

Good Governance: A pathway to local resilience



Since 2011, the Partners for Resilience (PfR)⁴ alliance in Nicaragua has been promoting a comprehensive approach to the issues of disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation (CCA) and ecosystem management and restoration (EMR). This initiative has also promoted an environment that is conducive to dialogue on PfR's approaches among the local population and authorities.

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In the context of PfR, good governance is understood as harmonious and structured dialogue between the citizenry and the authorities, in which the former present their demands through citizens' consultation arenas, explaining their most felt basic and strategic needs. Negotiations are established and they receive from the authorities a resolution aimed at satisfying their needs. Citizen management is established in the execution of projects in the communities, complemented by other good governance processes such as transparency, as demonstrated by the accountability in the consultative municipal assemblies.

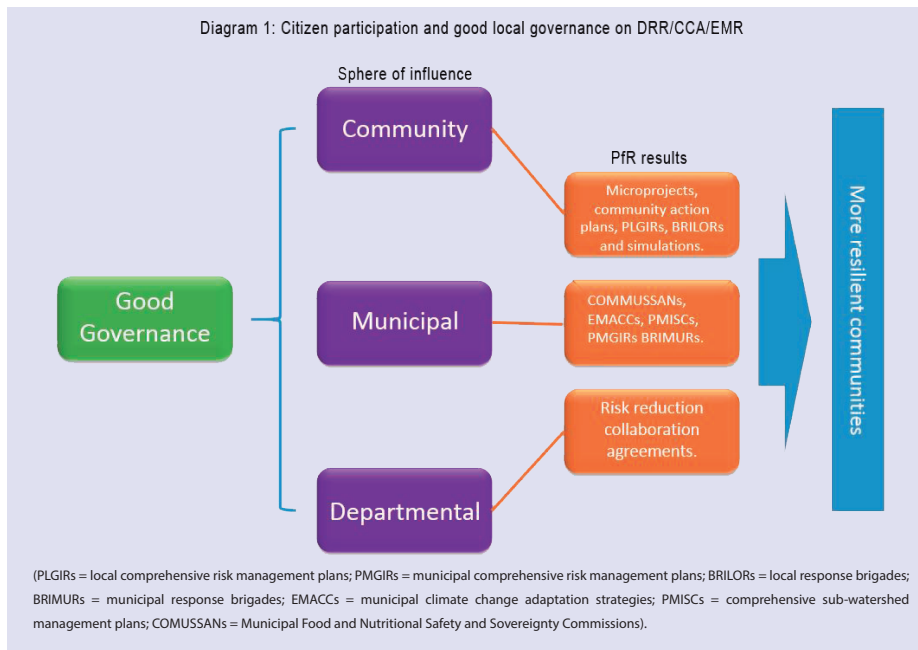


Figure 1 shows the levels at which activities were carried out in the form of outreach actions, dialogue, coordination, collaboration agreements, certifications, letters of understanding, joint planning, fund complementarity and the joint execution of activities. The interacting actors have different hierarchical rankings in line with their particular function in that area and the relations between them occur in different senses and at different levels. As a result, a process of good governance makes it more probable that decision makers will respond to demands from the community level and that more resilient communities will be built.

This process has resulted in the promotion of the communities' empowerment through their self-management; the development of microprojects aimed at satisfying the population's immediate needs; the implementation of important planning processes, such as the management plans for the Inali and Tapacalí sub-watersheds in the department of Madriz; and the production of climate change adaptation strategies. These tools have been adopted by the municipal authorities for their land-use planning and strengthened disaster risk reduction at the departmental, municipal and community levels.

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⁴ Partners for Resilience (PfR) in Nicaragua consists of CARE Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan Red Cross, the Nicaraguan Human Promotion Institute (INPRHU), the Association of Municipalities of Madriz (AMMA), the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Center, and Wetlands International. Its sphere of action focuses on the municipalities of Somoto, San Lucas, Las Sabanas and San José de Cusmapa in the department of Madriz and on the municipality of Puerto Cabezas in the Northern Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region (RACCN).



Exchange visit on good governance between the Collaborative Management Committee of the Somoto Canyon, and municipal governments of San José de Cusmapa and Las Sabanas. Photo: Red Cross.

