

Sustainable local development and preservation of biodiversity: The case of Orinoco Caiman in the Cojedes River, Municipio Ricaurte, Estado Cojedes, Venezuela.

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A non traditional vision is presented in this work, contrasting with a great number of scientific works corresponding to the biological sciences and conservation of fauna species, mainly of those that are in extinction danger.

This is a presentation on behalf of the Mayoress of the Municipio Ricaurte, Estado Cojedes, Dra. Violeta Montoya de Cobos, which has begun a project of Tourist Development that has as axis the presence of the Orinoco Caiman, also selected as emblem and mascot of the National Sport Games 2003, which will be carried out in our entity. This is an opportunity to locate this species in the public interest, because perhaps many people have never heard about its existence, and less about the real danger of its disappearance forever if we do not take today the necessary measures to avoid it.

Traditionally, the studies dedicated to the biodiversity have been limited to the biological sciences and the ecology, obtaining investigations and results of great importance, which constitute the base of any program of fauna conservation. However, we consider they have in themselves the germ of their limitations, when we observe that during years they had devoted financial and human efforts, but the results do not seem to be all the flattering ones that the own investigators wait. Perhaps the same concern prevailed to carry out conservation studies, mainly in social sciences.

Today our presence in this event, where most of the presented works corresponds to biological sciences, constitutes an indicator of what we try to expose. Our position, like you observed in the title, seeks to see to the Orinoco Caiman and the problem of fauna resources in general, from the perspective of the social sciences, an element in common for the encounter of diverse scientific disciplines. A multi-disciplinary vision of the topic could help us to find the solutions and answers that we are waiting. Particularly, we will approach our topic from the perspective of the studies of the development, and the search of answers that allow us to guide the efforts on tangible results in the fight against the poverty.

Traditionally and during many years, the development was seen almost with a single lens, and this in turn just by two glasses. On one hand, the development seen from the quantification of the profit *per capita*, the Gross Internal Product, and macroeconomic variables as the parity of the currency, level of international reserves, commercial balance and others that you have surely heard mentioned in newspapers. On the other one, the desideratum of the technological development: energy and aluminum consumption, number of appliances for person, number of vehicles, number of personal computers and connections to internet and, more recently, number of cell phones and other indicators of this type. Certainly, the case is that although everything is necessary, and even desirable that our societies arrive at high levels in each one of the indicated parameters, but it is not less certain than the levels of life quality of a whole group of the society can be expressed in good terms only with these items. That is the vision of the development from the "macro" levels (from above). We consider that we should supplement it with a nearer vision to the common citizen and the territorial spaces in which people carry out their daily life. To such goal, we postulate (following the conceptual base developed by the UNEP) the local development as the strategy that will allow the incorporation of each citizen as first order actor in the transformation process of their social reality, on the base of consensual participation of local stakeholders (State, Market and Civil Society). It is important to take advantage of the existent potentials in each community and

territorial spaces, starting from it to the process of social change. It would be then a vision of the development from the "micro" levels (from below) that, without discarding the macroeconomics variables, lead to a wide world of possibilities locally existing. We refer to a great world of resources, obviously including the fauna resources like a fundamental element.

We are also offered from this perspective an option or focus of the development. It is not only the search of the economic profit, but the amplification of the range of people's options in all their width, so that we can really speak of growth or sustainable human development. Likewise, this vision of human development implies the incorporation of traverse axes or indispensable condition focuses, among which acquires particular relevance to mention the environmental sustainability. We can not think about alternative programs or development projects without take into account the conservation of the environment and preservation of biodiversity as a fundamental topic. In such a sense, the use of the existent resources is postulated, guaranteeing its preservation for the future generations.

From this perspective, in the municipality of Ricaurte, a process had begin with the design an Eco-tourism Project denominated "Eco-tourist Trail of the Orinoco Caiman".

