Community-Based Monitoring System in Colombia

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Community based monitoring system in Colombia
Cordoba province
Alto San Jorge region

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1. Project Overview

A) Title of the project: Association of local councils in San Jorge region
B) Project proponent: San Isidro Foundation (FSI)

a. Abstract

In Colombia the national department of statistics (DANE in Spanish) is in charged to plan, collect, analyze, evaluate data and general information related with different topics such as inflation index, price consumer index, and unemployment index. Poverty indicators are one of the current tasks of this office; however the information is not only outdated but also insufficient.

The purpose of this project is not only to do a comprehensive research gathering several poverty indicators at the local level, but also to establish a program to enhance important areas such as civic institution, cultural identity, increase the community relations and collective cooperation to find common ground rules to positively influence local policies. Also increase information dissemination and follow up activities related with local and regional accountability.

It is important to point out that information system must be kept updated in order to support any local or regional project. The most important outcome of this process is that the empowered community must be able to propose and negotiate strategic plans of development with local, regional and national institutions either private or public.

b. Administrative information

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2. Background

As the World Bank[1] stated Colombia's socio-economic development from 1978 to 1999 shows mixed result. The poverty profile has not changed much in the last two decades. World Bank study shows how dynamics of poverty in urban Colombia are linked to economic growth, inequality and the evolution of basic income per-capita generating factors. Chart 1 shows poverty statistic through a timeframe of twenty three years. It clearly states the stagnant evolution of poverty over time.
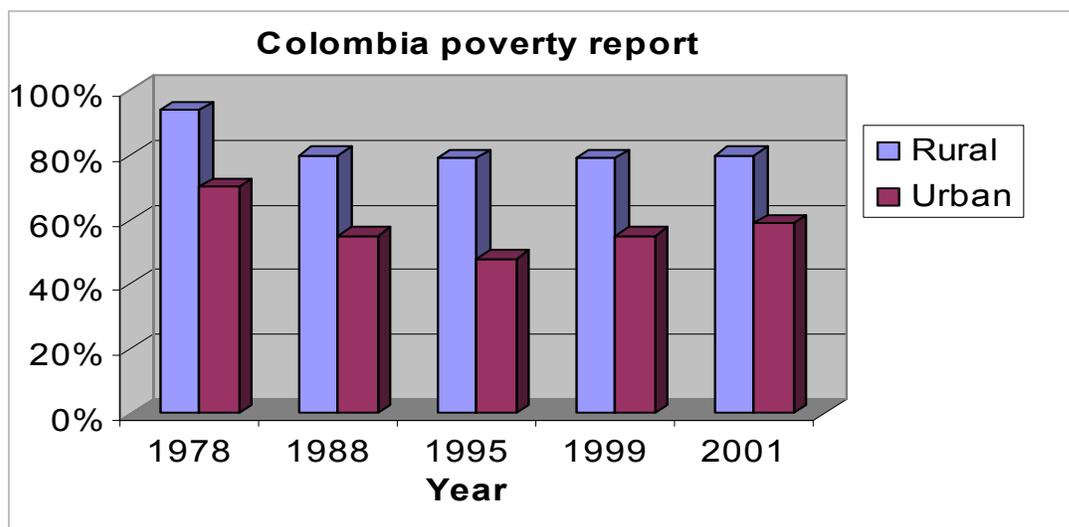

Chart 1 (Colombia Poverty Report, World Bank 03 / 2002)

Poverty is known as a catalysis which nourishes many other problems at the social, human and economic level. Rural population in Colombia represent up to 29 % and urban population count up to 71 %.

Most recently slow growth of the Colombian economy and insufficient mechanism to comprehend the dynamics of poverty make necessary to find a bottom up approach to improve the living condition of people that lives under the lines of poverty. For this reason, local and regional initiative introducing new proposal to better their living conditions are becoming more effective. In recent years, insufficient information and lack of accountability in local government provoke low impact in poverty alleviation. Due to that environment, it is essential to build up an organization capable of plan, collect, evaluate and oversee information flow, projects and programs that deal with community needs.

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[1] World Bank report. Colombian country management unit / PREM sector management unit: Colombian poverty report Volume II. September 12 2001

We are building this project under a core principle which is to improve the awareness of electing better representatives to enhance the living conditions of rural and urban citizens. Poverty levels should decrease as part of the national and local government policies. However, this has not been the case. Moreover some programs implemented at local level are not delivering tangible results.

