



ACCELERATOR LAB, MEXICO  
*Sensemaking series*

# Voices of the Isthmus

What does the Indigenous Consultation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec mean for the people who participate in it?



*Sensemaking series*

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accelerator  
labs



## **Voices of the Isthmus**

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Consultation of the Isthmus of  
Tehuantepec mean for the people  
who participate in it?*

Sensemaking Series

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### **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).**

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*Mexico City, April 2020*

This document is the result of an applied research activity of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Accelerator Lab in Mexico. Thanks to the openness of the Mexican Government, we witnessed the processes that were initiated in the territory, when the indigenous communities were consulted about the construction of a regional development programme, specifically the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme. This activity was carried out to serve as a platform giving voice to the people who participated in it. It is through their experience that we identify the challenges, faced by society and government, that can be overcome by working in a coordinated manner on common goals.

The Accelerator Labs are a global initiative with which the UNDP is creating the world's largest and fastest learning network on sustainable development challenges. Each Lab is made up of a multidisciplinary team dedicated to exploring and identifying emerging indicators, mapping grassroots solutions and local innovators, and promoting a culture of experimentation that builds evidence of what works and why. The Accelerator Labs work to incorporate new skills into the UNDP portfolio and to develop methods that more effectively address complex problems, while simultaneously facilitating faster learning in a network focused on solving global development challenges. Its objective is to inject innovation into the organization and contribute to re-imagining development for the 21st century, in order to find solutions that meet the complexity of the challenges faced by society today.

The case of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme and the consultation through which its strategic objectives were created is of particular relevance for sustainable development in Mexico. It represents a vision for development that aims at increasing economic activity from the standpoint of inclusion, sustainability and full respect for the history, culture and traditions of the Isthmus region. For the UNDP it is essential to assist in the articulation of common ground between the communities and the Mexican Government in order to achieve the Programme's objectives. Therefore, we will continue working with the government and the communities to build a more democratic, inclusive and sustainable Mexico.

*Lorenzo Jiménez de Luis*  
*Resident Representative*  
*UNDP United Nations Development Programme in Mexico*





In accordance with Article 25 of the Mexican Constitution, it is established that the State is responsible for leading the development of the nation, while guaranteeing it to be integral and sustainable. However, the history of economic development over the last four decades in Mexico shows a country with inequalities, disparities, low-economic growth and little capacity to offer opportunities. This situation is mainly found in the south-southeast of the country where the need exists, and is evident, for the State to reorient development models and public investment priorities, as well as to commit to ceasing and reversing these social and economic inequalities, intrinsic to its responsibilities.

Therefore, the current Mexican government has decided to implement projects and programmes that aim to generate the necessary conditions to improve the population's well-being, especially for those living in economic deprivation. In this regard, Mexico's 2019-2024 National Development Plan proposes the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme as one of its regional projects, a public policy instrument aimed to promote conditions that stimulate economic and social growth in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. This programme is made up of 79 municipalities, 46 in the State of Oaxaca and 33 in the State of Veracruz.

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme's main objective is to promote local economic growth while fully respecting the history, culture and traditions of the Isthmus, and the promotion of sustainable economic development for the region, as well as the productive capacity in the sectors with the greatest potential.

It is clear that no real change, improvement or development will occur in the country if it fails to be inclusive. Therefore, all indigenous communities should be invited to participate in this new vision and opportunity. It has been recognized that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is an obligation of the Mexican State and a right of indigenous and Afro-Mexican peoples, since they are the focus of public policy and strategic projects, where their participation is guaranteed in administrative decision-making and legislative measures that may affect them.

Under these considerations, the content, objectives, strategies and actions of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme were developed through dialogue between the towns and communities in the project's impacted area. This was done in order to incorporate their vision and specific culture, and to design the mechanisms for indigenous communities to participate in a fair and equitable way, according to the benefits proposed in the "Alternative Nation Project 2018-2024".

The consultation of indigenous communities was organized through Regional Consultative Assemblies. Local authorities as well as institutions representing the indigenous communities participated in the consultations. The indigenous communities have the right to self-determination; thus, the consultation was regulated by this principle: to freely determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development. The Regional Consultative Assemblies are where the opinions, suggestions and proposals expressed by indigenous communities and government departments are taken into consideration in the creation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme.

The indigenous consultation ensured that the results respect and guarantee the collective expression of the communities, and the agreements strengthen the well-being and development of the indigenous communities of the region of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Additionally, both men and women were invited to participate, with the purpose of procuring gender equality, respecting their right to participation and decision-making, without pressure or distinction of any kind. Furthermore, an adequate and respectful way of involving women was always sought during all phases of the process.

The Consultation process began on 30 and 31 of March at seven venues along the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Subsequently, the first follow-up meetings were held on 18 and 19 May at the same seven venues, and the process concluded with second follow-up meetings on October 5 and 6. In total, 21 consultative assemblies were held with approximately 5,000 participants from 12 indigenous communities, one Afro-Mexican community and the participation of more than 100 public officials.

A comprehensive development in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a matter of urgency. In particular, the inclusion of regional indigenous communities in this development should be guaranteed. To this end, a fairer distribution of income and wealth is an indispensable condition. Mexico, especially, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, has a cultural wealth that gives identity and a sense of belonging to the region. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme will show that wealth to the world.

*Lic. Rafael Marín Mollinedo  
Managing Director  
Isthmus of Tehuantepec Interoceanic Corridor*

## VENUE

## COMMUNITIES

Santiago Laollaga/  
Ixtepec, Oaxaca

Binnizá (Zapotec)

Jaltepec de Candayoc,  
Oaxaca

Ayuuk (Mixe), Chinantec  
and Mazatec

San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca

Ikoots (Huave)

San Pedro Huamelula,  
Oaxaca

Chontal

Santa María Chimalapa,  
Oaxaca

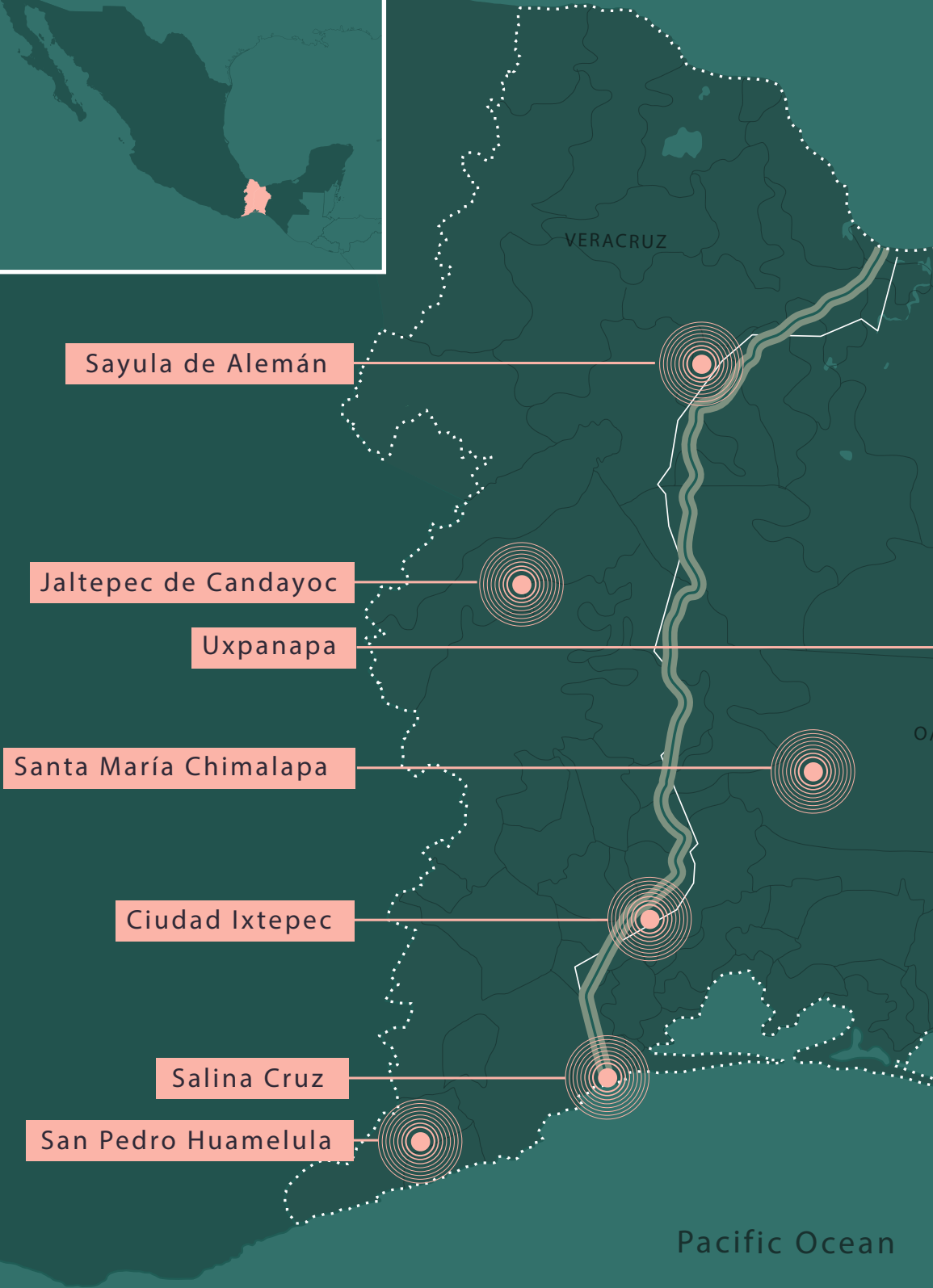
Zoque

Oteapan/Sayula de  
Alemán, Veracruz

Mixe, Mixtec, Nahuatl,  
Afro-Mexican and Popoluca

Uxpanapa, Veracruz

Chinantec, Zoque,  
Zapotec, Totonac  
and Tzotzil



Sayula de Alemán

Jaltepec de Candayoc

Uxpanapa

Santa María Chimalapa

Ciudad Ixtepec

Salina Cruz

San Pedro Huamelula

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AXACA



**Glossary**

<b>BIENESTAR</b>	Secretaría de Bienestar <i>Ministry of Welfare</i>
<b>CFE</b>	Comisión Federal de Electricidad <i>Federal Electricity Commission</i>
<b>CIIT</b>	Corredor Interoceánico del Istmo de Tehuantepec <i>Isthmus of Tehuantepec Interoceanic Corridor</i>
<b>CONAGUA</b>	Comisión Nacional del Agua <i>National Water Commission</i>
<b>INAH</b>	Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia <i>National Institute of Anthropology and History</i>
<b>INPI</b>	Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas <i>National Institute of Indigenous Peoples</i>
<b>PDIT</b>	Programa para el Desarrollo del Istmo de Tehuantepec <i>Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme</i>
<b>PEF</b>	Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación <i>Federation Expenditure Budget</i>
<b>PEMEX</b>	Petróleos Mexicanos <i>Mexican Petroleum</i>
<b>SEDATU</b>	Secretaría de Desarrollo Agrario Territorial y Urbano <i>Ministry of Territorial and Urban Agrarian Development</i>

<b>SEGOB</b>	Secretaría de Gobernación <i>Ministry of Interior</i>	1 3
<b>SEMARNAT</b>	Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales <i>Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources</i>	
<b>SEP</b>	Secretaría de Educación Pública <i>Ministry of Public Education</i>	
<b>RAN</b>	Registro Agrario Nacional <i>National Agrarian Register</i>	
<b>SS</b>	Secretaría de Salud <i>Ministry of Health</i>	
<b>STPS</b>	Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social <i>Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare</i>	





### **Voices of the Isthmus. What does the Indigenous Consultation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec mean for the people who participate in it?**

This report presents the results of an exploratory investigation carried out by a team of anthropologists and documentary filmmakers. This team accompanied a delegation of officials from the federal government and the state governments of Oaxaca and Veracruz during the Second Meeting for Monitoring and Verifying Agreements<sup>1</sup> of the consultation with authorities and representative institutions of the municipalities and indigenous communities of the Binnizá (Zapotec), Ayuuk (Mixe), Zoque, Ikoots (Huave), Chontal, Chinantec, Mazatec, Mixtec, Popoluca, Nahuatl, Totonac, Tzotzil and Afro-Mexicans, settled in the areas of impact where the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme will be implemented.

This report gathers the voices and experiences of the people who participated in the seven assemblies organized by the Mexican Government on October 5 and 6 2019, across different municipalities in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region. To achieve this, a mission of four groups was arranged, made up of UNDP representatives as well as researchers and documentary filmmakers, organized as follows:

MISSION	TEAM	OCTOBER 5	OCTOBER 6
Group A	UNDP, Research team, Documentary Filmmakers	Ciudad Ixtepec, Oax.	Santa María Chimalapa, Oaxaca.
Group B	UNDP and Research team	Salina Cruz, Oax.	Uxpanapa, Veracruz.
Group C	UNDP and Research team	San Pedro Huamelula, Oax.	—
Group D	UNDP and Research team	Jaltepec de Candayoc, Oax.	Sayula de Alemán, Veracruz.

1 The first Follow-up Meeting and Agreement Review was held in May 2019. Prior to that, an assembly was held to define the priorities of indigenous communities in March of the same year.

The methodological strategy for gathering information consisted of documenting firsthand the experience of the assemblies through non-participant observation and interviews with those attending, including federal, state, and local government officials, in addition to people from the communities. Additionally, Group A performed the video ethnography exercise that gives substance to the documentary video that accompanies this report.