We should point out that the available information allows us to observe that the world tourist market, and mainly the Latin America and the Caribbean market, is conformed in a good percentage by the eco-tourism, and inside this segment as tourist destination our country has immense possibilities. We can in Venezuela, based on biodiversity, incorporate fauna species of proven attractiveness as an element of the local development.

We need to mention the importance of the population's participation in plans and programs in the process of democratic development of our society, just as it is established very thoroughly in our Bolivarian Constitution along all their articulate. Based on this, we postulate the necessity to incorporate the local populations in the conservation programs and fauna management, be or not in extinction danger.

Finally, and inside diverse strategies to take advantages like the Eco-tourist Project, there are specific programs of conservation of this species. We consider that it is possible to achieve the declaration of the area of the Cojedes River, which is a wild habitat of the Orinoco Caiman, as a Refuge of Fauna. To make such proposal, we we propose the name of Mr. Coromoto Ramírez very firmly, recently died, to identify this refuge. During many years, even before the beginning of the preservation campaigns, he was an anonymous hero in the fight to conserve the Caiman, and even more, as surely endorsed many specialists of the area, the mentioned citizen constituted an invaluable support for many of their works.

Profile of the project "Eco-tourist Trail of the Orinoco Caiman"

Promoter: Governorship of the Municipality Ricaurte, Mayoress: Abog. Violeta Montoya de Cobos.

Elaborated for: Lic. Marcos Sánchez E.

Location: Cojedes, municipalities of Ricaurte and Anzoategui.

Area: Approximately 70 Km of the river Cojedes (Caño de Agua) from the establishment La Chorrera until the mouth on the Portuguesa River (see map).

Justification

1. It is a characteristic species of Venezuela.
2. It is in extinction danger.
3. It is the place of more concentration of specimens in wild state.
4. Many financial and human resources have been devoted to their study.
5. The reintroduction in other areas has depended on this river
6. The species has reacted positively to the performed efforts
7. It is an animal with great attractiveness
8. The ecological characteristics of the Cojedes River allows its establishment and permanency
9. The economic activities, as well as the works of dredge in the river, put in danger their existence

Objectives

1. Contribute efficiently to the conservation of the species.
2. To support the activities and investigation projects.
3. Motivate the declaration of Refuge of Fauna Coromoto Ramirez", the area of the Cojedes River with presence of caiman.
4. Incorporate the rural population and property owners in the conservation of the species.
5. Open a new space for the local tourist activities.
6. Establish a research station for the caiman and wildfauna of the Municipality.

Strategies

1. Establishment institutional alliances.
2. Promote the Eco-tourism as support activity to the conservation of the species.
3. Incorporate social and economic stakeholders to this process (local communities, agricultural producers and peasants).
4. Promote the municipality Ricaurte as tourist destination in Venezuela.
5. Demarcation of the Eco-touristic Trail along the river.
6. Reforestation of gallery forests.
7. Establishment of a research station.

Possible Activities

1. Guided visit by the river.
2. Photographic competitions with the topic the Orinoco Caiman.
3. Bird observation.
4. Visit and lodging in private farms.

Guidelines for the workgroups discussion

Common theme for all the groups:

Challenges for the development of a shared conservation plan and sustainable management of the Orinoco Caiman between Colombia and Venezuela

Discussion matters:

1. Harmonization of both current plans.
2. Professional formation and exchange of experiences at bi-national level.
3. Develop of a trans-border, bi-national project of natural resources management in the distribution area of *Crododylus intermedius*, embracing habitat and population evaluation together with other species of ecological and/or commercial interest (example: chigüire, babas, turtles, threatened species, etc.), with participation of both ministries and universities, to be introduced before the GEF.
4. Short term combined work.
5. Activities schedule.

Note: this theme will be the base for the elaboration of a document to be sent to CITES, UICN, Crocodiles Specialist Group, multilateral institutions and governments (Foreign and Environment Ministries) of both countries, as a reference document for application of investigation and financing projects.