For instance, although some local governments receive resources, they are usually unable to assess which projects or programs must be prioritized. Insufficient information at local level makes difficult to prioritize budget allocation to regional project planner. Sometimes few infrastructure projects drain the resources without having a high social impact in poverty indicators.

San Isidro Foundation has been working over six years on projects focused on strengthening the grouping of local communities. In order to accomplish our goals we would like to continue developing a basic information system that will enable us to plan, develop and evaluate local projects and hence improve our local community. The main goal of this project is to strengthen a social development model that would provide an accurate decision making process to better the living conditions of our people through democratic practices. Empowering the population with tools that will let them act independently and become more self-confident.

a. San Isidro Foundation (SIF)

SIF is a social foundation created by Cerro Matoso (A mining company that produces nickel mineral) and the Diocese of Montelibano in 1981 to improve the quality of life of the communities.
In its 24 years of operations, San Isidro Foundation has become a major catalyst in mobilizing the development for the region covering the entire spectrum of community economic and social development. It has 31 direct employees, currently the board of directors is compose by representatives of the local community, the Diocese of Montelibano, and Cerro Matoso.
San Isidro Foundation is engaged in strategies of sustainable development such as:

- Growth of local economy
- Poverty reduction
- Promote a responsible community that manages its own development.
- Strengthening the functions of public administration in order to support entrepreneurial growth activities
- Plan and organize workshops in the fields of regional development, civic legislation, urban planning and voluntary programs

Projects and programs usually are lever through local, regional and national alliances with public, private and non governmental organizations.

b. Institutional frame work

Figure 1. Structure of local government
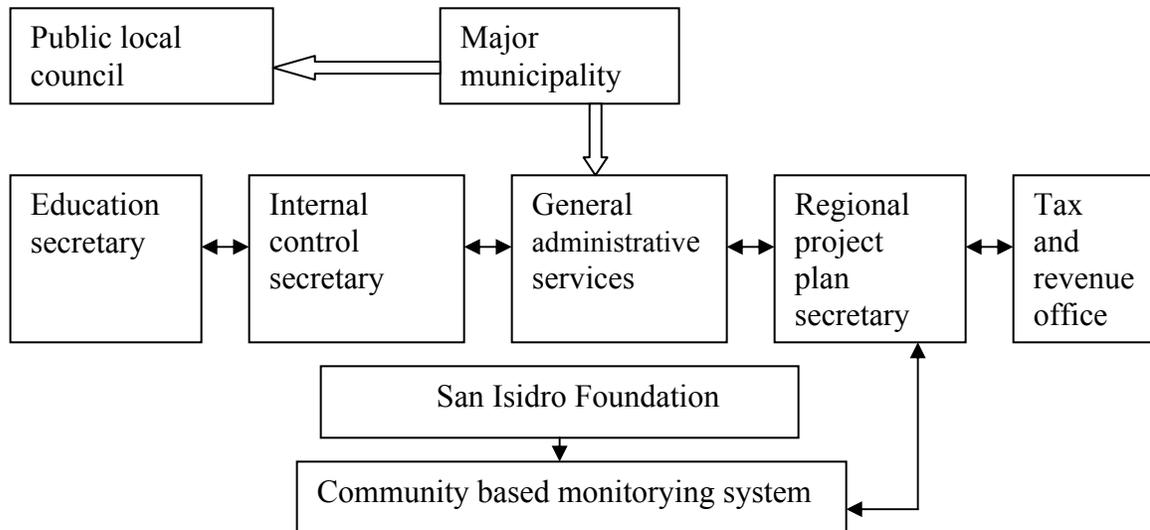
In addition, it is important to notice that national government interact within these local regions through the Government office and its different subdivisions.

At the national level Colombia government is separated in executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The president is elected for a 4-year term. Colombia has a bicameral congress compose by senate and House of Representatives. Administrative divisions are composed by 32 departments and the capital district which is Bogotá.

c. Regional planning system interaction

This process has been recognized as a new tool for local government candidates. In fact, the system has evolved in such a way that many local candidates who are running for local mayor municipalities and local councils extract information from current database. Moreover, regional and national entities such as The National Department of Statistics (DANE in Spanish) recently used a fraction of local data to undertake the Colombian national census. At the regional level some entities such as the government planning office has used current data to plan and verify the progress of local projects. The existing monitoring system is an isolated attempt to overcome the lack of information about poverty indicators. We are confident that the current system will become an excellent tool at the local, regional and national level if it is improved and is made more available to all potential end-users.

