



Learnings From Mexico Investments

Executive Summary



THE DAVID & LUCILE

Packard Foundation

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Progress from Marine and Coastal Conservation Efforts in Mexico

Since 1991, the Packard Foundation has been supporting work in Mexico, providing grants that contributed to the conservation and sustainability of the country's marine and coastal biodiversity and strengthened civil society organizations primarily in two key regions: the Gulf of California and the Yucatan Peninsula. Other key funders for this work include the Marisla Foundation, the Sandler Family Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and the Helmsley Charitable Trust, among others.

In 2023, the Foundation convened our partners to better understand the accomplishments thus far, remaining challenges for the environmental movement, and opportunities for continuing progress. The retrospective included input from 40 civil society organizations and 10 individuals with experience in the conservation sector. The following summary presents the perspectives of our grantee partners, shared to encourage other foundations to acknowledge and take into account these insights and recommendations.

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Key Accomplishments

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Mexico have made several achievements that established a solid agenda for conservation and sustainability in the country. Key accomplishments include:

Establishing an environmental movement. Over the years, a robust environmental movement has emerged in Mexico, particularly in the Gulf of California and Yucatan Peninsula. Driven by increasingly professionalized CSOs, the number of Mexican organizations and the scope of their work have grown along with contributions from international organizations. Diverse grassroots efforts with socio-environmental approaches have also flourished. Environmental consciousness and citizen-led initiatives have achieved significant marine and coastal conservation successes and enabled timely responses to environmental and human rights challenges in the region.

Promoting and strengthening participation by diverse stakeholders and communities. In earlier years of these efforts, the stakeholders mainly included government agencies and academia. Today, they include stakeholders from a range of sectors and representation from local communities, Indigenous people, women, and youth. Participation from community members is now the norm and prioritized as a starting place for conservation efforts. Together with CSOs, these communities have helped address issues such as sustainable resource management and regional and spatial planning.



Establishment of the national system of natural protected areas. CSOs were critical leaders in the design, establishment, management, and evaluation of natural protected areas. These areas include the Espiritu Santo Archipelago and Cabo Pulmo National Parks, among several others, and a total of 65.8 million hectares throughout the country. CSOs' efforts included helping identify and develop funding for protected areas; supporting the long-term management of marine protected areas, such as Bahía de Loreto National Park and Cabo Pulmo; and working collectively to defend protected areas against threats and advocating for sustained and sufficient funding.

Advocacy for better fishing practices. CSOs' efforts over the past decades led to better fishing practices in more than 25 fisheries. These efforts included research, implementing more sustainable fishing methods, development of fishery improvement projects, designation of fisheries refuges, use of catch-share systems, accessing higher-paying markets, and community surveillance.

Coastal protection through protected areas and other conservation measures. In addition to establishing the natural protected areas system, the joint efforts of CSOs and foundations led to the legal protection of more than 1,700 kilometers of federally protected tidal land and another 135,000 hectares of coastal land. CSOs were critical in these gains, acquiring protected coastal land, spearheading scientific research, and providing support for communication and policy efforts.



Courtesy: Comunidad y Biodiversidad, A.C. (COBI)

Opportunities For Future Progress

Looking forward, we see many opportunities to continue this progress in Mexico, as well as take the learnings and outcomes to benefit ocean and coastal conservation efforts globally. Key opportunities include:

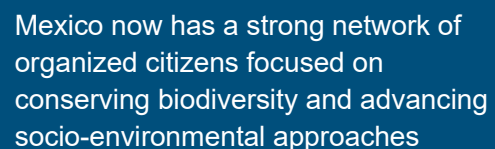
Leveraging the new federal administration to advance socio-environmental goals. The upcoming federal administration (2024-2030), led by a president with scientific and political expertise and a capable cabinet, offers opportunities to strengthen collaboration between civil society and the government. This shift could advance climate, environmental, and socio-environmental priorities by fostering cooperation between CSOs, local communities, and government at all levels. Key priority areas include climate action, biodiversity preservation, and sustainable development with a focus on social equity and community well-being.