The consultation process in the seven locations initially served as a way to get to know, access and observe the diversity within the governmental apparatus, as well as the cultural and indigenous diversity. These elements will undoubtedly have to be taken into account during the implementation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme.

This process has been and continues to be very important to those participating in it, beyond shedding light on the cultural diversity represented through the observation work and interviews. On one hand, it is an opportunity for many to present, in person, their demands concerning their community's needs, such as health, education, agrarian issues and basic infrastructure. On the other hand, officials of government agencies have obvious and distinct levels of social awareness training and preparation, needed to effectively address the community, to establish dialogue and to problem-solve with the communities and their representatives.

As a result of being present at the consultations, hearing community comments and needs, it was possible to identify that the Mexican Government's image is more favorable among those in attendance. According to the participants, this consultation process sets a precedent compared to previous governments, allowing them to be heard and to listened to, which represents a first step in building participatory democracies that attend to, and follow up on, people's specific demands.

This multi-agency process compels public servants to illustrate concrete actions that build and generate results as to the extent of awareness and empathy created by these types of experiences. Conversely, this implies organizational and participatory exercises within in each of the visited communities. It also raises the question as to the joint responsibility in improving living conditions and caring for the territory of and for the people who live there.

The seven assemblies were held with comparable informational content and in similar physical spaces. In every case, an attempt was made to follow the same schedule. However, as to be expected, the reactions were different at each location, independent of the ethnic and cultural diversity evident at each meeting, as well as the requests to their specific problems. The progress

of each assembly varied from those with little to any antagonism at all in a friendly atmosphere, and others were full of aversion and moments of tension among all the participants. There were also others riddled with interruptions, interjection of ideas and demands, general notice and in building and reaching agreements.

Just as the diversity of the social and cultural contexts throughout the region are unconcealed, the same is true of the expectations at each assembly and venue. Opinions vary and credibility relating to the process of the consultation extends from a mistrust of the government, which some participants pointed out, is just "more of the same". However, hope, openness and an acceptance of a process of dialogue also prevails where the starting point is the formulation of a common working agenda towards a future that brings benefits not only in the short term for a few, but for all generations to come.

The binding and democratic nature of the consultations is staked in legality that permeates the legitimacy of the struggles and actions of the communities. It emphasizes that compliance, advocacy and the continuity of agreements arising from the consultations will depend on the joint-responsibility between the State, communities and individuals: some by governing and ensuring that decisions are free and informed, and others by exercising their right of participation, listening and active expression regardless of the point of view expressed.

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the south-southeast of Mexico is the region with the shortest distance between coastlines, 230 kilometers away. This represents a development opportunity to efficiently connect the southwestern coastal area with the eastern coast of the country, in such a way that natural resources and production can be transported from one place to another quicker and easier. However, this region is home to different cultural realities, inheritors of ancient Mesoamerican traditions, which imply different ways of understanding the territory, nature, landscape, habitat, and cultural identities. All these elements should be taken into consideration as they affect the way development throughout the region is locally understood and conceptualized.

The idea of building an interoceanic corridor is not new; attempts to create a corridor of this type and in this region date back centuries. At the beginning of the second decade of the 19th century, the idea was latent among American and Mexican rulers and business leaders, but it solely remained a feasibility study. During the Mexican-American War of 1847, the US Government insisted that it be granted rights to free transit through the Isthmus area. However, the Mexican Government did not yield, and instead chose to cede the northern territories of the country. After the turn of the century, the United States continued to insist for free transit through the Isthmus area via their government, diplomatic corps, and business leaders. Studies indicated that it was the best option, superior to a canal in Nicaragua or Panama. After more than a century of debate, in January 1907, Porfirio Díaz inaugurated the 321-kilometer railway between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean. Soon after, in 1910, the Mexican Revolution began, but the decline of the project began in earnest after the inauguration of the Panama Canal in 1914. In 2018, after a century of neglect and failed initiatives to revitalize the corridor, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced the renovation of the railway project on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the objective of establishing an interoceanic corridor.

For the implementation and development of this project, the government established the parastatal company Isthmus of Tehuantepec Interoceanic Corridor (CIIT). A decentralized public body, with legal status and its own assets, not sectorized, and with the capacity to generate resources. The parastatal company has two objectives:

- Implement a logistics platform and build the physical, social and productive infrastructure necessary to strengthen the economic base of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region. For this, CIIT will have license to provide administration services in the ports of

Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz and Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, and its connection via rail transport.

- Lead the implementation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme (PDIT), a public policy instrument aligned to the National Development Plan, that lays the foundations to give a boost to the regional economy under the principles of respect for the environment and the opinion of the communities, striving to benefit the local population.

In the Federal Expenses Budget (PEF) project, the CIIT has more than 3 billion pesos in 2020 to carry out its work, which will be used mainly for remodeling the railway and the two ports. In addition, the company has powers to conduct all types of legal acts and contracts for the establishment and operation of the multimodal logistics platform, as well as any other action that contributes to the development of the region, including the preparation of studies, projects and consultations for the identification of productive vocations.

In this context, CIIT invited the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in particular, the UNDP Deputy Resident Representative and the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Mexico to attend as “observers” of the consultation work. This work was carried out by the Mexican Government with the representative institutions of the municipalities and the indigenous communities belonging to the villages of Binnizá (Zapotec), Ayuuk (Mixe), Zoque, Ikoots (Huave), Chontal, Chinantec, Mazatec, Mixtec, Popoluca, Nahua, Totonac, Tzotzil and Afro-Mexican villages, situated in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec of the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, located in the area of impact where the PDIT will be implemented, headed by inter-institutional relations and government branches. Attendance as “observers” does not imply institutional validation of the consultation process by UNDP or the United Nations. Rather it implies acting as sense makers, meeting the people attending, exploring the dynamics that are generated and the lessons learned that can be shared about the process.

The consultation aims to receive opinions, proposals, and suggestions from indigenous peoples and communities regarding what the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme should contain and incorporate into its concept, design and implementation, guaranteeing an integral, intercultural and sustainable development of the region. Also, this exercise seeks to start the process of establishing agreements with the indigenous towns and communities that are in the project’s area of impact, regarding their participation in the implementation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme (PDIT), as well as a fair and equitable distribution of benefits.

*Voices of the Isthmus* is an exercise that, from an applied research standpoint, makes it possible to sense and understand what the consultation exercise

means for those who participate, by portraying their voices when identifying relevant problems on the spot in order to attend to and achieve the purposes of the PDIT, including 5 strategic objectives:

1. To strengthen the social and productive infrastructure in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region.
2. To promote a new model of economic growth focused on development for the benefit of the entire population of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.
3. To guarantee the coordination of up-and-coming actions to benefit the Isthmus of Tehuantepec population in extreme poverty.
4. To increase biodiversity and improve water, soil and air quality, with a focus on sustainability in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region.
5. To protect, strengthen and disseminate the linguistic and cultural diversity, memory and cultural heritage of indigenous, Afro-Mexican and similar groups of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, through actions that guarantee their participation and cultural rights.

This report was conceptualized by the UNDP Accelerator Lab of Mexico, which, in addition to this narrative document, prepared a video ethnography exercise to accompany this innovative approach to the region and the people who inhabit the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

The Accelerator Labs are part of a new global effort by UNDP to inject innovation into the efforts of the organization and its allies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2019, UNDP created 60 Labs that serve 78 countries, including Mexico, in which the organization has a presence. The Lab strives to incorporate new skills and techniques oriented towards social innovation and people-centered design, to more effectively address complex problems and to learn how to solve global development challenges in an accelerated and networked way.

The Lab provides a set of strategic services to UNDP areas and their allies to more effectively address complex problems. These services are:

- **Sensemaking:** The ability to identify development challenges that are relevant to address in a complex and dynamic environment.
- **Collective Intelligence:** New ways of getting an in-depth look at what is happening in the territory and designing mechanisms of responsibility and transparency.
- **Solutions Mapping:** Diversify the way solutions are designed, starting from the identification of innovations that people have developed, based on their own experience dealing with the challenges they face.
- **Portfolio of Experiments:** Design and create portfolios of experiments that are capable of triggering systemic changes and generate agile learning about actionable solutions.

The Lab's method consists of the following phases.

1. **First, to give us the space to make SENSE** the development challenges that people have in their communities, while avoiding rushing into solution proposals without first understanding the context in which the problems arise, as well as the way in which the interactions occur. Subsequently, it is a matter of identifying where the opportunities for change exist and focusing efforts there.
2. **The second phase is to EXPLORE** to have a better understanding of the challenges from the perspective of those who face them and propose solutions that stem from the changes that people are willing to make or already do.
3. **The third phase consists of TESTING** different solutions experimentally, prioritizing the construction of evidence and embracing failure to create an environment where learning about what really works flourishes, before committing large sums of resources.

4. **The fourth phase is to GROW** which involves incorporating what has been learned into the systems it seeks to affect.



This work, together with the video ethnography that accompanies this study, belongs to the first phase. It was fundamentally an exercise **to SENSE the challenges of the PDIT consultation process**. The goal was to go with an open mind to make sense of the challenge ahead, understanding what this consultation means for both government representatives and communities, and what is required for the correct implementation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme (PDIT).

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The methodological strategy for gathering information consisted of documenting firsthand the experience of the assemblies through non-participant observation and interviews with those attending, including federal, state, and local government officials, in addition to people from the communities. Additionally, Group A performed the video ethnography exercise that gives substance to the documentary video that accompanies this report.

Every person participating in the research was told that the purpose of the study was to document their experience through interviews, observation, photography and video. They were informed that the information and the terms of their participation would be used as follows:

- Their participation consisted of an interview.
- They were not obligated to answer the questions and if at any time they felt uncomfortable, did not want to answer, or wanted the interview to end, it would not be a problem.
- The interview could be recorded (video or audio) with their consent.
- Their participation would not have any cost nor would they be paid for the interview.
- The interview would not be part of the consultation and their demands would not be referred to either the government or the United Nations for follow-up.
- The information would be used exclusively for research purposes by the United Nations Development Programme.

The anthropological and especially the ethnographic approach consisted of taking notes of the dynamics that the researcher identified through the non-participant observation during the consultations. After the process, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which began by explaining to the interviewee the reasons for the interview and obtaining their written consent for the use of any produced materials, with audio and / or video support catering to the different identified profiles of attendees, participants and experiences.

In addition to asking and delving into their concerns, expectations, challenges and significance regarding the consultation, video ethnography makes it possible not only to listen to the interviewees' speech but also to tape gestures and body language, which express a diversity of positions and postures that would be impossible to study in detail if it was not for the footage captured on video.

During the design and planning of the interviews, the specific factors inherent to their development in the context of the fieldwork were evaluated. Two factors were prioritized: those related to the transformations that could occur when interviewing people not used to being recorded, and the best way to implement the ability of the interviewer to devise appropriate questions that explain certain nuances, resulting from the diversity of positions and actors.

## Voices of the Isthmus: The Venues

Historically, the Isthmus has been a region marked by social exclusion, low economic performance, high levels of violence and environmental degradation. At the same time, it has a richness and sociocultural diversity that complicates any type of government intervention. Therefore, these factors led to difficulties with this exercise, which was one of consultation and attention to needs. In this region, different indigenous groups coexist: Zapotec, Huave, Chinantec, Mixe, and Nahuatl. Their specific cultural realities reveal diverse and particular forms of lives, supported by a common worldview and relational strategies where the natural landscape, resources, and agricultural and livestock uses and techniques are part of a ritual narrative. In this regard, the Isthmus represents a set of cultural otherness whose identity and relationship with the landscape highlights the need for understanding from the governmental bodies, in order to know the different visions existing in the region. These generate different impacts in relation to development projects and is why it is vital for them to be heard.

*Voices of the Isthmus* collects the testimonies of the "Second Follow-up Meeting and Agreement Review with the authorities and representative institutions of the municipalities and indigenous communities of the Binnizá (Zapotec), Ayuuk (Mixe), Zoque, Ikoots (Huave), Chontal, Chinantec, Mazatec, Mixtec, Popoluca, Nahuatl, Totonac, Tzotzil and Afro-Mexican, settled in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec" located in the area of influence where the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme will be implemented, in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz. The following is a summary of the seven follow-up meetings that took place within the framework of the consultation. It should be noted that the same number of previous meetings have been held in all the localities so far.

## 1

# *Ciudad Ixtepec* Oaxaca

The event was held on Saturday, October 5, at a sports centre in Ciudad Ixtepec; the assembly began at 10:00 a.m. by taking attendance.