"It took the loss of a member of my family to see this bridge here today, but it serves a purpose because nobody else is going to perish when this brook swells up," said Eliodoro Gutiérrez Reyes, Clementina Gutiérrez Tórrez' husband, during the opening of the pedestrian bridge in the community of El Rodeo in the municipality of San Lucas, department of Madriz.



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Strengthening community self-management

The program has strengthened the capacities of both female and male community leaders through training processes involving community diploma courses, learning schools and disaster risk reduction workshops that have enabled them to develop self-management. Based on the capacities generated, the community leaders have drawn up a plan of action for fundraising with their municipal authorities and for the promotion of good practices.

The processes for community empowerment on the issues covered by PfR promoted changes in attitudes and practices for the good management of community livelihoods, including reforestation actions; soil and water conservation; the production and use of organic fertilizer; promoting and rescuing native seeds; rescuing highly-nutritious traditional foods; harvesting water; and the management of wetlands that promote the ecotourism value of their local area.

Community self-management in adversity

The community of El Rodeo is located some 7 km east of the municipal capital of San Lucas. People used to walk across the brook, known as El Encinón, which could experience sudden rises in water level during heavy rainfall, endangering the lives of locals, particularly children.

Members of the community were in the process of identifying and prioritizing a microproject to be executed with the support of Partners for Resilience when a sudden surge in the brook's water level resulted in the unfortunate death of community leader Clementina Gutiérrez Tórrez, who was a judicial facilitator and an active participant in the Program's activities. After the community had mourned this sad event, it was even more determined to prioritize the implementation of a microproject to build a footbridge over the brook.



The municipal mayor at the inauguration of the footbridge in the community of El Rodeo. Photo: CARE-PfR



Municipal council session on the negotiation of amounts for community microprojects. Photo: CARE-PfR

Communities producing management instruments

Partners for Resilience's work is based on a participatory process that involves conducting community assessments (CVCAs⁵ and VCAs⁶) to evaluate the existing threats, capacities and vulnerabilities from the perspective of the community inhabitants. These led to the social production of community proposals, advancing the dialogue for good governance on PfR's issues.

As an initial response and with the support of the PfR Program, the San Lucas local government addressed the community's demands through a fund complementarity mechanism in which the local government contributed 10%, the communities another 10% in the form of labor and local materials, and PfR 80% for the execution of 12 community microprojects. This collaboration mechanism was institutionalized through municipal certification and the signing of a collaboration agreement among the parties involved.



In this respect, the mayor of San Lucas, Deysi Pérez Vásquez, stated that "The model of alliances and consensus that Partners for Resilience has implemented has been very valuable and played a fundamental role, creating an impact and building strengths for good local governance."

⁵ The Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA) is a methodology that CARE has created as a tool for gathering, organizing and analyzing information on climate vulnerability and the adaptive capacity of both the communities and the families and individuals within them. In the framework of PfR, the CVCA has been a key instrument for identifying community microprojects.

⁶ The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) is a methodology of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that proposes actions to transform vulnerabilities and capacities in order to reduce risks.



Swearing in of the Inalí River Sub-Watershed Committee. Photo: CARE-PfR.

Joining forces for active participation

With support from the organizations in Partners for Resilience, dialogue arenas were promoted to analyze vulnerability in the communities where PfR is working and to provide responses through the linkage of the actors working in the local areas. The linkage of efforts and community management were reflected in the 28 community microprojects implemented with a DRR/CCA/EMR approach. They are also reflected in tools for land-use planning aimed at achieving the balanced development of the communities, including the municipal climate change adaptation strategies, community action plans, sub-watershed management plans, and local and municipal comprehensive risk management plans.

Referring to the coordination of efforts, the environmental technician from the San Lucas Mayor's Office, Manuel de Jesús Gutiérrez, felt that "the Program's success lies in finding common spaces to develop the communities, and in the fact that the actions of Partners for Resilience and this Mayor's Office have been a perfect synchronization between both entities, finding common objectives and sharing methodologies and strategies."



Different activities carried out to promote local governance: joint work sessions with organizations and institutions together with the municipal council and the Departmental Disaster Prevention Committee. Photo: CARE-PfR.



Coordination and dialogue session with local governments and state institutions for joint planning. Photo: CARE-PfR.