3. Objectives

a. Reference and context

In 1991 our constitution was changed increasing public candidate's responsibilities at the local, regional and national level. As a consequence any person willing to reach a public position has been obliged to write a program including community needs. These programs should include a plan of development based on current poverty needs. In some regions there were some isolated attempts to create a set of data as simple tool to transmit key poverty indicator from the community to local candidates.

More over, around 1991 local leaders in this region started to realize that many problems couldn't be solved without providing accurate information about their life's conditions and expectations. Since that time small groups involving grass root leaders from this region started to be connected.

Just in 1999 the association of grass root leaders have had the initiative to discuss different alternatives in coordination with San Isidro Foundation local NGO (SIF) and local authorities to reduce poverty issues. For instance, in our country the bottom up approach has been relegated for decades. Isolated efforts to communicate necessities and requirements from the community start to become imperative.

After several meetings, inhabitants of this region defined guidelines to study and comprehend in a depth way factors affecting poverty. The following three factors were identified as crucial: self-government, empowerment and community leadership.

This proposal has identified two main components such as the community leaders and the monitory system.

For this specific project it is essential to point out that perception and priorities of the community has been taken into account to establish core basic indicators of quality of life. At this point those indicators have been the starting point of a multidimensional participation of different actors. It is important to understand that basic indicators reflect the most important needs of the community. They must also reveal present and future requirements of the entire region. Furthermore, it will enable to mapping out a plan to improve resource allocation strategies and public policies discussion.

Since the beginning the data base has provided simple information. For that reason it must be improved to better the living condition of this community.

Information is not useful unless it is part of a system that allows to update, evaluate and analyse the progress of each variable or indicator over time. This proposal intends to improve and update an information system prioritizing variables and creating better maps that assist stakeholders to easily retrieve information. These maps will show the zones of the rural and urban area which need more attention. Maps would be an additional tool

that will help to assess the entire region at a glance. Refer to the map example on page 18.

The target region will be divided into 8 macro zones, 47 zones and, 270 clusters or communities' districts zones or small rural clusters. One of the most important points is to build a consensus in each zone about the strategic plan to follow up.

It is also necessary to set up regular meetings with local government in order to plan, evaluate, verify and analyse local and regional strategic plan of development.

This project must continue to be lead by the community under the supervision of civil society and local government, but we expect that it will be self-governed with autonomy and decision making tools.

We believe that our simple community monitory system works based on the support of democratic elected leaders from the community. These leaders are appointed taking into account principles such representation, recognition, accountability and previous experience. They understand very well the community needs of these small clusters or units. These leaders are not paid but the FSI we just provide some money for transportation and refreshments. They do not have a different duty other than collect and validate at some level information coming from his/her area or district.

An additional task of our Foundation is to provide support with human and technical resources that are always limited. Our ultimate goal in this project is to improve and excel our current monitory system with your cooperation.

Finally, the association of local leaders would be able to create a legal entity that would help them to organize, link and propose projects within a strategic plan of development at local and regional level.

4. Specific objectives:

- Increase the local participation within local public institutions
- Support and discuss local government programs through deliberation and negotiation.
- Establish regular meetings to deliberate about the progress of the organization
- Community must be capable through this association to play a key role in the deliberation of local municipality budget for each fiscal year.
- Establish an agreement with regional, national and international institutions in projects and programs that positively affect their living condition.
- Provide to regional, national and international entities accurate information about key regional social indicators
- Increase levels of transparency and accountability within public administration
- Create a pact of development with local authorities.

- Create a bank of projects that might be needed to undertake in order to improve the living condition of our community.

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5. Project activity

It is necessary from the beginning to inform the target population establishing clear ground rules for this process. The community participation is essential in order to create a sense of self deliberation.

