

Climate Justice in Ecosystem-based Adaptation

The case of Indigenous municipalities
in the province of la Mosquitia, Honduras

Supported by:



Federal Ministry
for the Environment, Nature Conservation,
Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection



INTERNATIONAL
CLIMATE
INITIATIVE

Published by:



Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

based on a decision of
the German Bundestag

Abstract

La Mosquitia is a remote province of Honduras with about 100,000 mostly Indigenous inhabitants. Structural disadvantages account for high levels of poverty and conflicts over land use rights.

The project 'Sustainable Natural Resource Management under Climate Aspects in Indigenous Territories in La Mosquitia', which runs until 2023, aims primarily to achieve sustainable and climate-adapted use of the province's natural resources. The project focuses particularly on strengthening governance structures to encourage the local population to participate in development planning. From the start, the project has actively involved the local population both in planning and implementing ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) through agroecological approaches. Stakeholders' strong sense of project ownership and political recognition of its participatory approach indicate the value of the justice-based approach.

Climate Justice and EbA

The case of Honduras/La Mosquitia illustrates the importance of integrating justice issues into the project during the early stages of planning. It is especially important to integrate these issues into governance structures and processes in the project area, although project management needs to consider them as well. As shown in Figure 1, entry points for anchoring justice issues strategically include the project concept, steering structure, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system and the staff concept. Integrating the various dimensions of justice – recognition justice, procedural justice and distributive justice – through these entry points is a key prerequisite for justice to be considered in project implementation.

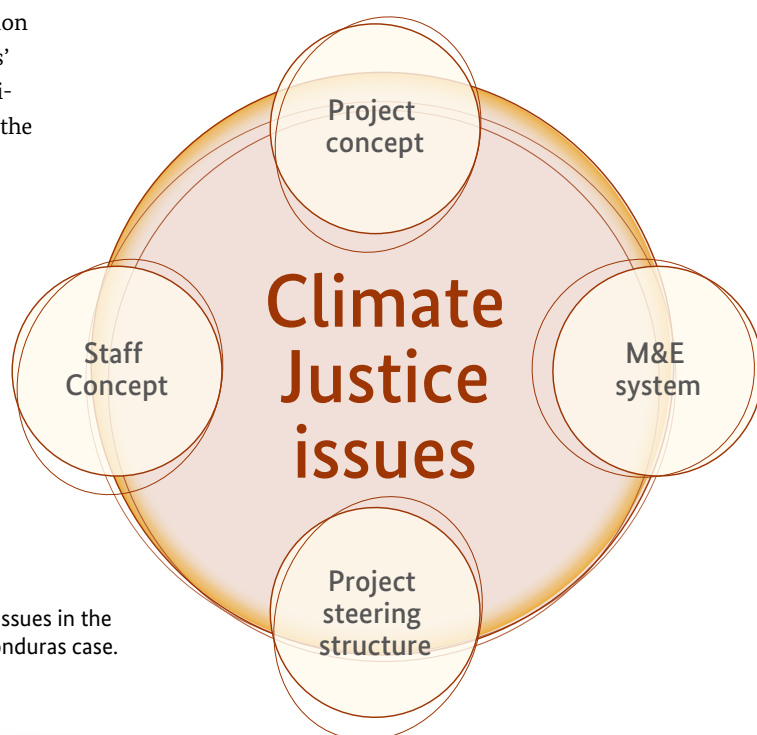


Figure 1: Entry points for integrating justice issues in the project environment of the La Mosquitia/Honduras case.



Climate Justice is about recognising social differences



Recognition justice: Justice-based EbA is rooted in Indigenous, local, traditional and diverse knowledge, and recognises the different cultural values of ecosystems. It actively promotes the recognition of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as well as particular groups, such as women, youth, people with disabilities, LGBTQS2+ and underrepresented groups, as key stakeholders in EbA projects. It accounts for their distinct rights over natural resources, based on human rights principles and the specific rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Procedural justice: Justice-based EbA includes creating an open, fair and inclusive governance structure, and integrating existing human rights procedures into planning, implementation, and monitoring & evaluation of EbA projects. It grants access to information on projects and ecosystems to all stakeholders. It enhances their ability to organise and influence rules on ecosystem use through effective and meaningful participation. It ensures that individuals and communities have effective access to complaints and grievance mechanisms or other legal procedures.

