

Field Visit Summary: Guanajuato University, Mexico

Background

The Environmental Institutional Programme of Guanajuato University (PIMAUG) is a cross-faculty initiative structured around 6 strategic areas: (a) assisting students to develop a holistic vision of the environment; (b) promoting sustainable resource use and waste management; (c) diffusion of a culture of environmental awareness, through a variety of media; (d) interdisciplinary research; (e) training in environmental issues through diplomas and Masters programmes; and (f) social participation and inter-institutional partnership. The work of PIMAUG is heavily informed by the Earth Charter Initiative, who recommended this project for a field visit. In particular, PIMAUG has a peer education programme in which Guanajuato University students train to impart workshops inspired by the Earth Charter.

Aims of the Field Visit

The field visit to Guanajuato concentrated on discussions to validate the relevance and importance of all the draft indicators. Only one indicator from the Care and Respect for the Community of Life value cluster and nine Empowerment indicators (three head indicators and six sub-indicators) were taken forward to the assessment stage. No new assessment tools were developed during this visit, but the focus was on confirming the applicability of existing tools to different indicators.

Main Findings

All 14 draft indicators for Empowerment and all 11 for Trust were validated as relevant by the PIMAUG group. Also validated as relevant were 6 of the 19 draft indicators for Integrity, 6 of the 8 draft indicators for Justice, 9 of the 12 draft indicators for Unity in Diversity, and 10 of the 79 draft indicators for the value of Care and Respect for the Community of Life.

The PIMAUG team members found that the very act of reflecting on the indicators - even before associating them to specific assessment tools - allowed them to envisage new connections between their current activities, potential new areas of work that could be developed, and strategic decisions that they would like to take. The results of the assessment were also useful to PIMAUG in helping them to understand the efficacy of their workshops, identifying the factors involved in genuine empowerment, and providing insights into how motivation can be translated into effective action.

Processes Utilized

PIMAUG expressed a wish to evaluate all the value clusters developed by the ESDInds team. Two and a half days were spent in discussion of every indicator that the team had brought, to identify those relevant to PIMAUG's work. Four members of the PIMAUG team participated in this process, which generated valuable insights and new directions.

The peer educators and project coordinator (supported by a researcher) took the lead in testing the relevant Empowerment indicators in the context of an Earth Charter promotion workshop. It was also decided that PIMAUG itself would continue to pilot different ways of assessing the indicators in the context of its ongoing activities.

Assessment Tools

Assessment Tool Used	Indicators Tested
Spatial and corporal surveys	E_SH1c, E_SH4b
Semi-structured non-participative observation	E_H1, E_SH1b, ESH1c; E_H3; E_H4, E_SH4a & b
Focus group discussion	E_SH1c
Personal action plans	E_SH1c, E_H3, E_SH4a
Word elicitation – What/Why grid	E_SH1b, CR_3072
Key informant interviews	E_SH1a, E_SH1c; E_SH2a; E_SH4b

(a) Spatial and corporal surveys: The spatial survey method was applied by asking participants to stand in a line and after each question, step to the left to answer ‘A little’, stay in their place to answer ‘Sometimes’, or step to the right to answer ‘A lot’. A variant of this tool, the corporal survey, was applied by using body postures (cross arms, hands on hips, flex biceps; sit on the floor, stand still, raise arms) to represent the three points on the scale.

(b) Semi-structured non-participative observation: The researchers observed a workshop in progress without participating in it, guided by broad themes (the selected indicators) rather than a structured assessment sheet, and then compared observations.

(c) Focus group: This was used to complement the spatial survey, focusing on the reasons for participants’ responses and exploring the reasons for different levels of empowerment.

(d) Personal action plans: Workshop participants were asked to write down four goals. Analysis of the responses provided a qualitative assessment of the motivation and commitment generated by the training, and helped to identify personal priorities and values.

(e) Word elicitation – What/Why grid: Participants were asked to write down one or more emotions that the workshop had stirred in them, together with a sentence of explanation.

(f) Key informant interviews: In-depth interviews with the project coordinator and a youth promoter were used to supplement the information obtained through other methods.

Other Lessons Learned

Systematic and institutional application of values assessment: The PIMAUG team demonstrated great enthusiasm for the values and indicators, and the project coordinator would like to incorporate them into the work of PIMAUG at an institutional level. It is anticipated that the team members will continue a similar assessment themselves within the CSO’s ongoing activities.

Working within time limitations: The duration of this visit was only five days, which in retrospect was too short a time to reap the full benefit. It was suggested that a minimum of ten days would normally be required for a field visit. However, the focus on methodological development in the 3-week field visit to Echeri Consultores was enormously helpful, as it enabled assessment tools relevant to the PIMAUG context to be quickly identified. The incorporation of certain tools into a four-hour workshop confirmed that measuring values does not have to be time-consuming and that rapid assessment can often be helpful, depending on the objectives.

Level of detail to be observed: The semi-structured observation focused only on the presence or absence of specific behaviours, and did not include any evaluation of the extent to which they are present. This could be built into the observation process. The richer the qualitative data included in observation, the harder it is to measure, although the more nuanced the resulting picture may be.