

# The municipal territorial management and multi-functionality: Analysis of a bilateral international project in Copan (Honduras)

La gestión municipal territorial y la multifuncionalidad: análisis  
de un proyecto de cooperación bilateral en Copán (Honduras)

Álvaro Rivas<sup>1,3</sup> and Pablo Enrique Avendaño<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The approach of rural territorial development is defined as a process of productive and institutional transformation in a determined rural space, whose aim is to reduce rural poverty. The productive transformation seeks to competitively and viably articulate the economy from the territory to dynamic markets. Institutional development aims to stimulate and facilitate the interaction and agreement of the local players and external agents, as well as to increase opportunities for the poor population to participate in and benefit from the process. A multifunctional approach of rural development would not merely have functions to improve primary production, but broader functions that guarantee nutritional quality and safety, environmental protection and preservation of biodiversity; additionally, contributing to social and economic cohesion of rural settings, and the conservation of the landscape. The results obtained by the Project 'Self-managed Local Development for Poverty Reduction in Northern Copan, National Competitiveness Plan (NCP)', were: 1) Municipal environmental planning; 2) Reactivation of the local economy from a trust fund with environmental focus; 3) Participation and empowerment of local organizations and civilian society and their contribution to local government; 4) Institutional strengthening of municipal government.

**Key words:** municipal planning, environmental management, municipal development policies, financial and tributary management system, citizen participation.

## RESUMEN

El enfoque de desarrollo territorial rural se define como un proceso de transformación productiva e institucional en un espacio rural determinado cuyo fin es reducir la pobreza rural. La transformación productiva tiene el propósito de articular, competitivamente y sustentablemente, la economía del territorio con mercados dinámicos. El desarrollo institucional se propone estimular y facilitar la interacción y concertación de los actores locales con agentes externos, así como incrementar oportunidades para que la población pobre participe y se beneficie del proceso. Un enfoque multifuncional del desarrollo rural no tiene únicamente la función de mejorar la producción primaria; debe garantizar la seguridad y calidad alimentarias, la protección ambiental y la conservación de la biodiversidad, contribuyendo a la cohesión social y económica del espacio rural y a la preservación del paisaje. Los resultados obtenidos por el Proyecto 'Desarrollo Local Auto-gestionado para la Reducción de la Pobreza en el Norte de Copán' (PNC) fueron: 1) Planificación municipal ambiental; 2) Reactivación de la economía local a partir de un fondo en fideicomiso con enfoque ambiental; 3) Participación y empoderamiento de organizaciones locales y sociedad civil y su aporte a la gobernabilidad local; 4) Fortalecimiento institucional de alcaldías.

**Palabras clave:** planificación municipal, manejo ambiental, políticas municipales de desarrollo, sistema de administración financiero y tributario, participación ciudadana.

## Introduction

Honduras is considered one of the poorest nations in Latin America with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.660 in 2001. It is estimated that 64% of the homes live under poverty conditions and 36% of the children are malnourished. Poverty is greater in rural areas: 79.6% of the homes in 1991 and 68.9% in 2006. The mortality rate for children under five years of age is of 44 children for

every thousand live births during the 1996-2000 period (UNDP, 2007-2008).

About 90% of the municipalities do not have adequate supply of drinking water and sanitation.

The rural area does not have adequate control and monitoring systems for water quality, given the lack of treatment plants (UNDP, 2007-2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Agronomy, Faculty of Agronomy, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (Colombia).

<sup>2</sup> Poverty Reduction Local Project at Copan (Honduras), United Nations Development Programme & Finland Foreign Affairs Ministry.

<sup>3</sup> Corresponding author: arivasg@unal.edu.co

In 2000, in the United Nations, 147 heads of State subscribed the Millennium Declaration, committing to addressing themes related with peace, security, development, environmental issues, human rights, and good government. These commitments were consigned in the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and also denominated as the Millennium Goals. The Honduran State policy to comply with the millennium goals is denominated 'Strategy for Poverty Reduction' (SPR), which establishes short and mid-term operational and institutional mechanisms that lead to accomplishing better development of the nation (UNDP, 2007-2008).