The project will last 12 months with the intention to capture the most representative characteristic of poverty.

a. Detail plan activities

During the first year the following activities will be performed

First quarter:

- Review previous and current monitoring system
- Improve methodology and draft design to properly collect data.
- Stakeholder commitment such as local councils and major municipalities in each step of the project
- Establish a team leader from NGO office who will be in charge to properly coordinate the project including information flows and resources.
- Inform and disseminate the survey approach within the community and local public institutions
- Establish links with delegates from each zone of the urban and rural area within this region to implement and eventual take over.

Outputs

- Community leaders would propose and modify an additional set of indicators of quality of life if necessary.
- Improve maps which clearly identify not only the target region but also each zone, neighborhood in the rural and urban area.

Second quarter

- Verify current division of zones, neighborhood and small rural clusters within the target region. Urban and rural locations must be clearly identify in order to specify needs and allocated specific resources once key information about livelihood standards is available.

- Elect democratic representatives from each zone.
- Prepare local leaders from each zone establishing an effective team work strategies.
- Create a board of directors within an assembly in order to properly conduct and handle information flow from each zone
- Up date the draft that outlines the guiding rules to organize and deliberate during each local assembly of each zone
- Conduct a training workshop to introduce the survey approach format to all pollster
- Data collection and processing procedure start

Outputs

- Establish data base that would help to handle information properly. Under the condition of easy to manage easy to improve it.
- Establish a period no more than one year to gather the representative of each zone to validate the process.

Third quarter

- Based on regular meetings with local leaders a strategic plan of development draft must be presented including a mission and vision and goals. Clearly stating where the community would like to be seen in a timeframe of ten years.
- Indicators would help to understand different needs in each zone of this region.

Outputs

- Distribute a brochure with a report of surveyed results with key standard indicators.

Fourth quarter

- The association of local leaders must be a democratic elected organization that represents the constituency of this region. It must be a legal association with a board and delegates that might be able to legally represent the interests of the population. This organization does not have any political orientation.
- Hard copies of initial data base from all zones of this region would be distributed among all representatives and local major municipalities.
- Establish a round table talks with future candidates to discuss the outcomes of the community based monitory system in order to formulate local government programs that would tackle down future regional needs
- Each zone may be able to make proposals that will help to build up the first draft with a portfolio of projects needed to improve their living conditions.

Output

- Data including living standard indicators would be presented in a data base that will allow an easy access. Data could be search by topic or specific indicator.
- Project portfolio outline that would positively affect this region. They come from key basic indicators
- Workshops with local and regional representatives to disseminate outcomes and lessons learned.
- Detailed map that shows by zone where to concentrate and where the lowest poverty standards indicators are.
- Submit final report

6. Methodology implementation

    a. Data collection procedure

San Isidro Foundation (SIF) would be responsible in this process to coordinate, allocated and manage this project. Furthermore local councils and mayor municipalities would act as stakeholders. Elected representatives from each zone would have the responsibility to guide, conduct and select additional collaborators if necessary.

Moreover, collecting data process would have the condition of mandatory realization, where the entire population is responsible to collaborate with pollster to submit without exception accurate data. All targeted population would be eligible to submit data unless any special requests.

San Isidro Foundation will be in charged to plan, select and process the information. Our staff will establish special timeframe through out the year to conduct the new household survey.

Surveys approach would be introduced at three different levels. The budget of this specific exercise isn't too high because as mentioned before, only transportation and refreshment cost need to be covered to perform this step. Further costs are break down on the budget section.

At the first level, local leaders would be in charged to provide initial information about each indicator, at the second level project plan secretary officers from each municipality would provide information about public infrastructure and, at the third level survey would be introduced to the general population.

b. Data processing

Information would be collected manually by pollsters who are democratic elected leaders from each zone. It must be available in a timely basis in electronic version as well as hard copies or brochures. Collected data would serve as a platform to build up projects at different level. Those projects should be established within a strategic plan of development. This plan is the ultimate product of this process because under a consensus approach with local authorities and future candidates, local municipalities and futures candidates would have to allocate budget and resources to cope these needs. Information must be processed within a software program that will allow an easy input and data analysis.

San Isidro Foundation with his unit for community development is responsible to process and analyze the available data. We have implemented simple software called SIPLAN in Spanish. It is a database that organizes and generates a worksheet with output data. This information is prioritized by variables and could be compared with previous years.

c. Data validation

Information would be store carefully within an appropriate data base. The most powerful way to validate data is not only to follow up in annual basis the progress of each variables and indicators, but also to corroborate with community leader if strategic plans of development are generating positive outcomes.