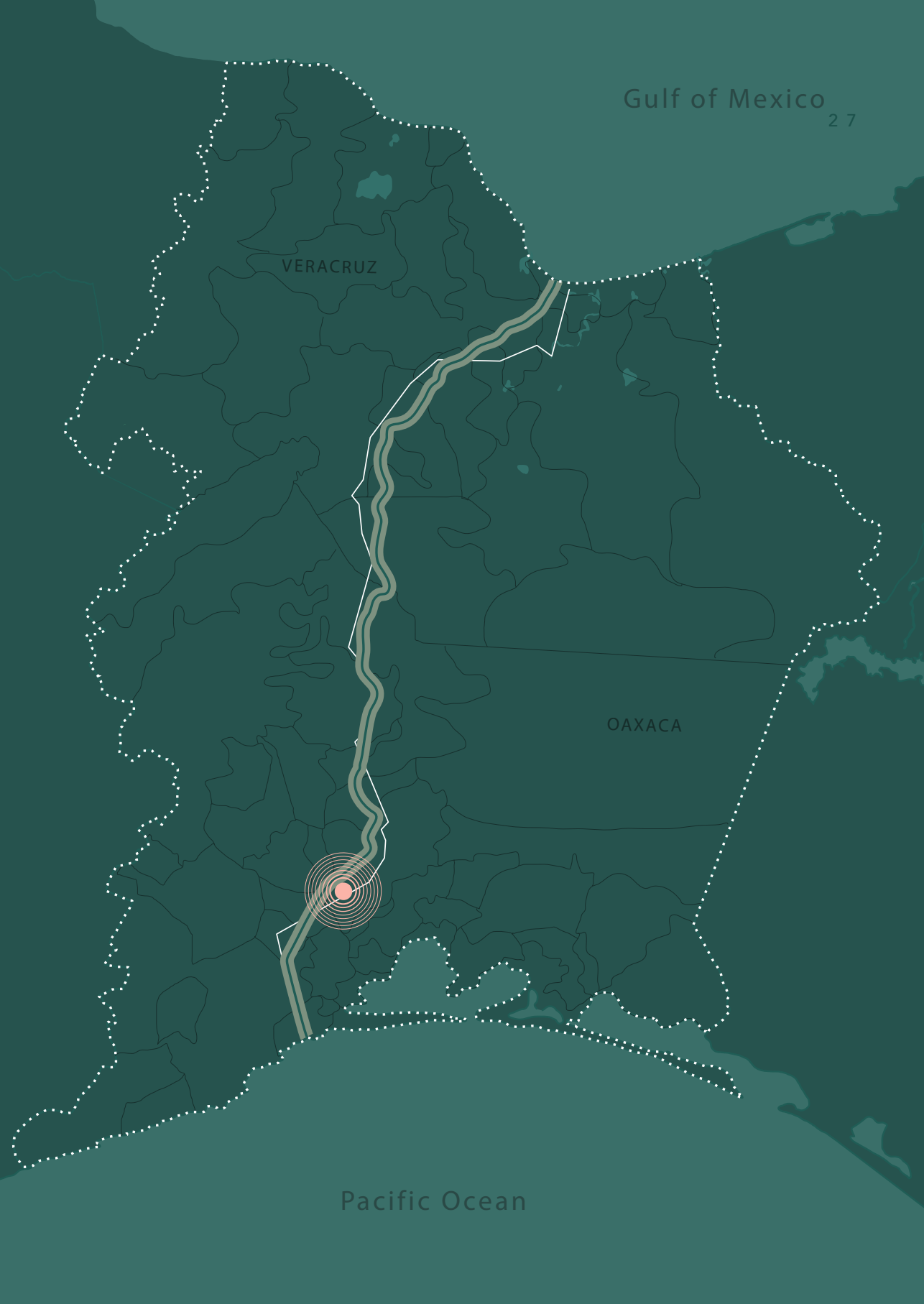
Gulf of Mexico

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OAXACA

Pacific Ocean





The Zapotec people are concentrated in the cities of Juchitán, Tehuantepec, Salina Cruz, Matías Romero, Ciudad Ixtepec and other neighboring towns located in the southeast of the state of Oaxaca. In this region of the Isthmus, mestizos and indigenous communities are the ones who define their territory through resistance and identity. The region is characterized by its natural resources, diversity, and in particular, the area has become an asset for wind energy projects. For this meeting, the municipal authorities and representatives of the Zapotec people, Binnizá or “people who come from the clouds”, as they are known, were summoned. The event was held on Saturday, October 5, at a sports centre in Ciudad Ixtepec; the assembly began at 10:00 a.m. by taking attendance.

At the beginning, the meeting had approximately 80 attendees, throughout the morning, the quorum increased to fill the room with approximately 200 people. Representatives from multiple agencies were included. The CIIT, the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) and the National Institute of Indigenous Communities (INPI) served as organizers and, in addition, 50 officials from various ministries from the federal government were present. On the community's side, the representatives of the Regional Consultation Assembly were present. They were designated in previous meetings. There were also community members, *ejidatarios*, peasants, fishermen, school directors, organized women from Juchitán and two INPI interpreters for the Diidxa Zaa or lowlands Zapotec language.

Government representatives were arranged in a presidium of officials, who were asked to climb onto a platform to be “seen” and recognized by the attendees. Once they introduced themselves, the assembly opened. Each official had the opportunity to present, without interruptions, the progress of their agency in fulfilling the requests that had been registered throughout previous meetings in the framework of the consultation process.

In general, during the assembly, it was observed that the attendees paid attention and took notes, while fanning themselves because of the suffocating heat. At the end of the government representatives' presentations, the order of attendees' participation was noted on a list. It was obvious that some of the attendees were listening as they summarized and paraphrased what government officials had presented about their demands and the work

yet to be done. This order was maintained throughout the entire follow-up meeting. Interruptions were rare. The voice of a local official drew attention to the importance of this type of consultation. Mr. Alberto, one of the officials, stated: *"The main challenge, as it is a consultation that deals with a megaproject ... is to counter people's perceptions that megaprojects are inherently bad, and that they bring the culture of death"*. He also pointed out that the opinion of community members about the megaproject must be respected, arguing: *"The opinion should be binding, they should have the ability to say 'No!' and should be respected, or say 'Yes! But under these conditions' and should be respected."*

## **Voices**

The participations, requests and comments were captured into the meeting minutes, which would be developed and shared later with all the participants. A primary result of the event was to present the guidelines for the future work proposal, the creation of strategic planning work groups for regional development and the creation of programmes. One concern that was emphasized throughout all participations was that representative relationships must be informed and collective. Thus, the communities will agree to support the CIIT project, provided that the demands of the localities regarding basic needs are prioritized. Among the demands of the people who participated in the Ciudad Ixtepec venue, energy issues stood out, such as: electricity costs, antagonistic relationships between wind-powered energy projects and communities, and the distribution of water, dams and water resource sanitation.

In the words of a participant, a native of the Juchitán municipality, Oaxaca, the importance of the consultations is that *"there must be a change, people should be allowed to express themselves very clearly, with great confidence and above all, to express what they go through in their villages."* Throughout the meeting, demands and voices were heard; however, not everyone spoke publicly. Observed at the end of the meeting were officials being approached individually by participants who gave them written requests or asked them questions about specific cases. This dynamic was important for people to further explore with specific officials the topics or technical matters that interested them.



In the interviews, people emphasized the progress represented by the exercise of being listened to and the opportunity to have a space for open dialogue with the government. Participants felt their voices were taken into consideration, even when they recognized that there was still a long way to go, and that their demands were still to be met and fulfilled. Two priorities in which both the people of the community and the officials agreed, were the task of generating trust and the complexity of making decisions together: government and community. One participant said: *“We are being heard and that, for us, is already an advance. We would like to have more radical changes because, even though we don’t want to be, we are under guidelines for what we call a neoliberal government, with rules that are in place of past governments.”*

The Interoceanic Corridor project generates expectations of economic growth for people, who made it clear that they were aware of the government’s challenge to articulate a mechanism of fast responses in order to face their problems and manage to work together for the common good. On this, they maintained moderate to low expectations. Undoubtedly, there was wide recognition on the part of government representatives regarding the pressure that comes from the responsibility to give results in a context of little trust. However, there was a general will among officials and participating communities, which materialized in the words of Mr. José, who defined the consultation as *“A form of work, which I think will make us move... meaning that government and people are going to come together, that is what it means to me, I do not think everyone feels the same way, but that is what it is; to join forces with the government and move forward.”*

## i n t e r v i e w

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 The most important thing about the consultation, in her words, was that: “Before, the federal government did not approach the towns, and that is what it is doing right now, consulting the current projects, and that is very important, because they take us into account, as a community, as indigenous communities.” Antonia saw the closeness with the current administration as an opportunity to make a change in the communities. For her, as a woman and mother of two children, the consultation was a way to participate, contribute and do things collectively. She told us that the project that was being promoted [referring to the Interoceanic Corridor] is important, especially for young people, because it will improve the economy and there will be more job opportunities or the chance to start a family business. “There will be something more for the whole community,” especially, “The schools, education, sports centres, that we are so in need of.”

Antonia

Representative  
in her  
community

\_ 59 years old



Enrique

Juchitán

elementary

director

\_52 years old



## i n t e r v i e w

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In response to our question, he asked: “How do we resolve the issue of coffee in the villages? How do we solve the problem of town limits?” Consultations must be a space that “allows people to express themselves very clearly and with great confidence and, particularly, to share what they experience in their towns. So, I would love for that to be collected, taken, shaped and returned as laws.” He believed that little by little, the consultations had been creating a kind of bubble or circle of trust between people and officials; however, he also believed that the real challenges were in “bringing progress towards the peoples.” He commented that he was aware of the fact that “historical lags” could not be “fixed” in “three months”. He considered the consultation as “an opportunity to express oneself,” and he clarified that even without a law, “never” had he been asked for his opinion “[directly]” by the government.

MaríaPrimaryteacher**i n t e r v i e w**

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For her, the role that women will have in the project was not clear, it was uncertain. “There is not a very clear route of how we, as native peoples, are going to be immersed in this investment hub and the concern, then, is that the approaches have not been followed up correctly, despite the fact that we have the support of the different state and federal agencies. I said it a while ago in my participation, how important it was for the presidents of the ejido commission, or the presidents of communal property, to also be present, because if not... we would not be moving forward.” Although she was very active in consultations, in her view, it seemed that it was still not possible to be listened to or taken into account in a real way. She wanted the needs and demands of the communities to be heard. María said that one of the biggest challenges was co-responsibility and accompaniment on issues. She elaborated on that by saying “We do not want this consultation to be simulated, but really an informed consultation, where we are all taken into account to make agreements that benefit everyone involved.”





## i n t e r v i e w

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For him, the consultation is a form of work, as he puts it: “It is going to make us move... meaning that government and people are going to come together, that is what it means to me, I do not think everyone feels the same way, but that is what it is; to join forces with the government and move forward.”. For José, being heard was a step forward, although he believed that the current government had yet to find the right approach to move things forward, without damaging the local organization. José pointed out that the challenges lie precisely in consulting with the community and what they called participatory workshops, not just a representation of the community. Speaking about what consultation meant to him, he emphasized the idea of “collecting the needs, impressions and concerns of the people to capture them and work together to pull the project programmes for the Isthmus region,” He pointed out that in 1961, they inaugurated the dam, but the project “collapsed” 10 years later, because it was planned from a desk. For him, it was necessary to know how people were feeling, and those feelings meant knowing the relationship between the people and the field, about organic crops. José told us: “We don’t want insecticides, fungicides or chemicals because they are hurting us.”

José

Farmer

\_ 64 years old

# 2

## *Santa María Chimalapa* Oaxaca

The assembly was held on Sunday, October 6,  
in the center of Santa María

Gulf of Mexico

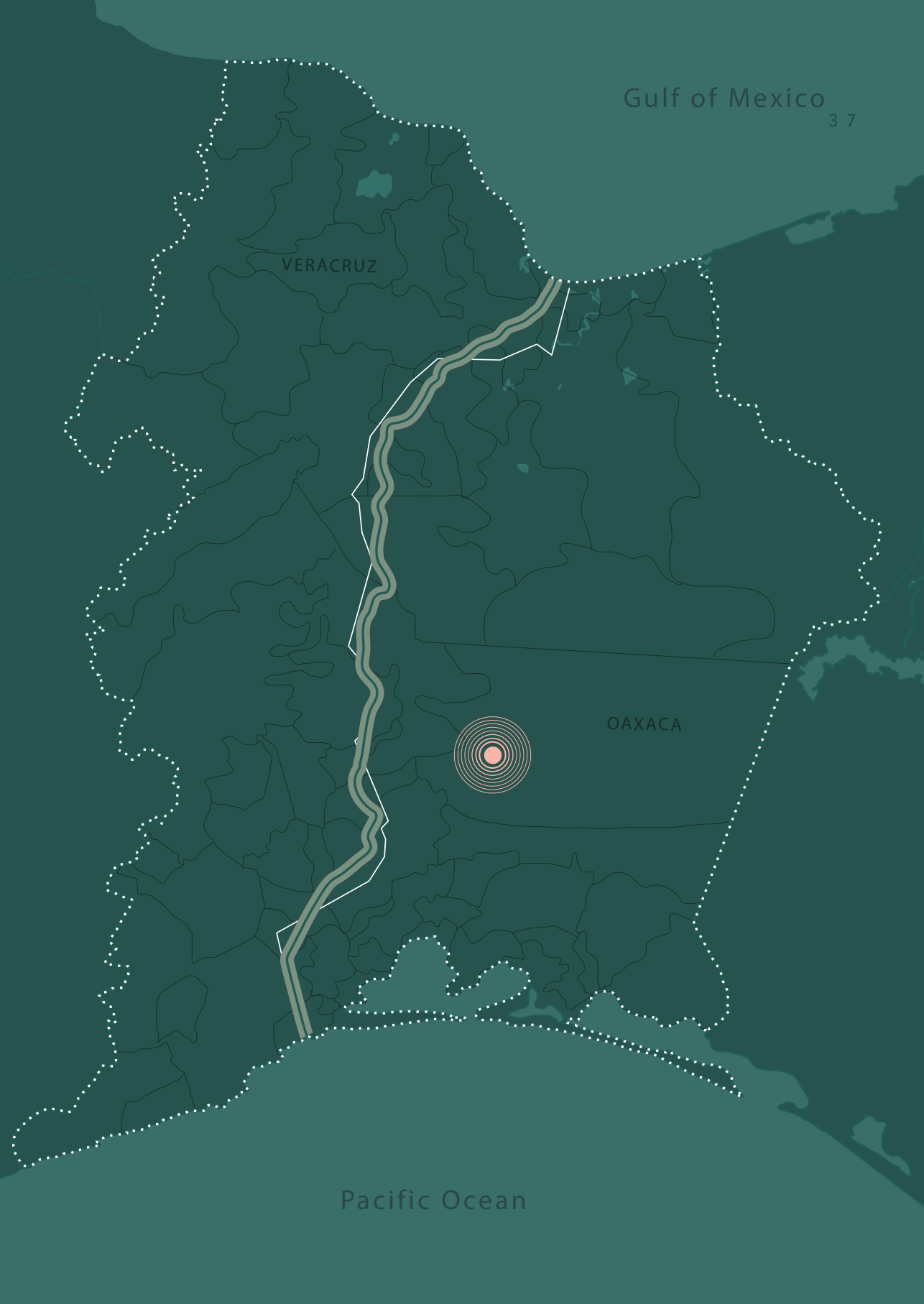
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VERACRUZ

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The people who attended Santa María Chimalapa were mainly from San Miguel and Santa María, towns separated by territorial conflicts. Because of this and due to the lack of infrastructure in general, there were people who made trips of up to 12 hours to attend the meeting that was no more than 100 kilometers away. The assembly was held on Sunday, October 6, in the center of Santa María, where the authorities and representatives of the Zoques peoples were summoned. This region is characterized by having ancestral, territorial and agrarian disputes that have not been resolved in decades: the resolution of disputes was the main demand of these people. In this assembly, from the beginning to the end, the feeling of disagreement was expressed, mentioning that it was “the same thing as ever”.