Distributive justice: Justice-based EbA ensures equitable and fair climate change policies and projects that protect individuals and communities from the loss of their land and livelihoods, and generate benefits for all affected stakeholders and rightsholders. It offers equitable compensation mechanisms for any losses or negative effects on land, resource access or livelihood opportunities in surrounding ecosystems impacted by the execution of EbA.

Definition: justice-based EbA accounts for the specific rights of people of all genders, cultures, classes and ages, including Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities, as part of international and national human rights. It is based on approaches that are non-discriminatory, transparent, accountable, meaningfully participatory and inclusive in their design and execution. Therefore, it ensures equitable and fair climate change legislation, policies, action plans and projects.

GIZ (2022). Defining Climate Justice in Ecosystem-based Adaptation.

Key elements of climate justice in EbA include integrating and recognising human rights principles and the specific rights of Indigenous Peoples. Climate Justice in EbA builds on an understanding of social dynamics and vulnerabilities on the ground, and examines the local situation through a cross-sectoral approach. The approach values Indigenous and local knowledge, and recognises different cultural values.



Background

In the Mosquitia region (see map below), the Indigenous population (Miskitu) has largely preserved its language and traditional way of life as well as the species-rich ecosystems that form part of the Central American Biocorridor. Located in the border area with Nicaragua, the region is geographically isolated (with no road connection to the rest of Honduras) and lacks infrastructure. The transport of people and goods relies mostly on rivers and the sea.

Mosquitia encompasses the 12 Indigenous territories of the Miskitu, with a total of about 100,000 inhabitants. More than half of rural families depending on subsistence farming live in extreme poverty, and 85% of households suffer from food shortages. Women and children suffer particularly from the effects of poverty; infant mortality is high, and women, because of their traditional role and limited knowledge of the Spanish language, have fewer income options than men.

The forests of Mosquitia are endangered by illegal deforestation resulting from the unregulated influx of non-Indigenous cattle producers as well as from a lack of state strategies and support mechanisms for sustainable use of natural resources. Cattle producers are rarely prosecuted for large-scale forest clearing to establish cattle pastures. The inadequately secured land rights of the Moskitia facilitate the intrusion of third parties, leading to violation of the Miskitu's rights over land and natural resources. At the same time, the military often confiscates the small amounts of wood that Indigenous families harvest to secure their livelihoods. The population considers the measure to be unjust, and this feeds the potential for conflict in the form of public protests.

Mosquitia region, Honduras

12

indigenous communities

100,000

inhabitants

85%

inhabitants of households
suffer from food shortages

50%

of rural families are
affected by extreme poverty

Honduras is preparing to participate in programmes aimed at reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), which would involve the forests of Mosquitia. Representatives of the Indigenous People suspect that this initiative could increase illegal land grabbing. **Climate change threatens the livelihoods of the local population**, as droughts, floods, forest fires and storms become more frequent, putting pressure on agriculture and leading to crop losses. Recurring damage and **rapidly changing climate conditions exceed the adaptation capacities** of the local population.

Description

In 1995, Honduras ratified the **International Labour Organization's Convention Number 169**, which recognises Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination. It also sets standards for the national government regarding Indigenous Peoples' rights, including the right to land. In 2016, the central government took a historic step towards communal land titling to benefit the Indigenous population of Mosquitia. The existing **territorial councils are very weak**, however, and are barely able to exercise stewardship over local land titles and managers of the territory, especially where disputes arise over land rights. Moreover, legislation on land and resource use has so far failed to take into account sufficiently the indigenous way of life. For example, user rights are not strictly bound to territorial units but can be of a cross-border nature. The **legal framework in Honduras does not yet reflect the reality of Indigenous People** but rather contributes to conflicts.

