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Community Forestry in Guatemala



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Protecting forests, improving livelihoods – Community forestry in Guatemala

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Many of Fern's partner organisations have lobbied for the creation of community forests under the revision of their forest legislation, or as part of the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement or Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) processes, believing that community forests could allow communities to directly benefit from forest management.

To inform this work, Fern commissioned a series of papers on community forestry policies in four different countries (Cameroon, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nepal). The aim of the papers is to learn from the successes and challenges faced by these existing community forest policies, to help non-governmental organisations in other countries develop, advocate for and implement their own.

These papers informed discussions at a workshop held in Brussels in April 2014, which brought together participants from thirty countries to share their understanding and experience of community forestry, and develop action plans for their own countries.

This paper is one of five in this series. The other papers, and further resources on community-based livelihood models, can be found at fern.org/small-scale-livelihoods

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Acronyms

ACOFOP	Association of Forest Communities of Petén (<i>Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén</i>)
ANOFEG	National Alliance of Forest Organisations of Guatemala (<i>Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales de Guatemala</i>)
BOSCOM	The Project for Strengthening Municipal and Communal Forestry
CO ₂	carbon dioxide
CONAP	National Council of Protected Areas (<i>Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas</i>)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
FTPP	Forests, Trees and People Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INAB	National Forestry Institute (<i>Instituto Nacional de Bosques</i>)
PAF-G	Forestry Action Programme of Guatemala (<i>Programa de Acción Forestal de Guatemala</i>)
PINFOR	Guatemala's Forest Incentive Programme
PINPEP	Smallholder Forestry and Agroforestry Vocation Incentive Programme (<i>Programa de Incentivos para Pequeños Poseedores de Tierras de vocación forestal</i>)
REDD+	Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation
SIGAP	Guatemalan System of Protected Areas (<i>Sistema Guatemalteco de Áreas Protegidas</i>)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

1 Introduction

Community forestry is a very old tradition in Guatemala; forests and trees have been part of local populations' subsistence strategies since time immemorial. Community forests were institutionalised in the 1990s, when the government recognised the close relationship between local communities and forests. It was felt that taking account of social issues could contribute to forest protection, and that supporting communities' forestry activities would help to improve their living standards. Since then, the government has put in place laws, pilot schemes and institutions to help community forestry, supported by funds and capacity-building from international development institutions.

Community forestry is now part of government and civil society work programmes and development strategies. However, major obstacles exist, including the poverty and profound inequality that permeate agrarian areas of the country, tenure insecurity, a lack of respect for indigenous rights and knowledge, and pressure from other land uses particularly agriculture.

This paper describes the Guatemalan model and analyses these challenges, in the hope of helping to strengthen community forest initiatives in other parts of the world.

Photo: Pan American Health Organization-PAHO / World Health Organization-WHO (Flickr CC)



2 Context

2.1 General context

Guatemala is a small Central American country with 14 million inhabitants (60 per cent indigenous Mayans and 40 per cent people of mixed and Spanish ancestry). Guatemala is one of the poorest and most unequal countries in Latin America, with 15 per cent of people in extreme poverty.¹ In the 2013 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development index, Guatemala ranked 133 out of 187 countries. Fifty-two per cent of the population live in rural areas, with the rest in urban areas. Guatemala City is home to three million people, or 20 per cent of the total population.

Between 1960 and 1996, the country experienced a civil war, which caused the deaths of around 200,000 people, and the disappearance or displacement of thousands more. Peace agreements put an end to this conflict and offered opportunities for a more democratic and inclusive society, but progress has been very limited, particularly for indigenous and rural communities and women, who continue to live in poverty and face social exclusion.

Guatemala's economic development has been based on the export of agricultural products, with coffee, sugar cane, bananas and, currently, palm oil being the most important. While some studies argue the agro-export model is losing prominence in Central America,² in Guatemala powerful players who benefit from this model continue to influence public policy on agriculture and rural development.

Eighty-five per cent of Guatemalan land (including the best agricultural land) is held by 15 per cent of the landowners. By contrast, most crops produced for domestic consumption are produced by small-scale farmers, on small plots on mountainsides or land largely unsuited to agriculture. The highly concentrated structure of land ownership in Guatemala is one of the main reasons for its deforestation problem, as it encourages investment in large-scale commercial agriculture. Annually, 130,000 hectares are deforested, initially being converted into grassland before being transformed into areas used for industrial agriculture. In 1988, it was estimated that 53 per cent of the country was covered by forest, but by 2010, this figure had dropped to 34 per cent.