INPI staff encouraged those invited to register on the attendance list. Officials took their places at a table in the centre, with their backs to the wall and facing the audience. The agenda was proposed by the organizing institutions, the CIIT, SEGOB and INPI. The event began by introducing the officials who then went on to present the progress made so far. However, there were interruptions and permanent signs of disagreement with the way the agenda was imposed. People partaking were disorganized and people spoke in an uncontrolled way, with constant interruptions, and even worse when insisting that they did not want to hear more, they cried: “*what they are talking about is a lie*”.

The claims were mainly that there were no “concrete proposals” on the subject of historical interest of the communities regarding the conflict of the territory and the agrarian problems. They clarified at all times that “the land belongs to us”. In general, there was little participation of women during the assembly. However, it is worth mentioning the voice of a Zoque woman, a housewife and a Santa María Chimalapa resident, who spoke on the issue of access to healthcare: “*During the consultation on 31 March, the government personnel came here, [...] they came here to give a consultation. I had a problem with my husband, he had a hernia. Whenever the personnel from the government came, I wrote it down (about my husband’s health needs) and they ignored me.*” Although it was not necessarily the number one demand on the list, the issue of healthcare, in particular the lack of medical attention and health services, was one of the recurring demands.

The environment was characterized by a tense atmosphere full of diverse feelings. The most emotional participations were followed by shouts from the other participants in a tone of acceptance and adding to the demands that their colleagues made to officials. A peasant from the town of Santa María Chimalapa, Oaxaca told us: *“To this day, we have not received any response; the people were angry, but at the same time, then, they reasoned.”* The officials made several interventions trying to calm people down; however, this was only achieved once Rafael Marín, who led the meeting, agreed to organize a meeting on this particular issue with the Secretary of Agrarian Affairs in Matías Romero, Oaxaca.

### **Voices**

The meeting could be said to have functioned as a large assembly, in which multiple opinions were expressed followed by Zoque representatives deliberated to make decisions. Throughout the meeting it was possible to observe the profound heterogeneous community and in a forceful manner, it was possible to visualize what the public decision-making process is like, exposing different points of view until reaching consensus. In the course of the meeting, a time of deliberation was taken to accept the proposal to sit directly with the Ministry for Agrarian Affairs and achieved a more direct approach, which was why, in a tense environment, the follow-up meeting was adjourned.

When speaking with the people of the Chimalapas, they described themselves as “people of struggle”, as people who are not going to be fooled and even less “in my own home”, where decisions are made collectively. At the end of the assembly, the community leaders took the opportunity to specify upcoming dates and meeting places. Also, at that time spaces were opened for specific interactions between participants and officials, in order to deliver documents, exchange words and continue to point out topics of interest, such as territory and healthcare.

When asked about their expectations regarding the consultation, people denoted a certain “distrust”, as expressed by a 40-year-old Zoque man, a farmer and a primary school teacher: *“the idea of doing it (the consultation) is very good, the detail here that I find, is that several servants or several public people at the service of the state, have not fulfilled their function as they*

*should, we have shared ideas, points of view with many colleagues and with the authorities that represent us, both in the communal and agrarian offices, we hope that from the visits of public officials, they are forming or formulating a work scheme that is procedural for progress towards what we want".* However, it seemed that the communities were not completely convinced, commenting, for example, that in previous meetings they had proposed the working groups and felt that now they were being taken into account. They also highlighted that disputes over land tenure were historical burdens that go back generations, and said they were talking about the same demands that their parents, grandparents, and older generations had.

Despite the climate in which the meeting was held, it served, on one hand, to validate the importance that the inhabitants of the region give to these spaces and the general feeling of being listened to. On the other, it was stated that there is a great mistrust towards the Mexican Government. The interviews included a diversity of participants: housewives, peasants, community members, shopkeepers, and public officials. Three people were interviewed who did not know how to read or write, and when asked about the consultation they did not show clarity or knowledge about the Interoceanic Corridor, but they did expect things to improve and there was a positive feeling of being heard for the first time by the government.

In addition to the agrarian conflict, among the recurring themes were several accounts of people who had lost relatives due to lack of access to healthcare. The high occurrence of albino population and alcoholism in the community deserves to be mentioned. It was documented that many people were not fully aware or informed about the scope and implications of the Interoceanic Corridor or did not know the objective of the project. However, as a backdrop there was a narrative of well-being that the President had captured in his public speeches. According to Adán, a Zoque shopkeeper, confidence in the current administration was slowly being restored. Finally, it is important to note that there was very little participation by women at this venue.

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 For him, the consultation had been the first time that he had heard about the development project. Succinctly, he thought that, even if little by little, he hoped that what he had heard and what had been promised will come, and that they should be heard, because what had been said was what was real about the problems the community was experiencing. Even if things remained unchanged, Rogelio was willing to continue participating in the consultations, as it was still an opportunity to be heard.

Rogelio

Peasant

\_ 59 years old



Elmer

Comunero

\_ 33 years old



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Elmer is from Santa María, a 33-year-old comunero, and stated that: “lately we are being taken into account, but really, the one who is going to be directly affected are our Zapotec brothers. We, like Chimalapas [...] are a little outside, but ecologically speaking, it could affect us ... in the future. For my part, I can say that the strongest custom of our people is love for our lands, that is, beyond receiving an economic resource and receiving a job, I think we focus and we have the objective well set, our lands, and from there we are not going to change that matter for another one.” For Elmer, the consultations were not entirely trustworthy. He explained that more than once they had not complied with the community, the last one being the “wind power” project where they did not fulfill the agreements with the comuneros. Elmer trusts, as he calls it, “the head”, referring to the President, but not the people around him.

## i n t e r v i e w

As a woman, she is an active member of the community. Her work as a local official allows her to have a broad vision of the consultations and the project. In her opinion, if the government wants to carry out any project, it must guarantee the rights of the people to be consulted. She has traveled the 40 towns of the Isthmus and knows that these are very remote towns with no roads, there are only dirt roads, lacking services, so ensuring everyone's voice is already a great first challenge. "We have reached communities where we were told that no official had come before because there are no roads and there is no electricity ... In this particular case, the Consultation of the Zoque Indigenous Community has been held as an assembly of everyone and not only of representatives; for the Zoque indigenous community, the assembly is the highest authority." For her, without a doubt, the consultation process can be improved; however, having held more than 39 community assemblies in the region has allowed us to build an initial trust that must be sustained by attending to and following up on the agreements.

Ceyla

Local official

\_ 38 years old





Esteban

45

Shopkeeper

\_41 years old

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In part he attended the consultations because he has confidence in the new government, although there were still no results in his community. “We, as indigenous Zoques, express a number of concerns and [...]we are not very clear [about] a real advance from the first consultation to this, because there has not been a clear path to a solution, and the first issue that we want to recover, on the part of the government in this case, is this one, to give a solution to our agrarian problems.” Esteban explained that one of his concerns, and of both communities in general, was to help to solve the agrarian problems between Santa María Chimalapa and San Miguel Chimalapa, which are “ancestral problems.” For Esteban, it was important that in addition to the feeling of hope, there should be concrete proposals, in order to give the government “a vote of confidence”.

# 3

## *Salina Cruz* Oaxaca

On Saturday, October 5, was held in the  
municipal auditorium of the city of Salina Cruz



Gulf of Mexico

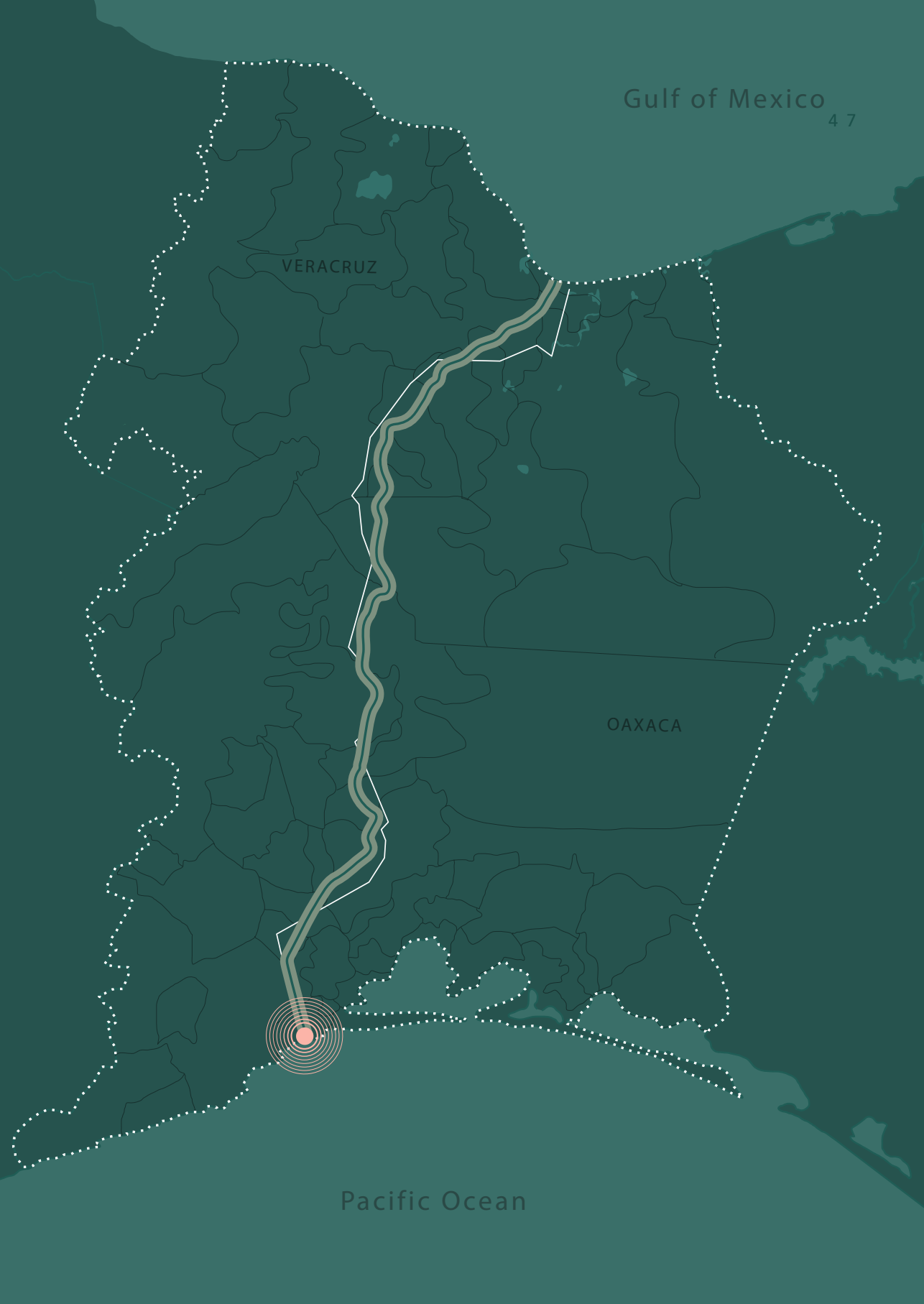
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On Saturday, October 5, an event was held in the municipal auditorium of the city of Salina Cruz, which brought together the authorities and representatives of the so-called "peoples of the sea" or "*Mareños*" of Oaxaca: San Mateo del Mar, San Dionisio del Mar, San Francisco del Mar and Santa María del Mar, localities that are located in southeast Oaxaca. The "peoples of the sea" are mainly made up of the indigenous Huave / Ikoots population. These towns and their communities were severely affected by the 2017 earthquakes. Because of what they suffered, as well as the lack of federal and state government support, there is a constant and energetic demand from the population of these localities.