All data is validated each year in the local assembly meeting where almost 540 local leaders attend representing 270 clusters or basic unit. Information is printed in brochures and small booklets that can be carried back easily to the entire community. At the communities district or clusters level that usually represent a group of neighborhoods or rural areas, local elected leaders set up additional meetings to provide any further information. According to the last census, this region has 108.000 inhabitants who are at the same time the source and last recipients of this information.

In addition information must be available to be checked at any time by local authorities. A future goal is to have this information on the web so it can be reached by anyone in Colombia and abroad.

Moreover, it is intended to manage and originate information from each zone creating a simple but effective resource network that will enable communities to access, update and communicate more efficiently regardless of their location.

d. List of indicators to be monitored

By previous experience with local leaders' an initial set of core variables, 38 sub variables and several indicators would extract valuable information from target population about the living condition in this region. These variables, sub variables and indicators are shown in table 1. Variables are extracted from previous meeting with local leaders who represent the population, these sets of variables are already prioritized by importance from one the most important to twelve the least important.

Variables	*Sub Variables*	*Indicators (Most representatives)*
1. Economy	• Principal economic activity • Income level • Entrepreneur capacity • Employment level • Saving capacity	• Number of people economically active • Number of people with a job. • Number of people jobless
2. Education	• School education level • Written and read skill • School infrastructure	• Number of children with access to high school • Number of adults without written and read skills
3. Health	• Access of health care service • Nutrition level • Vaccination access	• Number of people without access of health care services • Number of people with poor nutrition • Number of people without access of local vaccination program
4. Housing and shelter	• Housing improvement • Legal property title • Overcrowded housing • Lack of housing	• Number of houses with structure problems • Number of houses no legally own • Number of people living per house • Number of low income houses needed
5.Water access and sanitation	• Potable water access • Sewage system • Water treatment facilities • Energy access • Public services network • Natural gas access • Recycling process • Telephone service	• Number of houses without access of potable water • Number of houses without sewage system • Number of houses with legal energy access • Zones without public services network • Zones without a proper way to disposal trash • Number of houses without telephone access.
6.Transportation system and roads	• Road condition • Transportation system • Secondary roads condition	• Lengthily and quality of road access network • Public transportation quality service level • Access road condition
7.Organization and democratic practices	• Community organization • Local community groups • Regional organization	• Number of person that belong to local organizations • Knowledge about public and civil organization acting within this region • Number of organization that represent an specific group such as indigenous
8. Environment	• Risk management knowledge • Housing placed in zone of high	• Number of person currently involve in local management programs

	risk	• Number of houses which need to be relocated
9.Public space infrastructure	• Local infrastructure • Public space access • Spare activities infrastructure	• Zones with firefighter station, libraries, burial ground services. • Number of people with access to sport courts, public parks. • People with access to public facilities
10. Cultural activities	• Access of cultural and intellectual activities	• Number of people with access to cultural activities • Number of local cultural presentation by season
11.Institutional presence	• Public institution efficiency and accountability	• Perceived quality in issues such as participation in strategic plan programs. • Perceived accountability
12.Communication system	• Communication service level	• Number of household with access to telephone, TV and newspaper • Number of houses with computers • Number of computers with internet access.

Table1. List of variables and indicators

7. Coverage of the project

A strategic zone of the North West region of Colombia is composed by three municipalities named La Apartada; Montelibano y Puerto Libertador would be divided in different 8 macro zones, 47 zones and, 270 clusters or communities districts. Those divisions include urban and rural areas as well. This arrangement is made, in order to collect in a simple and organize way the information needed. One of the goals of this project is to be sustainable over time. In order to overcome this challenge this project must be implemented and tested in specific regions along the country. One suitable place to introduce this project is located in the North West region of Colombia. This region is known for presenting several problems such as high unemployment, low income household, education access, health care access, potable access and sanitation, regional army conflict among others. There are three small villages and rural areas that will be selected within this project called Montelibano, La Apartada and Puerto Libertador. Moreover population number in the rural and urban area counts up to 108.000 inhabitants.