2.2 The Guatemalan forestry sector

Despite government efforts, forest industries remain in an emergent state. There are two authorities charged with forest administration in Guatemala: the National Forestry Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Bosques (INAB)*) and the National Council of Protected Areas (*Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas (CONAP)*). The forestry sector contributes only one per cent of national gross domestic product (GDP), and despite its potential, the country imports more forest products than it exports. Timber and firewood extraction from natural forests remains the main type of economic activity. Added-value processing of forest products has not really been developed.

¹ World Bank, 2009.

² Rosa, 2008.

Guatemala has three types of forest ownership. First, there are state-owned forests, which are located primarily in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, in the department of Petén, and in other areas of land set aside by the state. Second, there are privately owned forests. Finally, there are forests under joint ownership belonging to communities, municipalities and assorted social groups.

Whatever the form of ownership, exploitation of forest resources is regulated by the state, through the Forest Act (*Ley Forestal*) (Decree No. 101-96) and the Protected Areas Act (*Ley de Áreas Protegidas*) (Decree No. 4-89). Nonetheless, the State has tried to decentralise forest management, delegating supervisory functions to municipalities, and charging Municipal Forest Offices (*Oficinas Forestales Municipales*) with the issuance of forest use licences. It has awarded forestry concessions to communities and private enterprises and concluded agreements with non-governmental organisations to jointly manage protected areas.

■ Maya ceremony during the changing of the local community forest authorities.

Photo: Silvel Elías



3 Community forests in Guatemala

3.1 Historical development of community forests

Community forestry has existed in Guatemala since ancient times, and trees and forests still play an important role in communities' livelihood strategies. This is why communities have worked so hard to conserve the forests, and defend them from encroachment by outsiders.

The government institutionalisation of community forestry started during the 1990s with the support of the former Forests, Trees and People Programme (FTPP), driven by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). During those years, the government, supported by non-governmental organisations and development aid, created various pilot programmes, such as the "Project for the Development of Participatory Forestry" (*Proyecto de Desarrollo Forestal Participativo*) in the department of Baja Verapaz, the Jupilingo-Las Cebollas Project in the department of Chiquimula, and the My Forest Project (*Proyecto Mibosque*) in the west of the country. The government also launched the Forestry Action Programme of Guatemala (*Programa de Acción Forestal de Guatemala (PAF-G)*), which placed strong emphasis on community forests.

The State was motivated to implement policies promoting community forests because they had come to recognise the role of communities in forest conservation. Studies showed that forests were managed and/or conserved as an integral part of the subsistence strategies of people dependent on them. A study entitled *Diagnostico y manejo de recursos naturales en tierras comunales de Guatemala* (Analysing and handling natural resources on communal land in Guatemala, Elías et al., 2008) highlighted three key elements of community forest management:

- Forest conservation has been most successful where communities maintain a strong connection with the forests.
- Communities already have their own means of regulating use of their resources through "local institutions or agreements":³
- With adequate technical and financial support, communities are able to improve forest management and conservation. To that end, several projects have focused on channelling support to local communities.

3.2 Community forests today

One and a half million hectares of Guatemala's forest are currently managed under some form of community forest, corresponding to 16 per cent of the total country's forest cover.

There are estimated to be more than 1,000 community forestry organisations in Guatemala, some of which are legally registered, others based on customary law. They often coordinate themselves

3 Ostrom, 1990.



■ Tourism project under construction in a community forest.

Photo: Silvel Elías

through groups such as the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (*Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén (ACOFOP)*) and the National Alliance of Forest Organisations of Guatemala (*Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales de Guatemala (ANOFCEG)*).

There are several different types of community forest:

- **Communal lands** (*tierras comunales*). Forests owned by communities;
- **Parcialidad**. Inherited forests owned by kinship communities;
- **Municipal forests**. Forests owned by municipalities, but influenced by the collective uses and decisions of local communities;
- **Community concessions** (*concesiones comunitarias*). State-owned forests granted as temporary concessions to communities;
- **Cooperatives**. Forests owned by peasant association enterprises.

Each of these models has developed under different social, cultural, economic and political conditions. For example, communal lands, municipal forests and “*parcialidad*” forests were in existence before the Spanish conquest and have survived despite undergoing changes throughout the colonial period. Today these forests are mainly used for community subsistence purposes. Cooperatives were created as part of mid-20th century agricultural policies, and have been used for

both commercial and subsistence ends. Community concessions appeared twenty years ago, during the post-civil war period when protected areas were established. These forests are generally used for commercial purposes.

Access, usage, harvesting and exclusion rights are defined by local institutions, generally using rules adopted by the communities themselves. Decisions are taken collectively at community meetings and local authorities are tasked with monitoring compliance. In many cases rules are very strict: only certain types of usage are authorised, or extremely limited exploitation quotas are imposed and users are required to participate actively in maintaining the forests.