In 2016, the 'Alliance for the Development of Mosquitia' was initiated for cross-sectoral coordination of state investments. Bringing together central government institutions supported by local governments as well as Indigenous organisations and the development cooperation community, the association aims mainly to address local demands more effectively in development initiatives. However, the Indigenous population remains too weakly organised to articulate its demands adequately. **Procedures for participatory and fair decision-making are nonexistent**, especially

with respect to **women and youth**, who rarely participate in Indigenous self-governing bodies. Furthermore, the Miskitu umbrella organisation MASTA experiences internal conflicts due to competing interests and weak mechanisms for conflict resolution. Another challenge is extremely weak representation of central government in the region. Only since 2018 has an agricultural advisor been active in the region, with a second officer joining in 2022. The forestry authority is only marginally better staffed.

The project 'Sustainable Natural Resource Management under Climate Aspects in Indigenous Territories in La Mosquitia' in Honduras, with funding from the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is being implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) from 2020 until 2023. The project aims to **enable relevant actors to implement jointly defined rules for sustainable, climate-adapted land use**, contributing to food security. In addition to strengthening the governance structure (especially the territorial councils), the project pursues a multi-actor strategy to develop capacities for adapted and balanced food production. A key focus is **eco-system-based adaptation of agricultural systems and forest livelihoods**, taking into account the **rights of the Indigenous population**. The project targets inhabitants of five Indigenous territories of the province Mosquitia, supporting their efforts to improve and diversify cultivation methods through mutual learning, with advice from project experts.



Pana Pana project area, GIZ Honduras

Consideration of justice aspects in preparing the project

In keeping with **recognition justice**, GIZ took into account the reality of marginalised groups within the Indigenous population and their development vision. To this end, it closely **involved the local population in project conception**, relying on Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) as a decisive principle for action. FPIC aims to establish bottom-up participation and consultation with the Indigenous population before development initiatives begin or resources are used in their areas.

In the early stages of project conception, ideas were jointly discussed and prioritised. **Local knowledge** and experiences served as the starting point for all ideas on interventions. The implementing organisation held meetings at the village, territorial and project area levels together with appraisers of the new project. The results were then synchronised with local development plans (planes de vida), which were developed with the help of donors and then consolidated with the territorial councils and political leaders at the regional level.

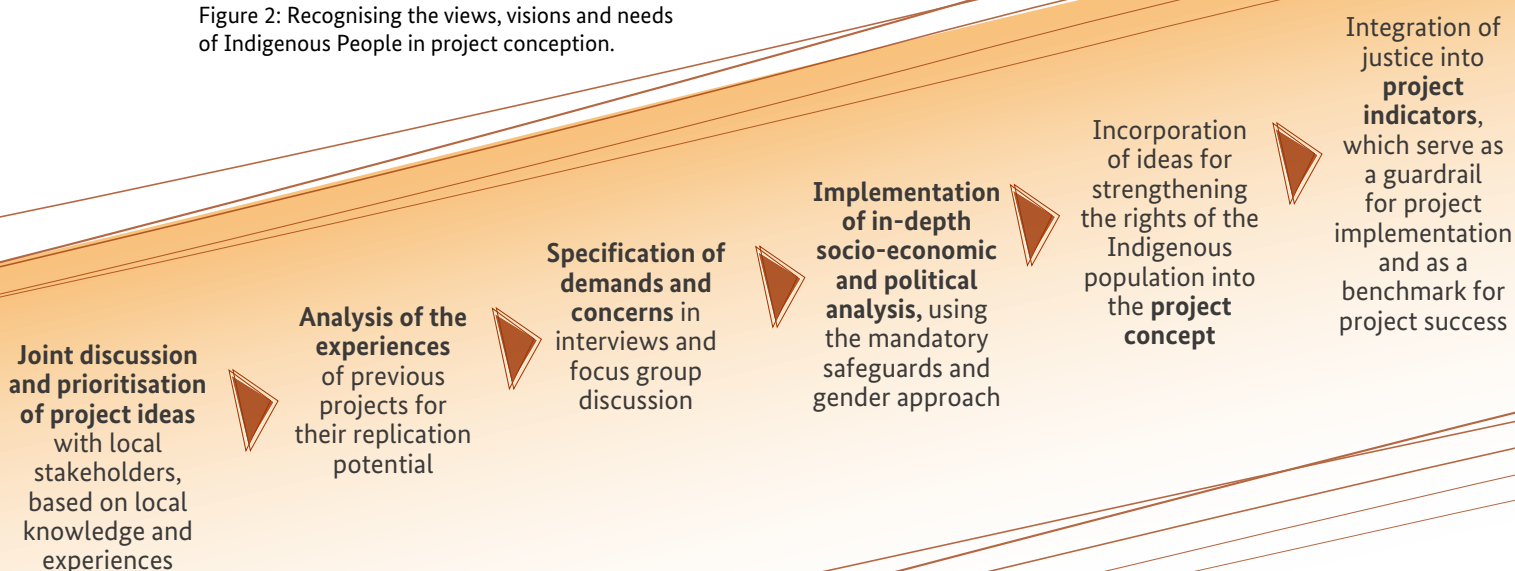
The major demand expressed was for stronger participation mechanisms and increased efforts to improve local livelihoods. In addition, the **experiences** of previous development cooperation projects funded by Germany and other donors (addressing rural development, food security and disaster risk management) were evaluated for their replication potential. GIZ has been active in the region for more than 15 years and thus has very good relations at the local level, which facilitate **access to important information and information carriers**. In subsequent planning – the project appraisal – the Indigenous Peoples' partner organisations and local administrative structures **sharpened the preliminary project outline**.