8. Dissemination strategy

Colombia is divided by 32 departments and the pilot test will take place inside one of them called Cordoba.
There are two main outcomes from this process. The first one is a tally electronic sheet that will provide a data base with complete set of core variables. This data base must be updated in the timely basis, or at least one time per year. This data base will be available through several electronic copies on CD's. Moreover a complete journal will be available including detail information for population that could not access a computer. Local project management office from each municipality will receive electronic and hard

copies. They will be in charged to disseminate this information with the regional office of development of the governor department. Second, it will be the ultimate step signing a new pact of development between the association of local zones and the major offices. Finally the most important outcomes of disseminating this information are to compromise public budget allocation into projects that would ameliorate the core variables indicators of quality of life over time.

Data Source	**Processing stage**	**Data users / validation**
Local board of director in each macro zone	✓ NGO office ✓ Local association Assembly	Project manager officer (Major office)
General population within this region		Local board assembly
		Regional project manager officer
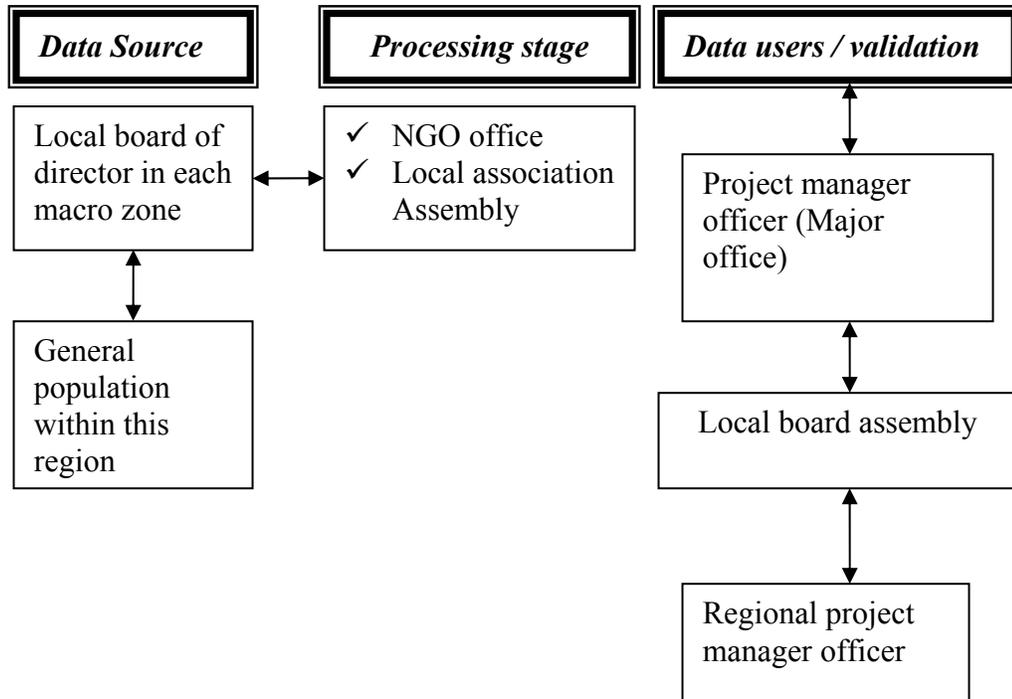
Figure 2. Information flow dissemination

9. Time table activities

Time table activities		I Quarter			II Quarter			III Quarter			IV Quarter	
Time	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Actvities												
Stage I												
Review previous and current monitoring system	■											
Create a methodology and improve draft design		■										
Stakeholder commitment such as local councils and major municipalities		■										
Sensibly and disseminate the pilot test within the community		■	■									
Submitting final design				■								
Stage II												
Divide the target region in different zones, neighborhood and small rural clusters		■										
Draft outlining guiding rules to organize local assemblies		■										
Elect democratic representatives from each zone.		■	■									
Establish data base that would help to handle information properly		■										
Conduct a training workshop to introduce the pre-test		■										
Implement survey approach					■	■						
Data collection and processing					■	■	■					
Data analysis and validation							■	■				
Information disemination								■	■			
Local asembly meeting - Local majors participation										■		
Presentation regional project portfolio											■	
Final report												■

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10. Institution and personnel

The following team of professionals will lead the CBMS project in the North West region of Colombia. Additional staff from different areas of San Isidro will assist this process such as accounting office, project management office and internal control office.