Unlike other assemblies, this one could not start at 10:00 a.m. as planned, the lack of a quorum forced it to start at 11:00 a.m. Some representatives were slow to arrive at Salina Cruz, but due to the conflict that exists between the *Mareños* peoples it was decided that the meeting was going to be held there because it was considered neutral territory. In the meeting there were representatives of different agencies including: SEGOB, INPI, SEMARNAT, SEP, SEDATU, STPS and others, such as the National Agrarian Registry (RAN). On the part of the communities, it was mainly attended by representatives of the Regional Consultation Assembly, who were appointed in previous meetings. As an event open to the public, there was the presence of *ejidatarios*, community members, interested local population and family members.

The way in which people were arranged was a presidium table where local authorities (municipal presidents) and convening federal and state institutions such as CIIT, SEGOB, INPI and representatives of the government of the state of Oaxaca were seated. In front of them and at the same level, chairs were arranged in an auditorium mode where the local population and the rest of the public officials who were not in the presidium took their place. The assembly consisted of the public officials coming to the front to present their agencies progress in fulfillment of the requests that were being registered in the consultation process, and then moved on to speeches by the population. Some people reacted immediately to the format and proposed that there be space for their comments after each agency's interventions. After a general vote, it was decided to modify the format of the meeting and that was how the entire assembly finally developed. It was common to see people gasping for air from the suffocating heat.

## Voices

The voices heard at the meeting were those of clarification and complaint. The participants confronted all the officials one by one, but they did so in a calm manner, as it was rare to see conflicting voices. Interruptions were few and far between, no one felt tension of any kind. However, this did not mean that people were satisfied with how the interaction turned out.

The participants highlighted the demands of the community to the representatives of STPS, SEDATU and CFE. The first one was questioned about the absence and lack of access for the youth of the community to the “Youth Building the Future” programme, to which they immediately responded and asked for a list of the youth who met the requirements and who could potentially be beneficiaries. It was very important for the participants that the STPS representative accepted this deficiency and recognized that the programme had been slow to act in their locality. The same happened in the case of the CFE, where the community’s demands on the government-run company are well-known, especially those that have to do with the distribution of electricity in the area of the towns inhabited by the *Mareños*, where the communities suffer from a deficient service of electrical power. They argued that it is irregular and that they experience blackouts that can last for weeks. After a conversation on this topic, the residents themselves recognized that the CFE had carried out concrete and continuous actions in the area.

In most cases, the officials managed to appease people’s moods by generating work commitments. In other cases, the officials were unable to provide a solution or articulate a convincing proposal for the communities. For example, during the SEDATU representative’s talk, the questioning focused on the lack of concrete actions in the localities, since the reconstruction has not been completed two years after the catastrophic earthquakes, on the contrary, they feel the support from the authorities had all but ceased. The official did not have on-hand information about the actions carried out by the agency in the area as it was the first time visiting the site. This situation displeased the people who considered that the government representatives should have shown work continuity during the different meetings and with the same populations during the consultation; otherwise, it is a “waste of time”, because in each meeting it is necessary to update a new representative about what was discussed and agreed in previous meetings.

Beyond that, the consultation was carried out in a cordial atmosphere. There were critical moments, but this did not hinder the agreements and commitments that must be fulfilled by institutions and the community together within a framework of joint-responsibility. For many people in the *Pueblos del Mar*, the consultation represented the first opportunity to speak with federal authorities directly and without intermediaries. Both public servants and residents generally expressed their agreement with what they had advanced in the consultation process and recognized that trust between them had increased.

For the local population, these conversations represented the possibility of expressing, first-hand, their needs and concerns before a competent authority that gives them direct follow-up. In the words of Juan, a 62-year-old man from San Mateo del Mar, *"It is a way to begin a conversation to reach the communities and see what kind of needs we have and how we can solve them."* Likewise, Mr. José Cruz, a resident of San Francisco del Mar, told us how they organized in his community to discuss their needs: *"We met three days before coming here, so that people could tell us what they wanted, and later, upon returning; we held meetings to inform them on any updated agreements."*

It also highlights the case of Raquel, originally from San Francisco del Mar, an indigenous woman who reflected on the empowerment that she and her colleagues had acquired throughout the consultation process that began in March 2019. The local population had become more fluent in their arguments; they were no longer intimidated when speaking with federal officials, and they were increasingly speaking and asking for more precise and better-directed petitions. Raquel stated: *"The truth is that the guys have done very well, they are responding. I will admit that they are working, but if one begins to slack off, others also slack off"*. Similarly, Eufemio, 30 years old, commented: *"We have been growing together, or, well, improving the way we talk to each other and how we understand each other."*

In conclusion, the officials had recognized after the consultation that these assemblies *"Are an exercise in accountability [...] we take the requests and at the next meeting we must give accounts and [it is a] time of reflection and pulling together"*. The INPI representation stated: *"These consultations are very important. I do not remember that someone has come to ask the communities directly."*

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For Juan, 62, a resident of San Mateo del Mar, the consultations were to be held in his community; however, there was local rejection and therefore it had to be moved to Salina Cruz. For this reason, he considered there must be “a good-faith effort to reach the communities and see what kind of needs we have and how we can solve them.” Although he had participated in other local assemblies, he still believed that there was little clarity and more information was needed regarding the Transisthmian project. On one hand it will benefit them in terms of job opportunities, but on the other hand it will also affect them negatively, although they did not know how. Finally, for Juan, it was important that “the internal problems of the area are considered, such as the example of the Mareño peoples, who have conflicts and hostilities among them”.

Juan

Resident of  
San Mateo  
del Mar

62 years old



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Raquel is from Puerto Grande, San Francisco del Mar and she pointed out: “I am not afraid of anyone. Many people tell me that I am loudmouth, but that is not the case. We are demanding our rights and it is their job to enforce them.” She considered the consultations were an unprecedented fact: “The truth is that this is very good, because I believe that they had never come to ask us directly what we needed.” For her, it was a priority to recognize the role of women in the political activities of indigenous towns and her wish was that her community and region would have better economic and infrastructure conditions, because she wanted her children to have a better future. When asked about her expectations of the project, Raquel said she is not sure if the consequences would be good or bad, but considered the meeting process as an opportunity to request and negotiate with the authorities.

Raquel



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José Cruz lives in San Francisco del Mar, he is 50 years old and pointed out that in all the time he has lived “the authorities had never come” and considered: “They should come directly to the towns, but they are somewhat far away, and it would be better so that people get to know them and get to see them”. Furthermore, for him, local authorities should have greater communication with different populations and support them to resolve local conflicts. Although they were aware that this situation did not depend on government authorities, he believed that officials could have clearer ideas and be intermediaries for the resolution of conflicts among local communities.

José Cruz

\_ 50 years old



Kenia

Official



## interview

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The consultation process had been a type of round-trip learning experience. For Kenia, who works as an official, this was “a process in which both sides are learning, the State is learning to consult and relate to the people.” Also, the necessity to work in a strategic and intersectional way became evident among the different government agencies that converged on a public theme or issue. She pointed out the importance that “public policies must be cross-sectional as distinct government ministries are working on the same topics, it cannot be engaged from a single point of view.” For her, it was important to maintain this type of dialogue because it facilitated familiarity with the population that was going to be the direct beneficiary of the projects.

# 4

## *Uxpanapa* *Veracruz*

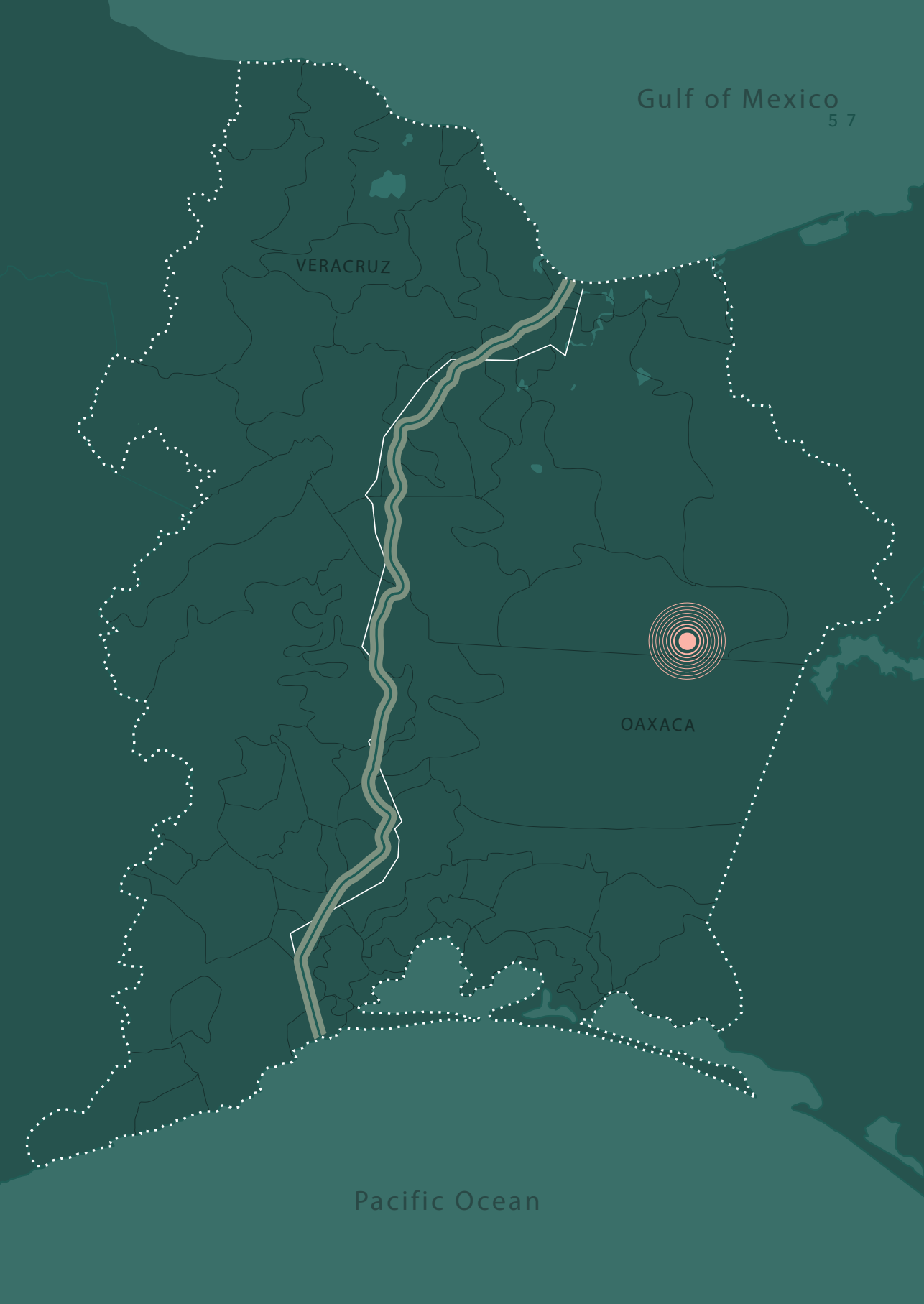
On Sunday, October 6, a meeting was held  
at a community center in the municipality of  
Uxpanapa, Veracruz

Gulf of Mexico  
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On Sunday, October 6, a meeting was held at a community center in the municipality of Uxpanapa, Veracruz, convening the authorities and representatives of the Chinantec, Zoque, Zapotec, Totonac, Tzotzil, indigenous population and migrants. These towns are located at the southern tip of the state of Veracruz. The population centers of the Uxpanapa Valley were founded in the 1970s, from villages displaced by the Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado dam. There, populations of different backgrounds coexist and maintain constant ties, above all, to stipulate social demands.

The follow-up meeting was scheduled to begin around 10:00 a.m. However, it was delayed and started around 11:00 a.m., when the INPI representative arrived. Representatives from different federal agencies were present, such as SEGOB, SEMARNAT, SEDATU, STPS, INPI and RAN. There was also representation from the state of Veracruz and the municipal authorities. The community representatives in attendance were mainly from the Regional Consultative Assemblies, appointed at previous meetings. But, as it was a public event there were *ejidatarios*, *comuneros* and representatives' relatives present. Outside the hall, at the community center facility, a small market was set up featuring artisan handicrafts and local products from projects supported by INPI. While the assembly was taking place in the hall, there was a market and vibrant atmosphere, where fruit, cocoa based beverages, textiles, extracts from medicinal plants and other local products were sold.

The dynamics of the meeting were for representatives of the government agencies to present their progress and then move on to a round of questions by local representatives. During the first two hours the meeting ran according to schedule. Then people in the community began to interrupt the presentations to draw attention to their demands. From that moment on, the meeting consisted of cross-interventions between government and community representatives.

## **Voices**

A constant call for attention was heard in the absence of representatives of the Ministries of Public Education (SEP) and Health (SS). Community participants stated that they had specific requests for these entities and voiced complaints that there were no corresponding public servants to direct

them to. In the face of these demands, the meeting organizers mentioned sending invitations to these entities, but were unable to articulate convincing reasons for their absence. For the local population, federal entities are viewed as part of the same organization and must respond to each other for their absences and omissions.

During and after the meeting, conversations between participants were experienced in a cordial atmosphere and encouraged to reach agreements for the localities of the municipality. The villagers considered that such meetings are necessary to express their needs and reach direct agreements with the authorities. For their part, public servants agreed that the efforts of the federal government allow a more open and constant dialogue with the population, especially when there is a project of such importance as the Interoceanic Corridor.