The *Project: Self-managed Local Development for Reduction of Poverty in the North of Copán* (NCP), contributes to the search for solutions to the problems mentioned, funded by Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, managed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and as a national counterpart by the Ministry of Governance and Justice of the Republic of Honduras. The intervention area comprises ten municipalities of north Copan with a mean HDI of 0.55. The main economic activity in the region is related to agricultural and forestry exploitation with 60.1%, followed by sales of communal services with 13.6%, and a third sector of business activities with 12.7% (UNDP, 2007-2008). The Project was aimed at achieving social and economic rehabilitation in the Chorti community, aiding in strengthening technical and administrative skills of local governments and civilian organizations (NGOs, Citizen Transparency Commissions (CTC), community organizations, farmers associations, micro-entrepreneurs) (Malta, 2003; Bedoya, 2002).

This article seeks to: 1) Present the main goals reached in municipal management; 2) Highlight the importance of local organization participation for local governance; 3) Reveal the impact of poverty reduction and the scope of the millennium goals.

### **Conflict and cooperation between rural and urban spaces**

The rural environment is a socioeconomic entity within a geographic setting with four basic components: 1) The *territory* that operates as a source of natural resources and raw materials, waste receptor, and support for economic activities. 2) The *population* that based on a certain cultural model, practices very diverse activities of production, consumption, and social relationships, creating a complex socioeconomic framework. 3) The *settlements* that are related amongst themselves and with the outside via personal exchange, merchandize and information, through relationship channels. 4) A *set of public, private,*

*and civilian society institutions* that serve as the backbone and articulate the system's functions, operating within a given legal framework (Ramos and Romero, 1993).

The rural setting is constituted by several regions with different agricultural activities, small- and mid-sized industries, trade, services, recreation, tourism, mineral extraction, mining, where there are population settlements called villages, townships, small cities, natural park zones, zones of agricultural or fishing production (Carpio, 2001).

According to Hamblin (2009), since 2006 over 50% of the world population is urban, evidencing a tendency for abandoning rural areas. In Honduras, the greatest part of the population is concentrated in rural areas with nearly 60% excluded from processes of urban planning.

Rural settings will comprise a broad series of land uses, ranging from non-food use agricultural production to environmental maintenance. On the other hand, regional specialization is highlighted in terms of the existence of competitive advantages, and there is increased dependency on agricultural activity by industrial and distribution companies (Pérez, 2001).

### **Rural development policies**

In Latin America, state development planners and decision makers perceive the rural area merely with utilitarian purposes of agricultural productivity. In the last 25 years, and with the aid of international financial organizations, rural development was identified solely with export production projects to join global market cycles and transfer technology appertaining to the green revolution (high mechanization, high input, high production seeds, and high capital investment); ignoring the socio-cultural and environmental variables of the rural communities (Chonchol, 1996; Guzmán *et al.*, 2000; Rist, 2004).

In some societies like Australia, agriculture represents 3% of the GDP and adding the agricultural food industry with 5%, it hardly reaches a total of 8%. These are relatively low figures of what the rural area represents in this nation's economy (Hamblin, 2009).

"Urbanization in Latin America has been induced by a development model that privileged urbanization and industrialization as synonyms of progress and development of modernity. Associating the rural setting with pre-modern schemes lagging in development, long-term visions were imposed in which Latin American societies were conceived as urban and modern societies and to ac-

complicate such, processes were generated and population behaviors of economic and social order were induced” (Piñero, 2001). Models of import substitution and industrialization were two decisive factors to consolidate exclusionary policies of the rural areas. In the last thirty years in Honduras and much of the Latin American and Caribbean countries, the application of neoliberal policies became characteristic, eliminating state institutions that supported the rural infrastructure (Funding, technical assistance, marketing, access to land, etc.) with the abstract approach that macroeconomic growth and the invisible effect of the market would extend its benefits to the social setting. The rural panorama has been dominated by the failure of the development model based on substitution of imports (Hinkelammert, 2002, 2005; Pino, 1992).

Increased urban populations propitiate greater demand for food resources, water resources, space reduction, and social problems, which suggests addressing the rural area planning from new alternative visions of rural development and not solely concentrating it on production and productivity for agriculture and cattle ranching. Within this context the rural setting gains vital importance in interrelating the rural setting with the urban, incorporating interdependent processes for the rural setting to provide multiple functions: food, fibers, environmental services (water, air, biodiversity, and recreation), and recreation activities.