Leveraging collective action to address ocean conservation and climate issues. There are several issues where conditions are ripe for expanding existing initiatives and approaches. If addressed, Mexico is poised to make progress that could have positive global impacts on marine habitats and biodiversity. These include:

- Enforcing existing and establishing new marine protected areas and other area-based conservation measures.
- Expanding protections to ensure the recovery of blue carbon habitats.
- Supporting small-scale fishing communities to develop sustainable practices and fight IUU fishing.

However, this progress will require collective action from CSOs, local communities, and funders to create the enabling conditions to allow for scaling collective impact on these priorities.

Working with the established network of organizations. Mexico now has a strong network of organized citizens focused on conserving biodiversity and advancing socio-environmental approaches. These organizations are well-positioned to scale progress with adequate funding. The Foundation's Mexico grantee directory provides more details on the organizations the Packard Foundation has supported, including details on the type of work they do and where they work.



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Physical and emotional security. Ensuring the safety and well-being of organizations, individuals, and their community partners remains a critical priority. Continued support for security initiatives helps safeguard those working on the frontlines of conservation. One example is the Protecting People and Protecting Nature (P3N) program, which is a collaborative effort aimed at strengthening the capacity of environmental defenders in Mexico to promote security practices and build a culture of protection. The initiative supports defenders in facing threats and documenting attacks, offering key resources, tools, and emergency support when necessary.

CSO Guidance on Effective Funding and Support in Mexico

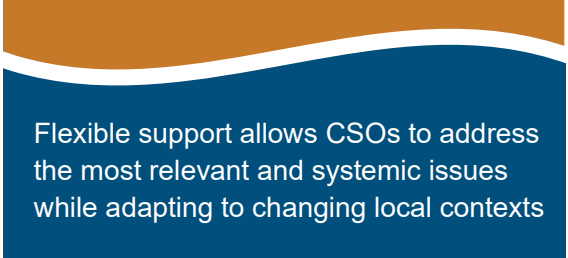
Through our conversations, civil society partners emphasized several key recommendations for improving funding practices in Mexico. These include:

Sustained and trust-based funding. CSOs emphasize the importance of long-term, flexible funding that covers operational costs. This type of support enables organizations to adapt and meet their organizational needs while prioritizing progress on collective efforts to address systemic issues like natural resource governance, climate change, and environmental degradation. Flexible funding also gives CSOs the confidence to take on long-term projects with the assurance that future efforts will be supported.

Capacity strengthening. Long-term participation in collaborative efforts requires sustained engagement, which places demands on CSOs' time and capacity. Providing flexible, long-term funding allows them to meet organizational needs and collective goals. Additionally, investment in leadership, governance, and strategic planning remains key to ensuring that CSOs are well-equipped to tackle complex challenges and sustain their efforts.

Collaborative approaches and alliances. Collaboration between organizations, donors, and local communities fosters stronger conservation agendas and more effective action. Grantees have highlighted the value of mentoring by foundation staff, networking, and peer-to-peer learning, which enhance transparency and mutual trust. These efforts are even more effective when funders coordinate with each other, ensuring strategic alignment and co-investment in priority activities.

Tailored support to local realities. Flexible support allows CSOs to address the most relevant and systemic issues while adapting to changing local contexts. Transparent and open communication, regular feedback loops, and the flexibility to respond to emerging challenges ensure that funding strategies remain aligned with local needs and realities.



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About the Packard Foundation

At the [David and Lucile Packard Foundation](#), we work with people and communities to create enduring solutions for just societies and a healthy, resilient natural world. The Foundation has a long history of supporting ocean science and conservation, and we recently outlined the next evolution of our work in this space.

Our 10-year (2023-2033) [Ocean initiative](#) focuses on developing and implementing solutions that protect and restore ocean habitats and communities, achieve equitable and sustainable fisheries, end illegal fishing and human and worker rights abuses in seafood supply chains, and harness ocean-based climate solutions.

While the Ocean Initiative will continue to support global and regional efforts to strengthen conservation, which may include limited work in Mexico, we will end our country-specific funding of marine and coastal conservation in Mexico by 2026. This was a difficult decision informed by both the significant progress made by our partners to date and the hope that other funders will play an essential role in supporting continued advancements in Mexico.

Contact

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