At this venue, it was noted that solid work teams had been formed. At one point, the chairpersons appreciated the recognition by a local leader, who congratulated them on the work done up to that point. The public official presiding over the meeting recognized the gesture and joked with the attendees by recalling that the local leader was previously one of the most reluctant and distrustful people, and this was one of the reasons that led them to go directly to the municipalities. In the words of the official himself: *"You told us you did not trust us, and we are pleased that we can now work together"*. At the end, the guidelines for the future work plan were proposed: to create working chairpersons for strategic planning focused on regional development and the creation of programs.

All the voices of the community emphasized that representative relationships needed to be collective and informed, and while trust had been built as meetings had passed, it needed to be nourished through accountability or, in other words, the community needed to see results in order for a collaborative relationship to be consolidated in the interest of the region.

Maricela, 27, originally from Uxpanapa, noted: *"It has been very important and very interesting, we have learned a lot, because at first, we were requesting and requesting, but now it is more concrete. If you need electricity you go to such place, or if it's transportation or anything else."*

The Interoceanic Corridor Project generates an expectation of economic growth for people, but at the same time highlights the need to solve structural problems in the region. A 57-year-old man from the Ejido Esfuerzo Nuevo commented that caring for the environment must be an important factor and that more preservation mechanisms were needed, stating that: *"No one talks about caring for the environment and when someone brings up the issue they avoid it... it's important to build an environmental trust in the area, we're running out of resources and nobody says or does anything.... we need that, just as they agree for other things, the responsible agencies also need to work to preserve this area."*

At the end of the meeting, tables were set up for all attendees to eat at the site. This fostered informal conversations between participants. This created an environment to strengthen the companionship and friendship between the various community and government actors. In this regard, the representative of SEGOB commented: *"For us, these types of actions have been very important, being able to meet the people is vital to continue our work and that is really productive... I think as public servants we should have the ability to come out to the rural communities. I know that not everyone is used to it, but little by little, I think we have done well."*

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For Hildeberto, the issue of environmental care had been absent, and he argued that environmental preservation in the area was not being taken into account, neither the inhabitants nor the representatives considered it in the meetings. He believed the authorities avoided the issue because they were not responsive. While he was not a local representative, he had suggested on several occasions the establishment of a trust, which would raise funds from extraction and production of natural resources by companies, but no one had taken his proposal seriously.

Hildeberto

\_ 57 years old





representative  
of the  
Interoceanic  
Corridor



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Aldo commented that “It is a very different work experience. We have all given our part, a few more, some less, and of course we have had challenges... some people did not trust us, some of the public servants were also not very sure, but the effort to work together is there”. The consultation, as a participatory exercise and way to get to know the people and communities, was not a binary relationship, neither one nor zero, it went beyond approval or disapproval: “Since we came up with the idea of holding the consultation, we are seeing a dynamic of generating bonds with people, that was what we wanted and I think we have achieved it.” It was a process where public servants contacted people and generated work commitments at a more subjective level. The ties that were built have resulted in successful consultations, as there was no legislation on indigenous consultations and they were creating mechanisms for a regional development plan, in which INPI had played an essential role for the success of the consultation and future follow-up meetings.

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For Maricela, the consultations had been “very important and very interesting, we have learned a lot, because at first, we were requesting and requesting, but now it is more concrete. If you need electricity you go to such place, or if it’s transportation or anything else. It is important that people like me get involved in these issues, because many leave, migrate and are no longer looking out for the town. Although at first people did not see the meaning of it, because they did not believe that something was going to be done, but little by little we have seen it.” She believed that it is vital that young people from localities are involved in these processes and that mechanisms are created for young people to continue to participate in the political life of their localities, even if they had migrated.

Maricela

\_ 27 years old





A m a n d a  
F e d e r a l  
g o v e r n m e n t  
o f f i c i a l  
\_ 37 years old

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Amanda, a federal government official, shared: “For us, this kind of action has been very important, being able to get to know the people is vital to continue our work and to be really productive.... Consultations and follow-up meetings should be an instrument that facilitates the work of public servants, because they show them firsthand the reality of the population that they should assist, from the perspective of various agencies. I was very pleased when a person congratulated us, I feel like we are doing a good job, that there have been results and that gives me a sense of satisfaction.” She believed that this type of exercise generates trust, closeness and results for the different populations that participated in the meetings, so they should be replicated throughout the country.

# 5

## *San Pedro, Huamelula Oaxaca*

On October 5, local and surrounding communities met in the auditorium of the INPI facilities of San Pedro Huamelula

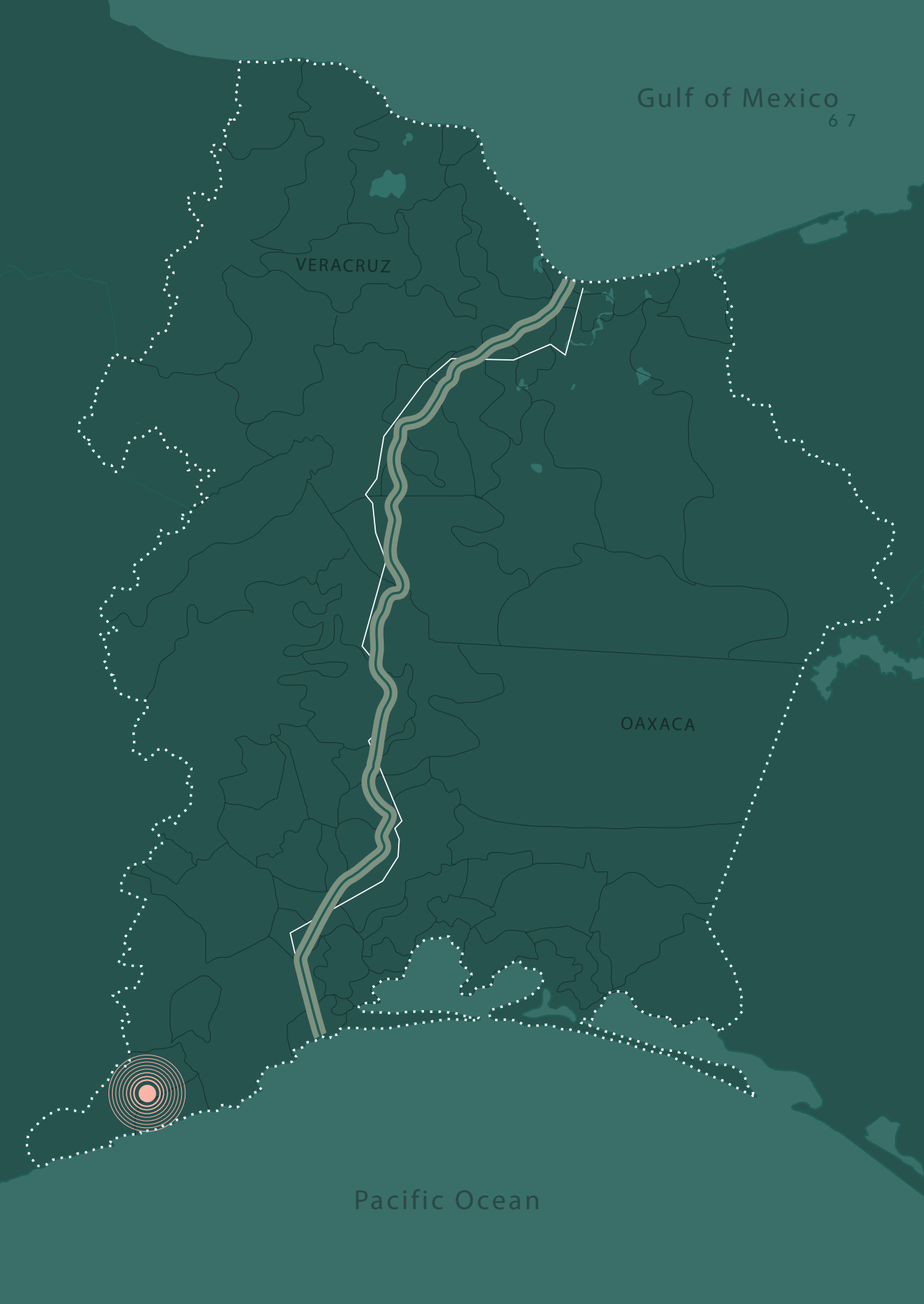
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Pacific Ocean





On October 5, representatives from different entities of the federal government, local and surrounding communities met in the auditorium of the INPI facilities of San Pedro Huamelula, among others: SEGOB, INPI, SEMARNAT, Bienestar, CFE, SEDATU as well as community representatives. This region of the Huamelula river crosses the villages of Los Cocos and the municipality of San Pedro Huamelula, Oaxaca. It is a village between the Sierra de Oaxaca, a jungle area, and the Pacific coast, northwest of the Isthmus, territory of the Chontal people.

The follow-up meeting of agreements began at 10:50 a.m., with a few words from the members of the Monitoring Committee. The chairpersons allowed all members of the communities to have a panoramic view of what was being carried out, without losing sight of anyone. Committee members were presented, then public officials introduced themselves, the institution they represented and shared the information gathered at the previous meeting regarding petitions or complaints. After government presentations, the agenda allowed for open public participation.

## **Voices**

The presentations took their course until the CFE representative took the floor. People no longer waited for the presentation to finish and began to address the different problems that occur in communities: excessively high rates and bills, power outages, maintenance, etc. Then people took the microphone to ask for concrete answers to the requests made to the institutions. Many of these claims focused on institutional attention to community issues; even though there had been an effort to get to know the community, there is widespread unease due to the pre-existing years of neglect in the region. The demands were summed up in three issues: healthcare, education and housing.

The presentations by officials focused on the previously gathered requests, seeking to prioritize attention to the most urgent needs. However, many of these requests had also failed to find quick solutions. As they were part of bureaucratic frameworks that hindered their resolution, inhabitants of the community seemed understandably fed-up and spoke frankly: *"We want straight up answers and solutions. We do not want all of you coming here to only listen to us"*.

While the community knew these issues would take several years to be solved, they recognized that it was a path that was beginning and could be improved, but there was a widespread climate of trust in the process. The expectation generated by these mechanisms was very broad and it was necessary to have a very timely follow-up, since all the trust they had generated could be diluted if there were no results.

Overall, it was noted that the perception of such consultation mechanisms was positive. Many people considered it a good start to relationship-building with the state, but it must continue to move towards tangible actions, that is, to solve the problems already evident. The people who spoke with the research team highlighted the “good faith” of the government, since that phrase is constantly repeated by public officials. In this way the communities gave a vote of confidence, as many had stated “*no government administration had come before*”. This was an important point because by making these problems visible and presenting them to officials, they were now confident that the solutions would come to fruition.



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For Marilú, consultations must strengthen the sense of community and create more mechanisms that build trust between locals and the government. They were a good exercise, but they should be more and more permanent.

### Marilú



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Salatien believed that the consultation allowed them to exercise their right to advocate and influence their community, work and raise awareness of the profound needs and problems of the region.

Salatien





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For Rey, the abandonment in his community was felt for years; however, since the start of the current administration, with the launch of consultations, and in the face of the opportunity to publicize the problems that arise in the community, he hoped that results would soon begin to be seen, especially with regard to the agrarian conflict, attention to healthcare and the preservation of the natural resources of the region.

Rey

# 6

## *Jaltepec de Candayoc Oaxaca*

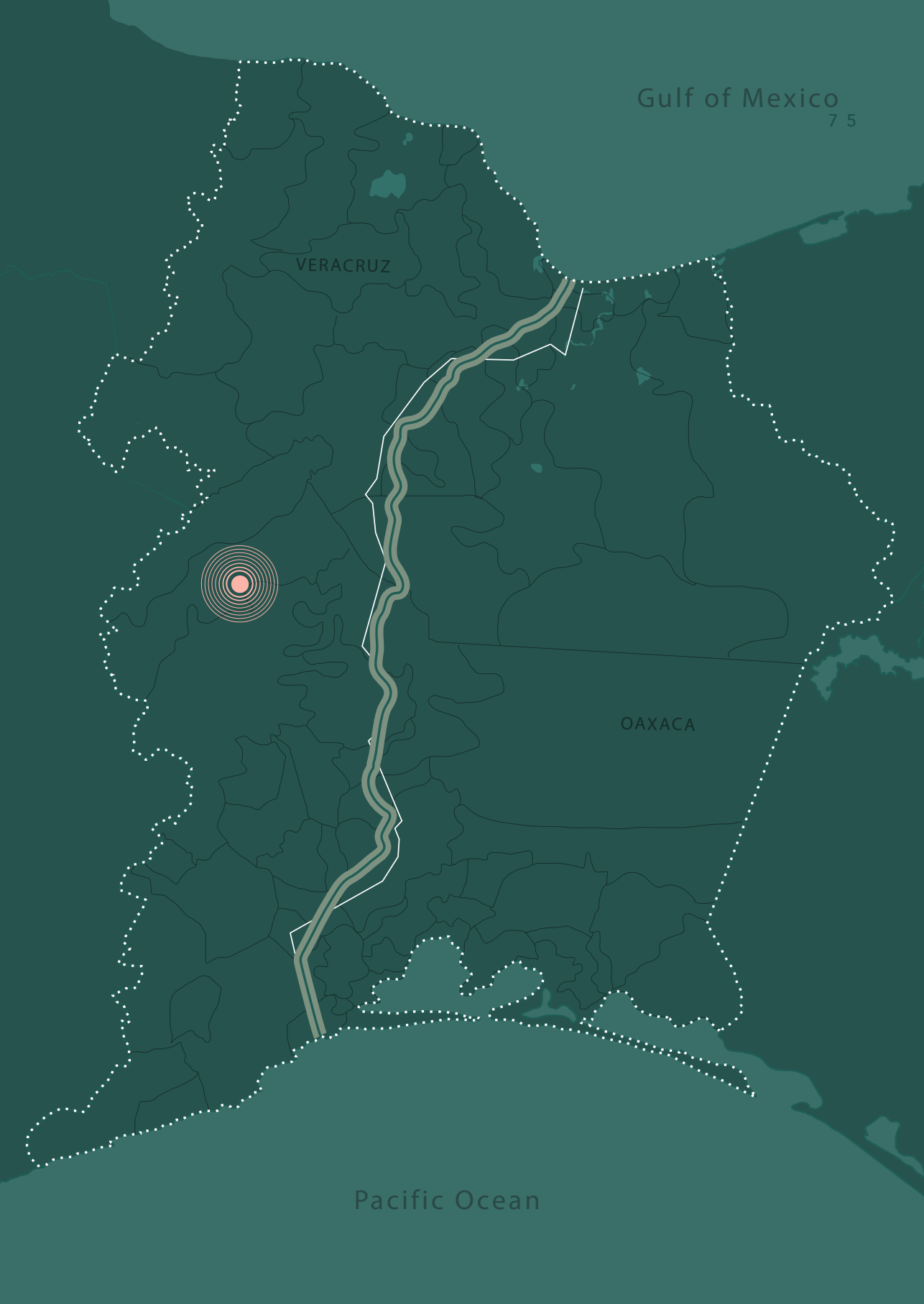
The meeting was held in the community dining hall of Jaltepec in Candayoc, Oaxaca, on Saturday, October 5

