

From an environmental strategy to a national integrated coastal and ocean policy. The successful Mexican experience

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Abstract

This paper presents the general steps followed by the Mexican government towards the definition of a national integrated policy for oceans and coast.

Due to the complex legal, regulatory and administrative frameworks related with the coastal zone and seas management in Mexico, in 2008 and by presidential instructions, a high level inter-ministerial commission for the sustainable management of seas and coast (CIMARES) was created. The main objective of the CIMARES Commission is provide the country with a National Policy for Seas and Coast, strength the governability of the marine/coastal regions, increase the productive capacity of the economic forces assuring environmental sustainability, promote transparency and public participation in the decision making process, as well as improve and harmonize the inter-governmental and inter-sectoral framework for action.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the conformation and operation process of the CIMARES Commission, the problems and opportunities detected as a high level working group, and present the results obtained in terms of the construction and development of the Mexico's National Policy for Oceans and Coast.

Keywords: *Coastal, Ocean, Management, Coastal Policies, Mexico.*

1. The Mexican context

With 2.7 million km² of Economic Exclusive Zone and 11,122 km of coast, Mexico possesses a great natural capital, biodiversity and economic resources associated with marine and coastal areas. The 17 coastal states and municipalities comprise the 56% of the national territory and hold a total population of 47.3 million of inhabitants (Azuz and Rivera, 2009). Several coastal and marine environments are present in this geography: about 900 islands; 245 bays, estuaries and coastal lagoons (Ortíz-Perez and De la Lanza, 2006); 665,657 ha of mangrove surface (CONABIO, 2008); the second largest coral reef in the world; deltas, coastal plains and beautiful sandy beaches internationally recognised.

The historic (1993-2006) contribution of the coastal states to the National Gross Domestic Product has been only 36%. The main economic activities present in coastal and marine zones are: oil production/extraction, tourism, maritime commerce, manufacturing industry, fisheries and aquaculture.

The Mexican coastal zones suffer different problems: chaotic urban development, habitat destruction and pollution, losses of biodiversity, high vulnerability to natural hazards in coastal cities, legal lacks and superposition of governmental responsibilities, social and

economic inequity and fundamentally, for many years the need for a national framework that directs their sustainable development.

2. Legal and institutional frameworks

The Mexican government works at three different levels: Federal (National), State and County level. Every government level has their specific laws, division of authority and regulatory tools. In the coastal zone as a territorial space, the three administrative levels share responsibilities and operate in an asymmetrical way in terms of technical capacities and economic resources.

In Mexico at least twelve Federal Ministries have the legal power to act in the coastal and marine zone. Thirty eight national laws (Federal level) are related to the coastal and marine zone (environment, population, commerce, industry, security, infrastructure development, risk prevention, port activities, tourism, economic, social affairs, etc), each state and county has their own particular laws, but the country as a whole lacks a specific coastal law.

Under this complex scenario, the Mexican president created, in 2008, a high level inter-ministerial commission to coordinate the efforts and to develop the required national framework to establish a National Policy for the sustainable management of coasts and seas.

3. Environmental tools and policies for oceans and coasts

The environmental ministry had been the leadership in the development of a national framework to manage the coastal zone in an integrated way. Several policy tools exist in the Environmental Law (LGEEPA): environmental impact assessment, marine ordinance processes and also considered is the development of national marine and coastal protected areas.

Under this legal framework (LGEEPA), in 2006 the National Environmental Policy for Oceans and Coast was presented (SEMARNAT, 2006). This National Policy was followed by the National Strategy for the Marine and Coastal Ordinance (SEMARNAT, 2007).

The National Environmental Policy for Oceans and Coast presents several fundamental issues:

1. A national definition for the "coastal zone". The Mexican coastal zone is considered as the geographic space of interaction between the seas, the terrestrial environment and the atmosphere. It has a continental portion defined by 263 coastal counties (150 with open access to the sea and 113 with high and medium marine influence); a marine part defined by the depth of 200 m and all the islands.
2. The strategic framework. This framework comprises the legal and institutional basis; the policy tools; the baseline for ecological and biodiversity management; the economic activities and population development rules and the technical and participatory bodies that help to develop a National Management Plan.
3. The Plan of Action. A plan of action toward the integrated coastal management in Mexico with specific guidelines for their success (86 principal topics).