The implementing organisation conducted interviews and held focus group discussions, which confirmed the demands and concerns. In addition, the appraisal mission carried out **in-depth studies** using the mandatory safeguards and gender approach. Together with local advisors, an external gender expert analysed project challenges, especially for women, as part of a **gender analysis** and on this basis developed approaches to address gender issues within the project framework.

Traditional norms and behaviours of the Miskitu (men, women and youth) were analysed with regard to justice issues through interviews. Furthermore, project consultants carried out an **integrated context and human rights analysis**, which considered social and legal issues in detail. Proposals for strengthening the rights of the Indigenous population were incorporated into the **project concept**.

The project made clear reference to the specific needs of women and youth within the target group. Based on the background studies and appraisal results, **capacity development** focused on strengthening governance, especially at the meso level (territorial councils, municipal administration, regional forestry and agriculture administration, and locally stationed functionaries of the central government), to clarify roles and responsibilities for management and administration of the forested territories that resulted from land titling. The project also focused strongly on **gender-sensitive promotion of democratic decision-making processes**. Anchoring governance, especially justice-based aspects, in project indicators is key for implementing and monitoring justice issues. The indicators serve as a guardrail for project implementation and as a benchmark for project success. Therefore, **justice issues were integrated into indicators for objectives and outputs** (see text box).

Figure 2: Recognising the views, visions and needs of Indigenous People in project conception.