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The meeting was held in the community dining hall of Jaltepec in Candayoc, Oaxaca, on Saturday, October 5. Authorities and representatives of the indigenous communities from Binnizá or Zapotec, Ayuujk Jääy or Mixe, and the Chinantec from the villages of Jaltepec, San Juan Cotzocón, San Juan Mazatlán, and surroundings, all gathered together. Located in the northeastern part of the state of Oaxaca, the aforementioned locations, until this consultation, had maintained intermittent relations with each other; the Mixe and the Chinantec have had differences with the Zapotec, not only in this region, but in other parts of the state where they live together.

The meeting was scheduled to begin around 10:00 a.m. However, the lack of a quorum forced it to begin after 11:00 a.m. There were representatives from different government entities including but not limited to the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), the National Water Commission (CONAGUA), CFE, SS, INPI, Mexican Petroleum (PEMEX). In attendance were mainly the representatives of the Regional Consultation Assembly, who were appointed in previous meetings. The event was not fully open to the general public; however, there was a presence of some interested locals and relatives of the invited.

The way people were arranged consisted of two presidium-type tables, where each of them sat independently of each other, the local authorities (municipal presidents) and convening federal and state institutions. That is to say, INAH, CONAGUA, CFE, SS, INPI and representatives of the state of Oaxaca and Veracruz. In front of them, and at the same level, chairs were available in auditorium mode where the local population and the rest of the public officials who were not in the presidium took their place. The dynamics of the meeting were for public officials (from their seats) to submit the progress of their agencies in fulfilling the requests that were recorded in the consultation process and then move on to presentations by the other participants.

## **Voices**

It is very important to note that, for the purposes of this meeting, the Interoceanic Corridor project was secondary. Throughout this assembly, people said they had seen a change from past meetings. They made reference that the dialogue took place in more “appropriate” terms and recognized the

gradual disappearance of the tensions that characterized previous meetings. It should be mentioned that the consultation took place in a discreet place; the local participation was scarce, except for the municipal representatives and other assistants. When asking other people who were going through or doing their work in other activities, they did not know what the meeting in the community dining room of the municipality was.

Local assemblies are usually held in other spaces, such as kiosks, athletic courts, plazas or other public spaces. Regarding this point, Ignacio Trujillo Hernández, 44, from the town of Pajapan, Veracruz (Nahua), stated during his allotted time:

“For us, and as an individual member of the committee, the process of consultation is practically legitimizing everything that concerns the agreements that are carried out in each of these meetings on the Interoceanic Corridor. But, because we have a lot of doubts, because we have analyzed the process that has been carried out but not completed... well, it has been transparent, but for example it was lacking greater participation, that society, indigenous communities still do not understand the consultation process well, because it has to have a process: first it is reported, then analyzed, in this case consensus is sought and it is approved or disapproved. If there is a benefit, it is approved. The information process was lacking, there was a lack of dissemination.”

The concerns of the indigenous representatives gathered there, revolved around issues related to the exercise of the rights of the population, for example, electricity supply, basic infrastructure (roads) and wellbeing support programmes, among other issues. In addition to setting out their concerns, representatives strongly questioned institutions such as INPI and CFE. On the other hand, presentations on progress from institutions such as INAH went almost unnoticed. After hearing answers to their complaints people reacted in a stoic way and in subsequent interviews expressed partial satisfaction regarding the resolution of their complaints and doubts.

They expressed compliance with government members in the region to whom they can present their complaints and needs. They also saw in the consultation an opportunity for regional development that can serve to



overcome the economic and social lag in which they found themselves due to the lack of effective means of communication. The community expected to see changes, especially around economic growth. Their expectations were based on better conditions and opportunities to send their products to other parts of the country.

In this region, public servants said they understood the consultation process as a way to integrate the efforts of each of the agencies into a central concept with the needs of the people. However, they agreed that one problem they face was little to no inter-institutional coordination between their agencies, since each proposes from its own vision what it considers relevant to work with the general population in the communities.

## i n t e r v i e w

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Pedro is indigenous Ayuujk-Mixe, originally from Santa María Matamoros, San Juan Cotzocón, Oaxaca. He believed that the consultation gave them the opportunity to get to know the authorities and to address their needs and evaluate whether or not to support the government to act. For him the consultation “is that the community be aware of the developments or changes that might happen. To raise awareness about whether [there is] agreement or not, seeing the needs, the gaps, that one lives, regardless of the projects that are coming to fruition. A consultation, therefore, is to verify whether the community actually accepts or agrees that the work should be carried out.” He preferred to think about the benefits it would bring in the long term. “At the moment, we can say that we do not benefit, but we think of the future of the young people who are becoming adults. They could, quite possibly, become mobile, or transport their products, by means of the infrastructure. For now, we say ‘I’m not going to get there, but it’s other generations to come, that really are going to benefit.’”

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 Ignacio is from Pajapan, Veracruz and is of Nahua origin. He pointed out that perhaps the most important thing in these consultations was “the inclusion of indigenous communities, because we have suffered and continue to suffer discrimination, maybe not as before, but the proposals that we [have] sometimes do not... this vision that we want to share, sometimes there is no interest, with some agencies, to make it their own.” For him it was an opportunity to “move now from speech to action, to operability [...] we express the world-view from the point of view of production, culture, indigenous rights, justice, all areas. And such it seems that agencies, as they do not have this vision, [...] they cannot understand.” This process is part of repaying a historic debt that governments have to the indigenous people, which will not legitimize something that they do not approve.



## 7

*Sayula de  
Alemán  
Veracruz*

On Sunday, October 6, the meeting was held at the premises of a local livestock association in the municipality of Sayula de Alemán

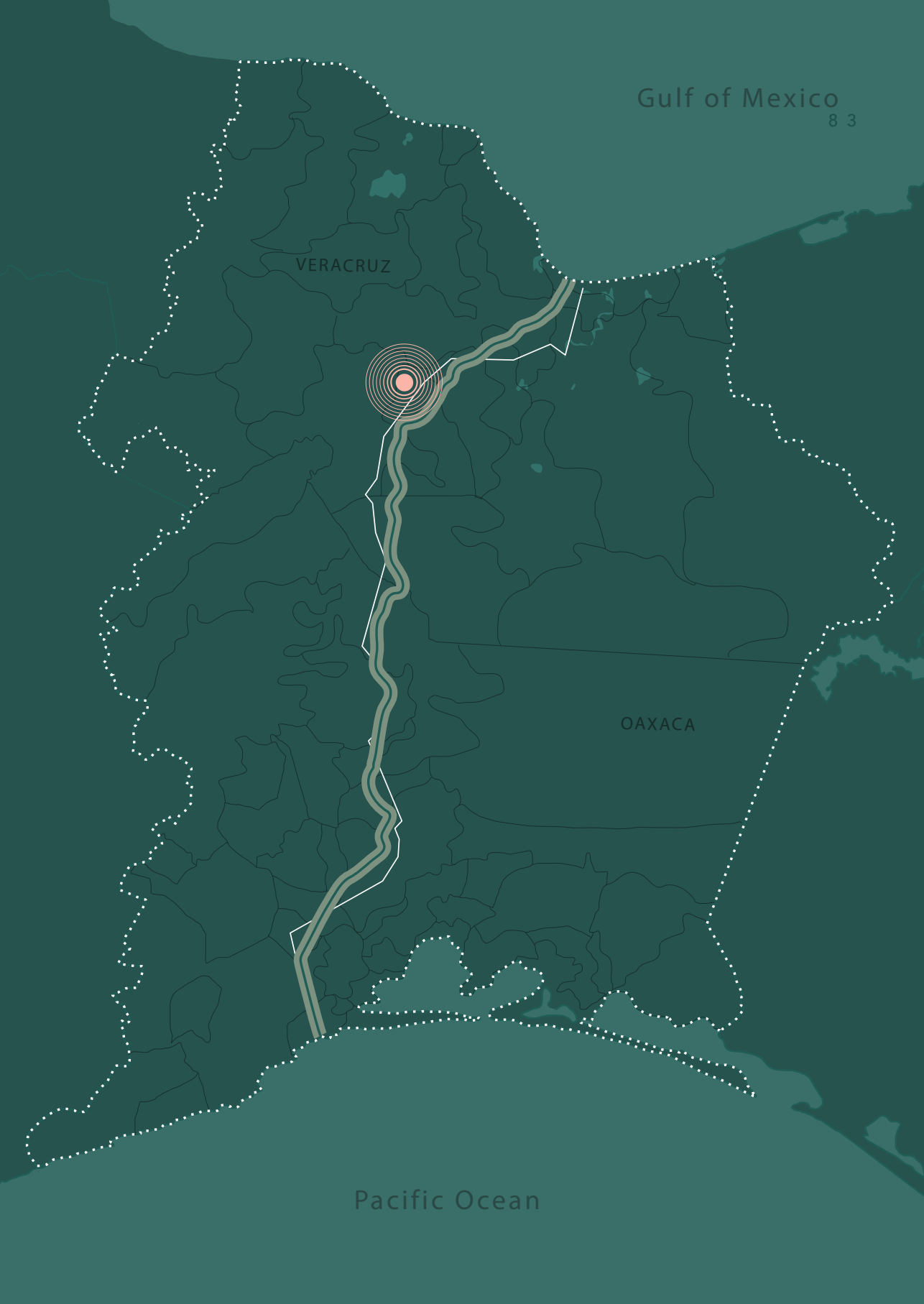
Gulf of Mexico

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On Sunday, October 6, the meeting was held at the premises of a local livestock association in the municipality of Sayula de Alemán, which convened the authorities and indigenous representatives of the Nuu Savi or Mixtec, Nahuatl, Popoluca, Zoque, Mixe-Popoluca and Chinantec from the villages of: San Lucas Ojitlán (Oaxaca), Abasolo del Valle and Pajapan (Veracruz), among others. These villages are located in the adjoining area of the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz.

The assembly was scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m. However, due to a lack of a quorum, it began after 11:00 a.m. Representatives of SEGOB, SEP, INAH, CFE, among others were present. The Regional Consultation Assembly representatives in attendance were from these communities previously listed, but as the event was open to the public, there was a presence of a general interested local population.

The dynamics of the assembly were that public officials presented the progress of their agencies in fulfilling the requests that were recorded in the consultation process, and then moved onto presentations by the attendees. However, some participants reacted immediately to the format and proposed that there be space and time for their presentations after each agency. After a general vote it was decided to change the format of the meeting and this is how the assembly unfolded.

## **Voices**

It is worth mentioning that members of the Regional Assembly had previously organized and agreed on common point to be discussed and demanded. Their participation focused on these fundamental themes: (a) economic resources for people by prioritizing the indigenous population, (b) discrimination and exclusion of indigenous communities, (c) demand for actions beyond the presentation of speeches, (d) ways indigenous communities will be included in development projects, be it as workers or in some other capacity, (e) environmental impact of the project, (f) rural-urban relations and (g) "legitimization", but not "complicity", of the consultation process.

The committee representing these communities made it clear that their role is to testify, as representatives of their localities, for the transparency of the process, and also to clarify their unwillingness to conform with public programmes which, "with or without the Interoceanic Corridor", the State has an obligation to guarantee. During the different presentations, there were significant nuances as to the audience's reactions. On one hand, during the government representatives' presentations, there was constant clamor of public disapproval. Contrary to this, when the representatives of the Monitoring Committee finished voicing their questions and complaints, especially against the National Institute of Indigenous Communities (INPI, whose representative was absent), the CFE and the Ministry of Health, some sectors of the public welcomed what the speakers had said with cheers in Nahuatl, constantly interrupting their speech. Later, the municipal president of the locality where this meeting was held addressed government representatives, and also questioned them about the management of public resources for the development of indigenous communities.