### **Multi-functionality as a rural development alternative**

In Honduras of rural areas are characterized by the great diversity and heterogeneity of its ecosystems, as well as the cultural, social, and political diversity: 1) Abundant labor force, especially women and youngsters who must integrate local and regional processes of agricultural economy; 2) Assessment of local autochthonous traditional knowledge as the basis for the construction of a new technological paradigm; 3) Unique conditions of tropical agriculture until now unknown; 4) the suggestive opportunities offered by environmental wealth and the services derived therein; 5) necessities for generating a distributive and inclusive economy (Echeverry, 2002).

The multi-functionality of agriculture was defined from the recognition of different activities from food and fiber production and stands out for involving other functions within the framework of conservation of natural resources, landscape, and the contribution to the socio-economic viability of the rural areas. The use of the concept can be transversal to the social and political processes (Renting *et al.*, 2009) and its main characteristic is its multidisciplinary approach, receiving information from landscape planning,

social sciences, agricultural, natural, and macro-economic forces and active involvement from different local players, decision makers, development institutions, along with training and research.

The concept of Multi-functionality supposes a new paradigm for public intervention, based on correcting market failures, on providing public goods, which are positive external factors, generated by agriculture through joint production processes (Atance *et al.*, 2001).

## **Materials and methods**

### **Description of the area**

The NCP was executed during the 2003-2007 period in 10 municipalities of the department of Copán, with a total population of 161,052 inhabitants. It was undertaken in the following municipalities: Copán Ruinas, Cabañas, San Antonio, Santa Rita, El Paraíso, La Jigua, San Jerónimo, San Nicolás, Florida, and Nueva Arcadia, all of which have a territorial extension of 1,849 km<sup>2</sup>.

The general NCP objective was to contribute to improving the Human Development Index to lessen poverty, and its three specific objectives were: 1) to improve the capacity of municipal management in technical and administrative aspects of the ten municipal governments and community organizations. 2) To strengthen the culture for citizen participation in auditing processes in municipal governments. 3) To reactivate multifunctional local economic development with units (farms, micro-enterprises providing goods and services). 4) To environmentally protect the sub-basins and micro-basins with participation from local communities. With a budget of USD\$4,532,418 legalized through a financing agreement between the Government of Finland and Honduras, distributed thus: 29% for production; 28% for management capacity; 19% for operating costs, 15% for management of micro-basins, and 9% for training.

### **Players and population benefited**

There were three types of players: 1) *Institutional players* represented in the local governments and personnel from the respective administrative units: tax administration, treasury, cadastre, planning, and environmental municipal units. 2) *Local base organizations* like schools, local water management boards, citizen transparency commissions (CTC), and social audit network. 3) *Economic players* like farmer’s associations, cooperatives, tourism companies, artisan associative enterprises, production small businesses or commercial services. In addition to lending technical assistance to the players, the NCP facilitated a process to empower the local players.

### Characterization of the municipal governments

Rural water, sewage, housing, and electricity services are very deficient. In said zone, only 19% of the homes have access to good quality water.

**The Human Development Index (HDI).** According to the Honduran (2006) report on Human Development, Copán is considered one of the poorest departments with an HDI of 0.55, an illiteracy rate of 31.8%; childhood malnutrition over 50%; and a very low level of per capita income (Tab. 1).

**TABLE 1.** Categorization of development in the municipalities of the Chorti community, Copan (Honduras, 2007).

Municipality	HDI 2006	Population	Budget 2007
Copán Ruinas	0.558	30,703	9,834,167.73
Cabañas	0.534	9,818	3,998,926.69
San Antonio	0.554	9,670	3,804,758.36
Santa Rita	0.554	24,157	7,068,704.50
El Paraíso	0.550	18,397	6,695,610.50
La Jigua	0.578	7,915	3,906,503.28
San Jerónimo	0.571	4,555	3,218,793.82
San Nicolás	0.595	6,017	3,732,444.56
Florida	0.563	26,703	5,938,720.86
Nueva Arcadia	0.615	30,136	15,291,747.09

Source: NCP (2001).

**The NCP organizational structure.** To execute its operating plan was made up of: 1. *The Management Unit (MU)* including an International Co-director (Finnish) and a National Co-director (Honduran) who were responsible for management and strategic decision making, as well as for monitoring the indicators and evaluating compliance with the goals and targets. 2. *Technical team* made up of six experts in: Local development, cadastre, taxation and municipal finance, citizen participation and transparency, production and comprehensive management of micro-basins, these were integrated onto municipal units, local community organizations, civil society, and producers.