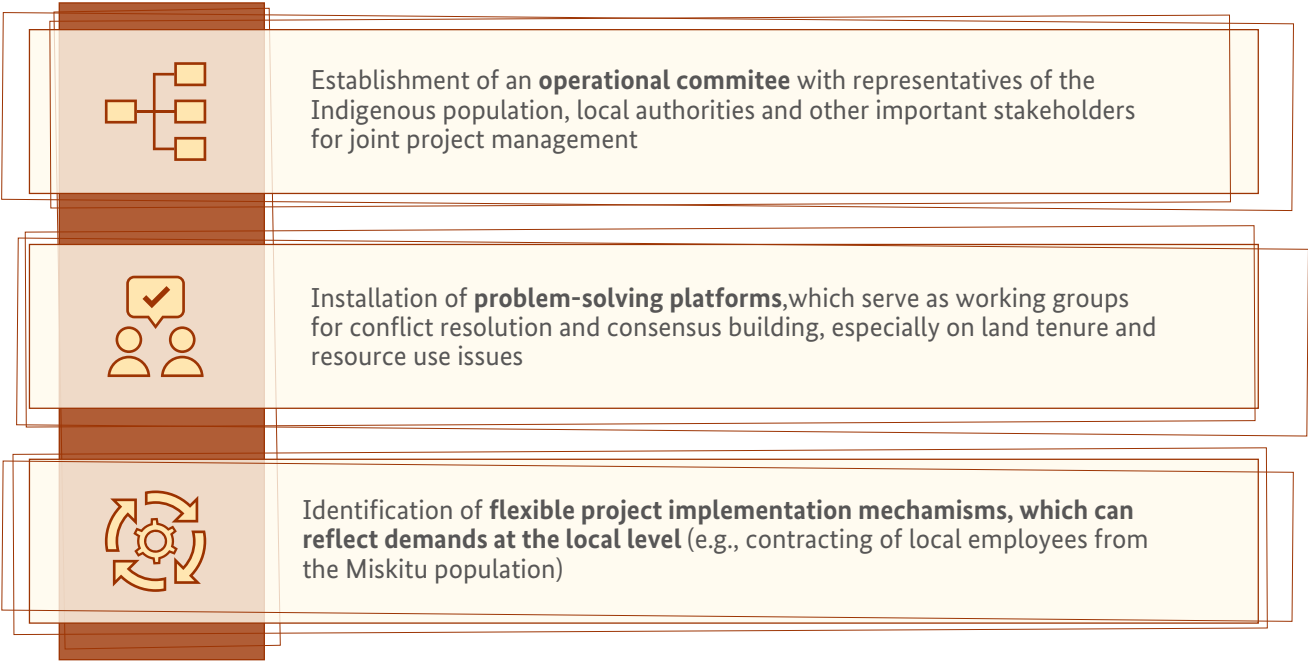


Figure 3: Roles for Indigenous People in operationalising the project.

In keeping with **procedural justice**, certain aspects of the project concept were further refined and implemented during the inception phase. The project launched an **operational committee** in the project areas, and at the project's suggestion, this body included two representatives (at least one a woman) from each of the five territorial councils as well as representatives from the municipalities (two), departments of forestry and agriculture (two), local NGOs (two), a university (one), the World Food Programme (one) and the implementing organisation, GIZ (four). Meeting regularly every three months, the committee handles joint project management, including annual planning, project monitoring, and dealing with risks and conflicts.

Indicators of the project reflecting justice issues
MODULE OBJECTIVE INDICATOR 2 1,000 Indigenous producers (50% women) each apply 2 new, climate-adapted methods for the production of food (adapted species / varieties / sowing dates and locations) disseminated by the project.
MODULE OBJECTIVE INDICATOR 3 10 Indigenous organizations of the Mosquitia confirm an alignment of 2 policies or guidelines for the management of their territories adapted to their requirements, taking into account gender aspects (in accordance with the guidelines of the project or the Ministry of Agriculture on the gender-oriented use of natural resources).
OUTPUT INDICATOR 2.1 The roles, responsibilities, competences and communication flow of governmental institutions and indigenous organizations in the management of natural resources are ratified by the actors for 3 cases.

The operational committee is responsible for selecting local support measures (e.g., infrastructure and capacity development), based on mutually agreed criteria, such as women's participation, interest in the measure and its chances of being sustainable. In addition, the project initiated various platforms for problem solving (e.g., one on delineation of borders between territorial units); the platforms serve as working groups for conflict resolution and consensus building. In creating the platforms, the project appointed members from the different stakeholder groups, provided them with intensive training and guidance, and established complaint mechanisms.

The project focuses strongly on strengthening local capacities and implementing jointly identified measures (such as the establishment of homestead gardens, tree nurseries, etc.).