Furthermore, the information on the consultation was very limited, as the same people indicated, many inhabitants were not aware of the purpose of these consultations, and therefore did not participate. Similarly, since the format of the meeting was open and with no restrictions, some people from Sayula joined the meeting, even when they had no knowledge of the main objective of the consultations. There were those who even thought it was some meeting to provide financial support, which caused an outburst of disapproval having only the opportunity to hear officials talk about progress.

The changes projected with the Corridor in the region divided opinions. There were those who considered that, if handled well, the Interoceanic Corridor has the potential to provide great social and economic opportunity for communities. However, there were those who believed that these are only government beliefs, that programmes are paternalistic in nature and only contribute to the increase in poverty. Expectations around job creation within the indigenous communities addressed, for example, the idea that the capital invested should be spent on improving local living conditions and, moreover, allow the direct participation of peoples in the development of the project.



Unlike other locations, public servants understood this process and knew they were in a confrontational and conflictive scenario. There were many complaints about what people were judging as bad performances by some agencies. Similarly, the lack of unity and coherence between the interventions of government agencies made it clear that attention was given in an uncoordinated manner allowing for gaps.

MaríaChinanteca

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María is Chinanteca from San Lucas Ojtlán, Oaxaca. As for the consultation she said: “They ask you if you agree or disagree on the different actions and their impact with indigenous communities... The consultation has to be free, prior, informed, and culturally appropriate. So, the process is to ask you before, not after... There is still a long way to go.... It is a very pleasant experience that, regardless of our cultures, regardless of our language, we unite, we have the same interest, all indigenous communities have the same interest, we interpret life from the same world-view. So, it is very pleasant to share, to learn from different cultures, it is where we talk about the famous interculturality, the learning of other cultures and organization, because each culture has different forms of organization, but we have the same worldview, we defend ourselves equally, we have the same common interest, which is to defend our lands, our territories, defend our roots, defend our identity”. Thus, the consultation must be a mandatory requirement, not a consideration or “goodwill” of the President of the Republic.





There are few public and participatory spaces where people from municipalities and indigenous communities - Binnizá, Ayuuk, Zoque, Ikoots, Chontal, Chinantec, Mazatec, Mixtec, Popoluca, Náhuatl, Totonac, Tzotzil and Afro-Mexicans - of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec region, either individually or collectively, can interact face-to-face with representatives of government agencies. That is why it is necessary to begin to remedy Mexico's political and historical debt, owed to these communities and their members.

In view of the results and findings documented throughout the seven follow-up meetings held in the consultation, a number of benefits and contributions from this exercise of democratic practice have been identified. It is true that the Isthmus region embodies a great complexity in itself and that, as observed in the seven venues, cultural, social, ethnic, identity and environmental diversity places the project in the face of profound challenges, which mostly date from several generations ago. However, the climate of openness that has arisen in the consultations makes clear the need to maintain mechanisms that respond to the region's multiple demands.

A series of lessons learned have come to light from the observation and analysis of the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Mexico in collaboration with a team of anthropologists and documentary filmmakers. The following lessons, by no means exhaustive, are organized in two ways: pertaining to the community or pertaining to the government agencies. Presented below are some experiences gained about the very approach of sensemaking proposed by the Accelerator Lab.

### ***One - pertaining to the communities:***

- **The consultation exercise strengthens discourse and a capacity to articulate needs and requests of communities.** As meetings go, villagers who had not participated in similar exercises strengthen their discursive capacities and gradually project their demands more freely and fluently. They generally claimed that at the beginning they did not have a concise and orderly speech that presented their ideas and requests. Throughout the process, and at the time of this consultation, they believed that they had achieved greater exposure and capacity that had allowed better communication with government representatives, as well as with people who attended and participated in the local meetings. They believed that the exercise encouraged organization and motivated them to prepare and plan within their communities, so it is important to continue to strengthen

discursive and communication strategies to articulate the needs and requests of the community, in order to build and lay the foundation for a permanent discussion with the government.

- **Communities seek that consultation moves from the demands of the community to the creation of working groups and collaborative agendas.** It was documented that the communities and the people who comprise them are willing to collaborate with institutions at different levels of government, not only in terms of articulating their demands, but in continuing to work on monitoring the programs that the federal and state government implements in the region. The condition is that their voice be heard and listened to on a permanent basis, and that the identified community demands and needs have a programmatic and collaborative follow-up, otherwise the dialogue and the path taken would remain at a very general level and would decline. Motivation would be lost as well as interest in cooperating. In a widespread and recurrent way, the need to set up working groups was expressed in communities, where they can sit down to dialogue around a specific agenda and topics that are of interest both to the community and to the various government agencies, utilizing a framework of respect for the pre-established forms of organization, with the aim of jointly resolving the historical demands of peoples, who for the first time feel that their voices are heard.
- **There is a need to encourage women, children and adolescents to participate in community agendas.** By linking to such processes, some women mention that they feel empowered and satisfied to have the opportunity to participate outside their homes in something they bring to their community. However, in general, low participation of women and youth, as well as no participation of children, was observed during the consultations. They are only seen accompanying their parents. The agenda on children's rights and obligations and early childhood are issues that need to be incentivized in communities, hence the need to convey the importance of other intersectional agendas. It was documented that the participation of women in indigenous assemblies is hardly visible due to the leading role of men. However, their public participation, although limited, was highly relevant.

### ***Two - pertaining to government agencies:***

- **A new set of skills needs to be fostered in public servants that allow for a true impact in communities.** Consultations and community work have been challenging for public servants, as most are not accustomed to these types of missions and realize that new skills and an awareness-raising process are needed to successfully carry them out.

It is necessary to have tools that allow them to be more effective in approaching communities, for example with communication / language skills. Many public servants address populations in the way they are accustomed with their counterparts in Mexico City, making excessive use of technical language, which does not always benefit the effective communication of their ideas and maintaining dialogue. While people have learned to use more colloquial language with less technicalities in a clear and timely manner, as well as to listen and understand the meaning of the voices of communities, it is important to close this skills gap, to continue with the pending dialogue, and the building of knowledge about the region and the active voice of the people who live in the territory. It has been a challenge for officials to experience and to directly listen to community demands that have caused people to feel attacked, vulnerable or lacking the tools or decision-making power. However, they have managed to identify and recognize that their job is to scale these demands within their entities, in order to ensure that they are met. They know they are part of a democratic exercise where governing also means to inform and, above all, to work horizontally.

- **Promote medium and long-term commitments that ensure continuity.** It is important that the people representing the agencies are always the same or, if someone must attend for the first time, that this person be well informed of the relationships their colleagues have built. They must be informed of the context, requests and progress that have been worked on. This constant attention promotes the construction of trust, dialogue and accelerates the process. Its absence has counterproductive consequences. If a different public servant is presented at each meeting, and the public servant has no knowledge of the previous work, it is perceived as a sign that the entities do not consider the process important; hence, a result is a high degree of dissatisfaction in the communities.
- **Support the process of building trust and reciprocity:** Within these spaces of political participation, emotional aspects and interaction are often inconspicuous. From the State's view, to revisit these aspects becomes important in order to begin building lines of communication that include: trust, hope, listening, love for the land, family honor, care, sadness, shame, intimidation, vulnerability, fear and hopelessness. These values, among many others, are heard and felt through observing and speaking with people, but also with people who are not always present in the discourse. It is enough to listen to a man's broken voice over the loss of a dear relative or the shame of a woman in mentioning that she cannot read and write; moreover, to recognize that the paths of research around perception, significance or courage are loaded with gesture, rather than words at certain times.

Thus far, the topics discussed in the meetings have little to do with exploring how the Interoceanic Corridor will benefit communities. It is understandable, in fact, it is a necessity that community demands related to rights such as healthcare, education, and the environment in the region be resolved first. Since these rights have historically been denied and, as long as they are not granted, it is difficult to imagine more complex interrelationship mechanisms. These mechanisms, pertaining to communities and opportunities, could spark the installation of a logistics platform such as the Interoceanic Corridor. However, it is the responsibility of the State, through the implementation of the PDIT, to ensure mechanisms to fulfill the objective of completely including communities in development that harmonize with their intangible cultural heritage of regional ancestral knowledge and awareness.

For the Accelerator Lab, the exercise of sensemaking, and the challenges it constitutes for the Mexican Government and communities to build ties of trust, was a key part of building collaboration with CIIT. Starting from an exploratory exercise with clear objectives, but without preconceived hypotheses to validate in the field, helped to create an ideal opening climate to identify early signs of change, as well as future lines of research and collaboration with CIIT based on the findings.

Now the challenge is to outline potential proposals to solve the identified problems and to move from mere identification to concrete action. In addition to being coherent, and without losing sight of any solution that is proposed, it should be tested for functionality in the field. Therefore, the Lab's proposal is to achieve efficient solutions, first from exploring solutions, and then from experimentation and constant iteration until reaching the desired results.



Lastly, while recognizing the value of this exercise to identify challenges in an efficient way, it is also important to talk about its limitations. This exercise is not intended to be a comprehensive diagnosis of the social problems of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a topic of which there is a wide array of literature. The problems here are limited to the framework of the indigenous consultation. Even in this context there are issues that, because of the nature of the research method, were left out of the analysis.

The observation by the Lab was exclusive to specific consultation events, with no consideration at the moment for the voices of those who did not participate. Going forward, one way to strengthen the analysis is to make efforts to integrate these voices and identify the reasons why those populations, whether out of ignorance, physical limitations, resources or personal or political stance, did not attend nor participate. All these voices are important and must be heard to improve understanding of the challenges of implementing a development program such as the PDIT.



***Pertaining to the communities***

***Pertaining to government agencies***

**Strengthen monitoring,  
continuity and reciprocity  
mechanisms for communities**

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**Promote inter and intra-  
governmental coordination  
within the development project  
framework**

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**Strengthen an approach from  
social, cultural and  
environmental diversity**

Initially, the mechanism implemented by the Mexican State to give voice to indigenous communities in this specific project is yielding some positive results. There is talk in communities that this can be defined as a good start for the project. In this regard, it is essential to have a timelier follow up on specific problems corresponding to each of the agencies that have participated. It will be strategically advantageous to continue addressing these issues with community and inter-agency working groups.

Undoubtedly, these participatory exercises have sparked awareness, open dialogue, horizontal communication, empathy and patience for all involved. From what was documented through *Voices of the Isthmus*, it is worthwhile to point out some opportunistic ideas that have been identified as areas to improve synergy between communities and government.

### ***Strengthen monitoring, continuity and reciprocity mechanisms for communities:***

- Continuing assistance from government representatives.
- Planning recurrent visits to the localities so that the population directly knows their representatives.
- Training federal and state authorities on how they should disseminate information, as well as to resume aspects of past consultations and focus on progress.
- Considering the changes in timing and agendas that arise in communities, yielding at certain times can help in a second phase of dialogue.
- Integrating and proposing community organization measures within the framework and with the aim of fostering horizontal relations of participation, which help build trust and capacities to advance and grow collectively.

### ***Promote inter and intra-governmental coordination within the development project framework:***

- In the areas of government, it is necessary to promote collaborative relations between institutions to provide coordinated local and federal efforts.
- The breakdown in relationships and lack of coordination observed, raises concerns among people.

- Individuals and communities demand more articulate responses from known agencies they are dealing with, and more direct responses to their basic needs, for example, CFE, Ministry of Communications and Transport (SCT) and INPI.
- Some agencies are left out because people in the community are unaware of their responsibilities or the value they might have in the region, particularly in the case of INAH.
- In diverse areas of communities, more information and explanation of the roles, limits of dependencies, and how the State is organized, should be provided so they can articulate their demands better.

### ***Strengthen an approach from social, cultural and environmental diversity:***

- It should be kept in mind that the indigenous visions articulated in this consultation process reveal very important nuances and cultural differences with regard to the notion of territory, territoriality, identity, landscape, culture and even the worldview of people.
- The approach to these communities should not be acted on in a universal way or by giving privilege to the vision of people from the central part of the Mexican Federation, but on the basis of the reality and cultural context that are specific to the region.
- The different ethnic groups that inhabit the region are associated with other peoples who, although not formally belonging to the region, do share commonalities of language, culture and identity. The processes, such as those of indigenous vindication that occur in other regions, may have an impact on this development project and must be taken into account; the clearest example of this can be seen among the Mixe peoples and their search for vindication against marginalization and discrimination.
- Finally, participation should be extended to and sought-after in different population centres that make up the different communities involved in the consultations, since, as some local representatives stated, the information that has reached local society is not yet sufficient. Many people are unaware of these consultations. Directly addressing the mass dissemination of the consultation exercise and local experiences would break the negative assumptions of people in regard to the process; it would let all residents and inhabitants of the region express themselves and have their voices heard, making visible the enormous diversity that gives meaning to this region.







This report presents the results of an exploratory investigation carried out by a team of anthropologists and documentary filmmakers. During October 5 and 6, 2019, this team accompanied a delegation of officials from the Mexican federal government and the state governments of Oaxaca and Veracruz to perform the works of the Free, Prior and Informed Consultation that informed the creation Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Programme. The authorities and representative

institutions of the municipalities and indigenous communities that were consulted are the Binnizá (Zapotec), Ayuuk (Mixe), Zoque, Ikoots (Huave), Chontal, Chinantec, Mazatec, Mixtec, Popoluca, Nahuatl, Totonac, Tzotzil and Afro-Mexicans. These communities are settled in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec of Oaxaca and Veracruz, in Mexico. The areas of influence where the programme will be implemented.

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