- ✓ **Ms Ana Perez. - Project director – Head of Community Development Area**
- ✓ **Mr. Andres Castro – Assistant research**
- ✓ **Mr. Gustavo Sanchez – Associate research**
- ✓ **Ms Belinda – Junior assistant**
- ✓ **Mr. Luis Fernando Lopez. Urban and Rural expert planner consultant**
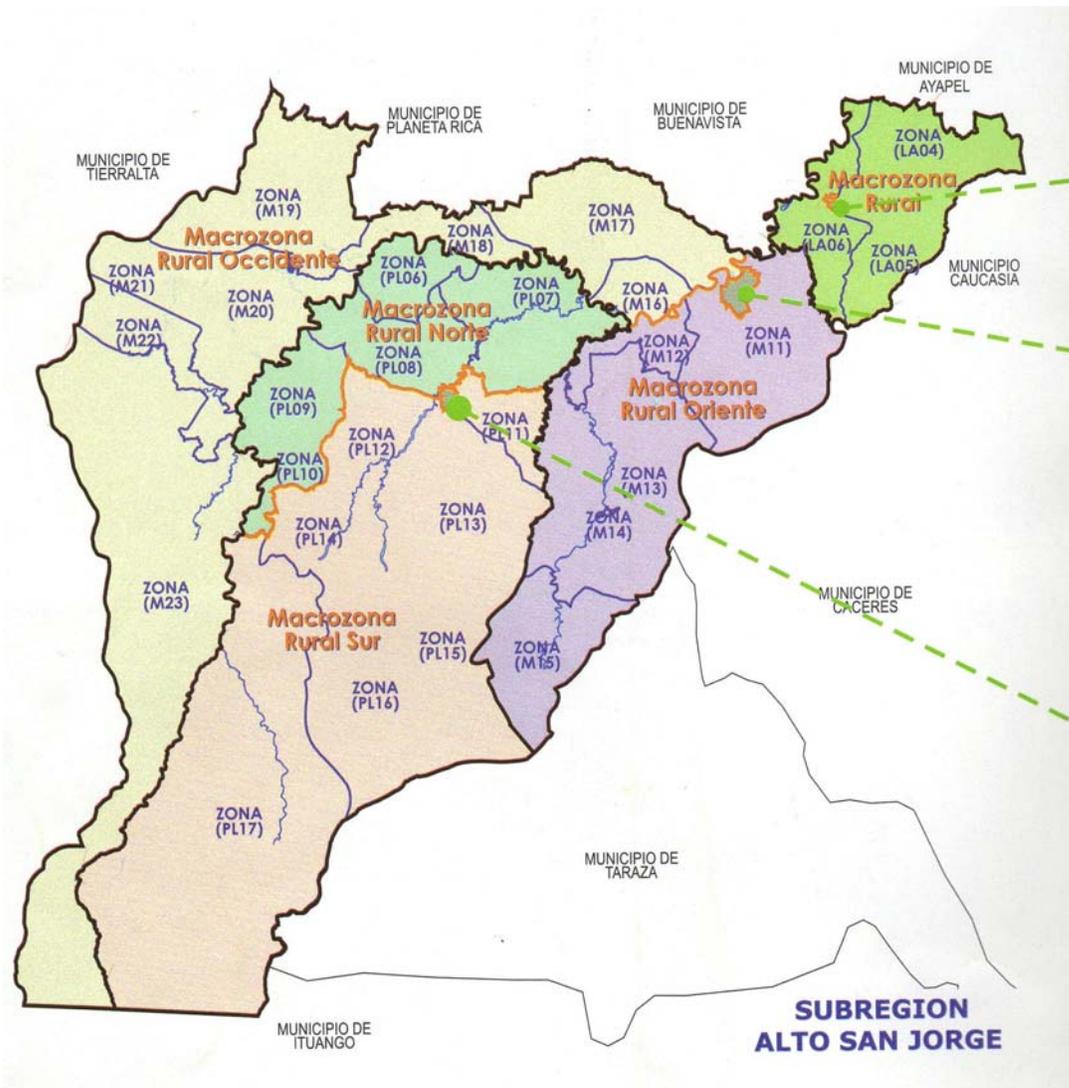- ✓ **Data collector group – 270 local elected leaders**

Figure 3. Map region evaluation