Such measures require **flexible mechanisms for implementation** (especially the procurement and transport of material as well as service contracts of workers) that can be implemented with little administrative effort. For this purpose, the project contracted two international consulting agencies with a long-standing on-site presence. In the **tender documents** and selection process, GIZ focused on prerequisites such as **expertise in conflict prevention and human rights-based approaches** as well as **gender justice** in particular. Based on the terms of reference formulated by the project, the consortium contracted **local employees**, who serve as trusted brokers, possess the necessary language skills and cultural empathy as well as the required expertise and understanding of the project logic from the donor perspective. In addition, the project contracted national consultants to strengthen the capacities of the local population and their institutions.

Preliminary results of the justice-based approach

- By applying the FPIC approach in its work and relying on permanent on-site support from technical consultants on the Miskitu culture, the project has managed to anchor the planned development efforts in local communities and to build a sense of project ownership amongst them. This is particularly evident from the high level of participation in project activities and high level of recognition by political decision-makers.
- By applying methods for participation and non-violent conflict resolution, particularly with respect to land-tenure issues, the project has helped settle border disputes between neighbouring territorial units and pacify different currents within the umbrella organisation MASTA of the Miskitu,
- Representatives of Indigenous communities highly appreciate the participatory and inclusive character of project planning and implementation, which the project's directive committee also recognises as exemplary at the national level. As a consequence, the project now serves as a blueprint for the interventions of organisations such as the Department of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples of Honduras. In addition, local initiatives supported by a World Bank project in the region took up the approach of establishing leadership mechanisms with local representatives.
- The project has managed to get central state actors and Indigenous administrations to work together to solve problems and conflicts (e.g., concerning sustainable forest management plans). As a result, these groups now have a better mutual understanding of one another's situations, and conflict-resolution mechanisms have improved.

Lessons learnt on addressing justice issues

- Governance should be a core element of every EbA project, if it is to follow best practices for justice-based EbA (i.e., strengthening the rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly women, in decision-making and in preventing or moderating conflicts).
- Early involvement of the local population in project conception together with the use of local knowledge are crucial for gaining acceptance of the EbA approach. Moreover, in the appraisal process of new projects, it is essential for the local population to be properly informed and heard, so that it can adequately advocate and prioritize demands and needs.
- Safeguard systems and conflict analyses can help identify risks and integrate appropriate measures into the project concept and implementation. It is also crucial for these processes and methods to deliver meaningful results that are relevant for implementation and are reflected in project conception and implementation.
- In the project planning phase, it is crucial to allow enough time and budget for participatory development of the project approach and for meaningful safeguards processes.
- Project acceptance and success depend critically on an approach that is strongly oriented to implementation at the local level and is holistic in nature, in the sense that it is oriented to local needs.



Disclaimer

This publication was developed by the global project 'Mainstreaming Ecosystem-based Adaptation' in cooperation with Dr. Harald Mossbrucker, head of the project 'Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in Indigenous Territories of the Mosquitia, Honduras' in the frame of its work stream on climate justice. He and his team, especially Rut Pinoth, Oscar Navarro and Nely Oliva deserve special thanks for their support in the preparation of this publication.

The global project 'Mainstreaming Ecosystem-based Adaptation', implemented by GIZ, has prepared, bundled and shared knowledge around Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) since 2015. Its goal is to strengthen the ability of decision-makers and practitioners at the international, national and local levels to mainstream EbA into policy and planning processes. This involves a mix of policy advice, capacity development and the establishment of knowledge networks based on practical tools and examples.

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Imprint

As a federally owned enterprise, GIZ supports the German Government in achieving its objectives in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development.

Published by:
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

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Programme / project description:
Global Project “Mainstreaming EbA – Strengthening
Ecosystem-based Adaptation in Planning and Decision
Making Processes“

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Editor:
Nathan Russel, Mexico City, Mexico

Design / layout:
Miguel Faber, Berlin, Germany

Suggested citation:
GIZ (2022) Climate Justice in Ecosystem-based Adaptation –
The case of Indigenous municipalities in the province
of la Mosquitia, Honduras. Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Bonn,
Germany.

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On behalf of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Berlin and Bonn. Financed by the International Climate Initiative (IKI).

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.
Published in Bonn, Germany. 2022.