4. CIMARES Commission and the National Policy for Oceans and Coasts

In order to develop the National Policy for Oceans and Coasts (NPOC) and to contribute with the sustainable development of these territorial spaces, a high level inter-ministerial commission was created by presidential instructions in 2008. The National Commission for the Sustainable Management of Seas and Coast (CIMARES) was constituted by ten Ministries: Internal Affairs; International Relationships; Navy; Social Development; Energy; Food, Rural Development and Fisheries; Communications and Transportation; Tourism and Environment. By law, the CIMARES Commission needs to have two high level meetings (with the heads of each ministry) per year, and workshops with medium level government officers (General Directors) and technical personnel at least every three months.

The Commission worked in six groups: government articulation and ordinances; life quality; economic issues and competitiveness; ecologic structures and processes; international agenda and science and technology. After two years of work a draft version of the NPOC was created and accepted. According with the time table, the final document will be ready at the end of October, 2010. Once the document has been accepted in its final form by the CIMARES, a public consultation will start.

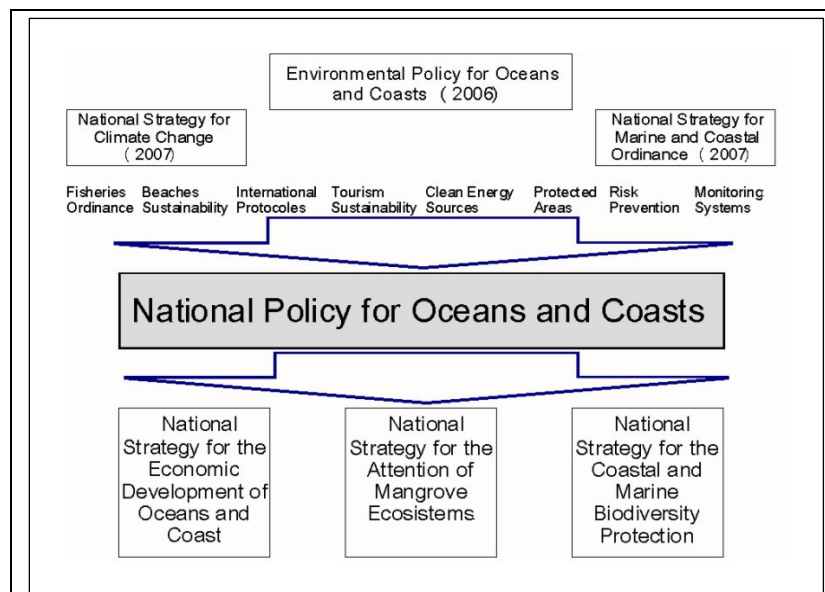


Fig. 1. Framework instruments associates with the Mexican National Policy (NPOC).

For the first time in Mexico's history a multi-sectoral high level commission was established and has been working in coastal and marine related issues. The level of technical knowledge, general interest and integrated view of the different ministries was very irregular. Also, for the coastal and marine environment the economic and political pressures are not the same for each ministry. Some ministries can be seen as development promoters, administrative instances, security forces or planning and managerial bodies. The CIMARES commission gives them the opportunity to share a common view of the marine and coastal spaces towards their integrated sustainable development. At the same time, the main problem confronted by the commission was the need for a real coordination of sectoral

programs and competences within the new framework proposed.

5. Conclusions

A National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Oceans and Coast in Mexico was developed in a collaborative way by the CIMARES Commission. The Policy proposes four general objectives: to assure the integrated management of seas and coast; to improve the life conditions of coastal population; to increase the economic competitiveness of coastal activities and to conserve the biophysics structure, environmental services and quality of coastal and marine environments. To attain these general objectives, four strategic principles were proposed: improve the governance of these areas; prevent the risk and reduce the vulnerability; develop the scientific and technological basis for decision making processes and assure an integrated vision in the development of any kind of infrastructure.

This new framework can help to attain a sustainable development in the coastal and marine areas if the country has enough economic resources, attains the expected coordination between the different government levels, and political will as well as public concern and participation is obtained.

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