

## **ECUADOR'S COASTAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (1985-2008): TWO DECADES OF INTEGRATED COASTAL MANAGEMENT AND LESSONS LEARNED.**

*Maria D. Herrera, GSO-CRC, University of Rhode Island  
Eduardo F. Molina, PRMC, Ministerio del Ambiente, Ecuador*

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Initiated in 1985, Ecuador's Coastal Resources Management Program (PMRC) was selected by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as an initial prototype to test the usefulness of applying lessons learned from coastal management initiatives in the United States to developing countries. In the nineties, PMRC was the first national coastal management initiative supported by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). It has continued functioning for more than two decades through the support of two loans from the IDB in conjunction with the initial USAID funding. PMRC has been an evolving and adaptive program. Initially defined by IDB's strategy, its main goal has been to improve the quality of life of local communities dependent on coastal and marine resources, while concurrently maintaining the biological diversity and productivity of the surrounding coastal marine ecosystems.

From 1981 to 1988, the Program's strategy was to identify priority issues affecting coastal natural resources in pilot sites selected for study along Ecuador's coast and to design an institutional framework for the PMRC. During this period, building constituencies among stakeholders and creating valuable capacity were key points at the community and governmental level. The implementation focused on six pilot special coastal management areas (*Zonas Especiales de Manejo, ZEMs*). The program evolved through a participatory process, which yielded comprehensive planning for the six ZEMs. The loans provided by IDB supported the implementation phase of the activities outlined in the ZEMs.

It is worth noting that PMRC evolved throughout some periods of substantial economic, social, political, and environmental instability in Ecuador. These perturbations provoked delays, and in some cases, halted the planned program activities because of the instability and uncertainty surrounding that period.

In August 2008, by Presidential Decree, the PMRC came to an end. Ecuador's current government leaders terminated the program because they believe that it has not provided real benefit for Ecuador's coastal areas and coastal communities. The government's recent decision to discontinue the program, along with the fact that PMRC existed and operated for twenty-three years, poses important questions that require careful analysis. First, what is the future of coastal and marine policy in Ecuador? Second, and more importantly, what lessons can be learned from PMRC's program, which spanned the period of 1985 to 2008?

A reflective and thorough analysis would be beneficial to Ecuador and other countries currently facing complex coastal issues. The PMRC, which lasted for twenty-three years, could serve as a good case study because it was the earliest integrated coastal management program in Latin America, and offers experiences and lessons learned to operationalize more effective management strategies to ameliorate coastal issues around the world.

Maria D. Herrera  
GSO-CRC, University of Rhode Island  
20 Fenner Ave. 3<sup>rd</sup> floor  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840  
*lolah@crc.uri.edu*  
(847)-401-3507