Lessons learned:

Developing the PfR actions in the programs and strategies of the national and local governments has been a key element in their success and thus achieving the Program's expected results.

Dialogue among the different sectors of the population and the municipal governments accelerates the response processes for resolving the communities' needs.

The systematic interaction among the municipal authorities, locally-based organizations and the community has facilitated conflict resolution and allowed the successful execution of actions such as the community microprojects.

The model for working in alliance promoted by PfR is an instrument that has facilitated coordination and fund complementarity for local governments.



Response of the local government of San Lucas, the communities' local disaster prevention committees (COLOPREDs) prepared to respond to disasters. Photo: CARE-PfR.



The San Lucas Municipal Council playing the PFR Program's "Upstream, Downstream" game during an ordinary session. Photo: CARE-PFR.

Conclusion

Promoting an environment conducive to effective participation and good governance, as PFR did, facilitates the development of actions that lead to the integration of the DRR, CCA and EMR approaches in order to increase community and institutional resilience and ensure the sustainability of actions.

The active participation of the population, community-based organizations, civil society, government institutions and non-governmental organizations strengthens capacities for project assessment, prioritization, attainment, execution and supervision.



San Lucas' municipal mayor, Deysi Pérez Vásquez, during a municipal environment forum. Photo: CARE-PFR.

La Bruja Lake: Life-giving wetlands of the municipality of Las Sabanas

La Bruja Lake is a 2.8-hectare natural conservation site with abundant vegetation cover, including tall trees and medicinal plants. It belongs to the community of El Pegador, located 1.5 km from the urban area of the municipality of Las Sabanas.

The lake's sedimentation and eutrophication have resulted in the growth of vegetal species, reducing the water mirror and affecting aquatic life.

During the assessment of its disaster risks, the community highlighted the lake's potential for ecotourism and the protection of its water resources.

In coordination with the community and the municipal government, Partners for Resilience supported the formulation of an initiative to protect this wetland.

The municipal government issued an ordinance decreeing that the lake is municipal patrimony, fostering the development of ecotourism and forming a collaborative management committee. For their part, local inhabitants organized to participate in activities ranging from a

clean-up process to remove invasive vegetation to the building of small tourist infrastructure works.

Thanks to the efforts of the community, the Municipal Mayor's Office and the PfR Program, the inhabitants feel that they are in a better situation. They say that they now have more visitors from many different places, that small businesses are being created in the community, and that the lake is part of a Madriz tourist package promoted by the Nicaraguan Tourism Institute (INTUR).

"We've dreamed about developing a tourist project for a long time," said Claudio Ramos, leader of the El Pegador community. "The good management of the lake will also allow greater water catchment, which could be used in case of drought."

The departmental office of the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources in Madriz is promoting a national-level process to declare the lake a wetland.



La Bruja lake, El Pegador, Las Sabanas, department of Madriz. Photo: Nicaraguan Red Cross.



Inhabitants of El Pegador cleaning-up the water mirror of the La Bruja Lake in Las Sabanas. Photo: Nicaraguan Red Cross.



Example of the wildlife of the La Bruja Lake. Photo: Nicaraguan Red Cross.

La Guata: An example of union and negotiation

The definition of the La Guata Lake water recharge area and its buffer zone in the municipality of Las Sabanas, department of Madriz, is the result of the work of the PfR alliance. This was done through the PfR member organization Wetlands International in coordination with the Las Sabanas Municipal Mayor's Office, which conducted a study to identify the potentiality and conditions of the La Guata water discharge area that supplies the drinking water system for the municipality's urban area.

The water recharge zone is private property, as it belongs to three medium- and large-scale agricultural producers whose activities exert pressure on the area's natural resources.

In an example of good governance, a negotiation process took place among the three producers, the Municipal Mayor's Office and PfR as the organization facilitating the process. The main results were: bringing together and negotiating with the different key actors to reduce the pressure on the water recharge area and its buffer zone; and establishing and delimiting reserve areas for the remaining primary forest with large-scale producers. This will allow the water to be conserved, guaranteeing the supply to the urban area.

It should be stressed that the catalyst for this process was the direct participation of the Las Sabanas Municipal Government and PfR for the implementation of the microproject.

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