### Methodological approaches of the project

The management unit's conceptual criterion was the territorial dimension of rural development in the Chorti community, and design strategies for decentralization, democratization, and municipal autonomy with participation from civil society. From this approach, there was greater proximity and assertiveness for the local development policies.

We worked municipal management in multidimensional manner, bearing in mind the regional conformation in

geographic, political, administrative, and ecologic terms, constituting comprehensive planning units. The spatial dimension of development requires a regional approach, expressed in rural areas with an urban structure made up of populated centers of distinct rank and size conducting essential functions in the operation of the rural economy and, particularly, agriculture.

Additionally, we recognize the growing interrelation between the rural and urban settings, and the fact that the rural setting is not only agriculture and dispersed population. The territorial vision of the rural permits visualizing the many functions linked to agricultural, agro-industrial and artisan development, to services, tourism and culture, to biodiversity and natural resource conservation, *i.e.*, of the local and global ecosystems supporting life and productive activities. All this conceived under an approach of a vision integrated by society and its multiple activities and relationships (Schejtman, 1998; Schejtman and Berdegué, 2003).

Prior to executing its intervention strategies, a document was elaborated (*Base-line study of the Chorti community*), to learn of the state of the institutions, local organizations, productive systems, local economy, forests, micro-basins, level of civil society participation, infrastructure deficit, as well as the technical and administrative sections of the local governments, etc.

The General Operational Plan of the NCP was designed with the players through consultations, incorporating their ideas and approaches of the process; steps were taken to avoid having the NCP become an external institution foreign to local interests. Due to this, it was important for civil society organizations to guarantee the long-term sustainability of the project once its intervention was over. We worked with an environmental planning approach on the population-resources relationship suggesting a strategy to avail of the productive space in each region, and of the ecologic, technological and cultural conditions in each community, aimed at satisfying their basic needs and improving their quality of life, affecting the conditions for populations to access their resources, and to possess their production media (Leff, 2001; Bolaños, 1992).

The principle of association was enhanced among the ten municipal governments (Chorti community) to better benefit from the human and physical resources by signing agreements and commitments.

Each component worked on strengthening capacities with participative methodologies with its goal groups, improv-

ing the local knowledge system and social cohesion. The *technical team* addressed the strategies of intervention subdivided into three complementary components:

1) *Component I of municipal management and citizen participation* to enhance technical skills in the units of taxation administration, cadastre, along with civil society organizations to carry out social auditing and comptroller duties.

2) *Component II of local production and economic enhancement* advise agricultural businesses and micro-enterprises to improve production processes. The infrastructure in farms and micro-enterprises was outfitted using agro-ecological technologies. Micro-credits were promoted through the *trust fund for production*. Local and regional commercialization networks and channels were strengthened, creating the Local Economic Development Unit (LEDU) to study, plan, and manage the potentials of productive or service companies with a focus on productive chains.

3) *Component III of territorial planning and management of micro-basins* to define the territory by updating data bases on land use in the municipality and for landowners to pay real estate taxes; each municipality inventoried its natural resources: micro-basins, forests, archaeological areas, tourism zones, etc. Hence, the municipal governments manage and plan local development considering the socio-environmental aspects with an offer of eco-systemic services: recreational, archaeological, research, water, biodiversity (Bishop, 2002).

## Results

### Accomplishments of the municipal management component

This component is conformed of four experts from: cadastre, community development, financial tributary administration, and citizen participation, who advised and strengthened the capacities of personnel in the municipal governments involved, initially improving the physical infrastructure of the offices with equipment and tools; thereafter, they transferred methodologies and technical knowledge. The Project's MU parted from the supposition that by strengthening the municipal governments' technical and administrative infrastructure and capacities these would be able to collect more resources for the town halls

to be economically solvent and consequently re-invest in social investment projects in the municipality.

### System of municipal cadastre

An urban and rural cadastral survey was conducted, creating and updating the data bases of the municipal governments, adjusting the appraisal per square meter of urban and rural land, along with the type of building to charge taxes. Updating cadastral appraisals in a municipality impacts on improving municipal income through: 1) Real estate taxes. 2) Construction-permit taxes. 3) Capital income through freehold sales. 4) Arrears recovery. From 2003 to 2007, 90% urban cadastral survey was conducted for the Chorti community, directly impacting upon increased income from real estate taxes by USD \$1,110,106; this helped cover costs of Strategic Plans for Municipal Development (SPMD) (Tab. 2).

