala City. These widely publicized and well-attended events featured the video and a presentation on the objectives, design, and other promotional materials of the campaign.

Media training was provided to eight leading journalists representing three major newspapers and three national television stations. The journalists took a two-day tour of the Biosphere to learn more about its features and to interview different stakeholders.



## Results and Lessons Learned

In August 2002, GreenCOM's training team returned to Guatemala City from the first Ambassador training in the Peten to find that the director of CONAP who had been very involved and supportive of the Biosphere promotional program, had been unexpectedly replaced. At the same time, the regional director of the Peten, who had originated the request for GreenCOM technical assistance and who had been a prime engine for the promotional strategy, was moved to the capital.

Because of these developments, the second training was postponed until GreenCOM and partners from USAID and CONAP could brief the new director and his staff and obtain their support. Ultimately, the new director of CONAP had other priorities and the promotional strategy did not receive the follow-up support needed to institutionalize it. For example, CONAP was to host follow-up meetings with the Ambassadors, but these meetings were never conducted.

In late 2002, USAID/Guatemala shifted the focus of its environment program by ending most of its projects in the Maya Biosphere in order to concentrate on activities in the Atitlán Volcanoes and Montagua-Polochic regions. The mission asked GreenCOM and FIPA to focus on these areas as well. Because of these changes, there was no formal USAID or CONAP follow-up or evaluation of the promotional plan or the Ambassadors. CONAP did, however, monitor some of the Ambassadors' activities. In September 2003, the agency's director of education and development gave a presentation at the World Parks Congress called "Mobilizing Volunteers for Gaining Support for the Maya Biosphere Reserve." In it, he reported that:

- Maya Biosphere Ambassadors and CONAP personnel had made presentations to more than 2,200 people.
- The Maya Biosphere video had been shown to more than 12,000 school children.
- The Maya Biosphere traveling display had been set up at 36 events. One of the most important was the First Mesoamerican Congress of Protected Areas, which more than 800 protected area leaders attended.
- The presentation he was giving had been viewed by 15,000 people.

One of the important lessons from GreenCOM's experience in Guatemala is that communication capacity and a sense of responsibility must be cultivated in multiple partners and in multiple sectors in order to be sustainable. If one partner withdraws its support, the other partners are equipped to continue as planned.

## Selected Publications and Products

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