Digital cartography was conducted through geographic information systems, modernization and automation of internal processes of municipal administration to provide efficient attention to the citizenship, and – in general – to make the municipal administration agile and modern, providing solutions to immediate problems of the population. The mayor's offices formulated and designed a rural and urban cadastral appraisal to add it to the software denominated AFTS (Administrative Financial Taxation System).

### Financial tributary administration

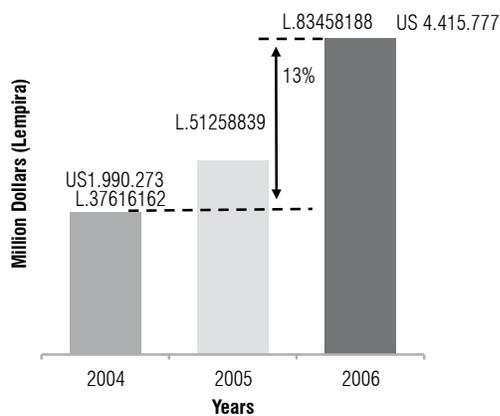
These dependencies were physically outfitted in the town halls and the technical and administrative skills of the personnel were enhanced. From 2003 to 2006, total revenues for the Chorti community was increased from USD \$1,999,273 (Lps. 34,577,322.13) to USD \$4,415,777 (Lps. 83,458,188), representing 132% of the total revenue (Fig. 1).

Current revenue from the municipalities involved comprise tributary and non-tributary revenue, the former include: personal income taxes, as well as commercial and industrial taxes, exploitation of resources, real estate, and fishing; the non-tributary income includes: fines, surcharges, and municipal rights. The NCP accompaniment improved current revenues. In 2003, current revenues were USD\$712,728; for 2006, these increased to USD\$1,162,279, indicating an increase of 163% (Fig. 2).

**TABLE 2.** Revenue (USD) received through real estate and cadastre services in 10 municipalities of Chorti community, Copán (Honduras, 2003-2007).

Municipalities	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Total	37,807.19	130,237.98	155,333.91	320,522.22	396,584.02	1,110,106.9

Source: NCP (2009).



**FIGURE 1.** Increase in total revenue for the 10 municipalities of North Copan, 2003-2006 (in Lempiras and US Dollars). Source: NCP (2009).

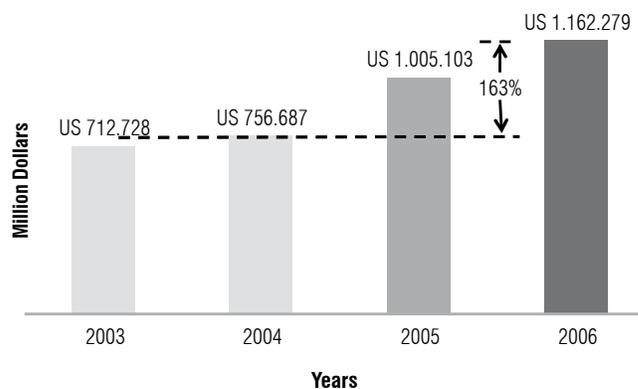
### Financial and Tributary Administration System (FTAS)

Software was used as a tool to improve: accountability, transparency, technical and administrative skills, efficiency in tributary financial procedures of the local government town halls, attention to tax payers, elaboration of the municipal annual budget, revenue and expense balance, bank balance. It is a software that generates synergy and is operationally complementary with the offices of cadastre, treasury, accounting, taxation, and budget. The FTAS was used in six municipalities with such success that the Ministry of Governance and Justice, upon seeing the experience, recommended its use by other local governments of the nation to guarantee greater control and transparency in managing resources from municipal coffers.

**Collections management.** This was a mechanism to recover tributary arrears and it was applied during the period from September 2005 to August 2006, managing around USD\$91,178 (Lps. 1,723,266) and obtaining USD\$38,497.14 (Lps. 727,596), equivalent to 42% of the amount managed. This consisted in the conformation of a team of two individuals with technical formation in tax collection and good skills at pedagogic persuasion to explain to taxpayers their obligations as citizens of paying taxes, which would in turn benefit society. The cost-benefit relationship was: for each dollar invested, the municipal coffers recovered five dollars.

### Citizen participation and transparency

The ten CTCs were institutionally enhanced along with their social auditing capacities, managing to get each municipality to destine budget resources to CTC operations. The transfer process for the local governments in 2005 was an excellent social auditing experience, given that it sought prior agreement of the CTCs with the candidates for the



**FIGURE 2.** Increase in current revenue for the 10 municipalities, 2003-2006 (In US Dollars). Source: NCP (2009).

mayor's office regarding their campaign program in *local pacts* and, thus, they were committed to complying with and continuing projects and programs related to the SPR, environment, economic development upon taking office. In social auditing, the CTCs designed more than ten methodologies and tools to assess projects, programs, procedures and transparent management of economic, physical, and human resources in the town halls (Rivas, 2009).

Each municipality, through central government norms, had to elaborate its Strategic Plan for Municipal Development (SPMD), which was updated and reviewed with civil society participation and auditing of the CTCs in 90% of all the municipalities. With this plan, local initiatives were articulated to assign them municipal, sectorial, and international cooperation resources.

### Local economic enhancement

Local economic development was not only circumscribed to production criteria (Malta, 2007); rather, work was done with the premise of the multi-functionality of rural development creating conditions for economic and environmental policies in the zone. Multi-functionality is not merely the recognition of non-marketable goods and services (socio-cultural, environmental, and ecological services); it also deals with planning policies and programs that promote material investment in the production of said services (Wolf, 2008). A community office for local economic development was created with the local governments (LEDU) and two funds complemented local production with environmental criteria, these were: the *Trust Fund for production* and the *Environmental Promotion Fund*.

### Strengthening of infrastructure units

The NCP helped to consolidate an *infrastructure unit of the Chorti community* with two engineers, a civilian engineer

and an architectural engineer, so they would jointly elaborate, design, and construct infrastructure projects like bridges, buildings, schools, streets, etc. During this period, they elaborated and financially managed 171 projects at a quantified value of USD\$12,144,225 (Tab. 3).

By hiring these engineers, the 10 municipalities were able to secure infrastructure resources, while they also saved costs given that the elaboration of a project with independent contractors increases costs by up to three fold.

**TABLE 3.** Total value (USD) for 171 projects approved for the 10 municipalities of the Chorti community (2003-2009).

Types of projects	Number of projects	Money received
FHIS* 2004-2008 Projects	61	4,360,078
Municipal projects to other funding sources	110	7,713,837
Total number of projects	171	
Estimate in Dollars (USD)		12,144,225

\*Fondo Hondureño de Inversión Social.

## Conclusions

From a multi-functional perspective, rural development policies offer a more enriching horizon in the territory, given that the rural and urban settings are conceived as complementary and interdependent, eliminating the counter-position that has historically been present in development policies, programs, and projects – involving the *productive function* (economics of production), the *environmental function*, the *territorial function* (recreation), and the *socio-cultural function*.

The territory has a broad multidimensional connotation, of spatial appropriation, in geographic, political, administrative, and ecologic terms. The territorial dimension of development requires a regional approximation, expressed by rural regions with an urban structure conformed by towns of different sizes performing essential functions in the operation of development regarding the rural agricultural, artisan, service, and tourism, economy, along with culture, conservation of biodiversity and natural resources, *i.e.*, of the local and global ecosystems supporting life and productive activities. All this conceived under the focus of a comprehensive vision of the society and its multiple activities and relationships.

The NCP enhanced technical skills of local municipal management for the municipalities to improve and increase their resources with the intention of reinvesting such in projects of social investment within the municipality. Thus,

by improving the system in the ten municipalities, revenues were increased by nearly USD\$1,110,106 and by improving management of tributary administration, total revenues were improved by 132%, meaning close to USD\$4,415,777. Likewise, and with the creation of a team of engineers, 171 infrastructure projects were elaborated and managed quantified in USD\$12,144,225.

It is important to involve civilian society (social organizations, community associations, CTCs, etc.) in development projects from local municipal management, given that in addition to enriching with their knowledge systems, they contribute with social auditing processes and methodologies to guarantee the continuity and transparency of the processes to safeguard public goods and interests. Hence, for example, the CTCs were involved in local governance processes to guarantee transparency and reduce corruption levels, creating comptroller and social auditing methodologies and tools in transparent municipal management and, thus, guarantee adequate investment of new resources obtained by the municipalities (local management, programs and projects for poverty reduction strategic policies). This enables long-term sustainability for development to be conceived with equity and to involve the poorest and most excluded sectors in the municipalities that in this instance are: children, women, youth, indigenous groups, and agricultural workers.

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