Community forests in Guatemala benefit from a programme of incentives designed to encourage conservation and provide income for communities. Guatemala's Forest Incentive Programme (PINFOR) has existed since 1996. It gives payments for reforestation projects (US\$2,000/hectare paid in instalments over five years), forest protection projects (US\$385/hectare over ten years) sustainable exploitation of natural forests (US\$410/hectare over five years) and, natural forest regeneration projects (US\$1,000/hectare over five years). Since its inception, PINFOR has financed a total of 7,777 projects (112,000 hectares reforested and 216,000 hectares of managed natural forest), with a total investment of US\$93 million, which has benefitted 760,000 people and created 23,000 jobs. When this has gone to community forests, it has been used to finance community development projects; it is also sometimes distributed among community members, accompanied by monitoring from the National Forestry Institute to reduce corruption and conflict. However, because of the unequal nature of land distribution in Guatemala, only 25 per cent of the PINFOR subsidies have actually gone to community forests.⁴ Moreover, many communities are blocked from accessing the incentives as they do not have legal title to their land.

To redress this, the government launched the Smallholder Forestry and Agroforestry Vocation Incentive Programme (*Programa de Incentivos para Pequeños poseedores de Tierras con Vocación Forestal (PINPEP)*), aimed at providing support specifically for people lacking legalised land titles. PINPEP has been operational since 2007, receiving funding from both the government and international development agencies, mainly from the Netherlands. As with PINFOR, INAB uses monitoring mechanisms to ensure the incentives are distributed properly. Since its inception, PINPEP has contributed to the reforestation of 1,300 hectares, as well as 1,500 hectares of agroforestry systems, 15,241 hectares of protected natural forest, and 1,247 hectares of natural forest managed for production purposes. In total, 5,399 projects totalling US\$13.4 million have been run, generating a total of 1.6 million workdays.⁵

4 <http://www.inab.gob.gt/Paginas%20web/Pinfor.aspx>

5 <http://www.inab.gob.gt/Paginas%20web/Pinpep.aspx>

4 How successful have community forests been in economic and environmental terms?

Communally-managed forests are among the best protected in Guatemala, thanks to indigenous conservation systems. They have also, in some cases, been motors for local economic development. The experience of Guatemala's two dominant models, communal forests and community concessions, is outlined below.

4.1 The communal forests of Altiplano Occidental

The Western Highlands of Guatemala (*Altiplano Occidental*) present a forest landscape dominated by coniferous, broadleaf and mixed forest. More than 80 per cent of forest cover in this region is found on collectively-owned land, either in the form of communal or municipal forests.⁶

Because the highland communal forests are located in the highest parts of river basins, they have strategic importance not only to the communities living there, but also for the general population. The forests' role in maintaining water resources is increasingly important as Guatemala's water resources continue to dwindle. Even though demographic pressure means these forests are small and fragmented, their biodiversity conservation role is also widely acknowledged.⁷ These are also unique ecosystems, home to a great number of endemic species.

Communal forests are legally owned by their communities. As such, they must follow the same legal requirements as other forest owners under the Forest Act: they must draw up management plans if they wish to obtain exploitation licences, request authorisation for changes in land usage, contribute to the protection of endangered forest species, and take part in combating forest fires. These legal requirements sometimes clash with communities' customary forest management systems.

Forests are used in this region for a number of purposes, including timber for housing, small-scale furniture-making, domestic firewood, non-timber forest products (organic fertilisers, medicinal plants and raw materials used in crafts), water collection, grazing, sacred sites and tourism. These needs can be met sustainably, but forest enforcement authorities are often ineffective, meaning forests are under threat from fires, diseases, and agricultural conversion.

Communities in this region have historically shied away from exploiting their forests commercially. Community leaders have repeatedly expressed that "*money brings nothing but discord and you cannot eat it*". For indigenous communities, forests have symbolic, cultural, social and economic values that go far beyond their commercial exploitation. These benefits are more important and can be distributed more equitably than benefits derived from selling forest products on the market. Consequently, although highland communities do generate some monetary income from the forests, they mainly use them for subsistence purposes (water, medicinal plants, firewood, timber, and sacred sites).

6 Elías et al., 2008.

7 Elías et al., 2008, Elías, Larson and Mendoza, 2009.

In order to ensure sustainable forest yield, harvesting volumes, periods and methods in the communal forests are usually subject to community rules. For example some communities maintain a system of “*faenas*”, where each family is allocated certain days where they are responsible for forest management. Other communities assign their members voluntary activities over the course of the year; and some provide members with funds and equipment.

Attempts to exploit these forests commercially have not been very successful. For example, around thirty years ago the communal forests in Tonicapán (with an area of 25,000 hectares) produced the timber for the majority of Guatemala’s domestic furniture consumption. But pressure from environmental groups meant that, from the 1990s onwards, the communal forests were converted into protected areas. This reduced timber yields and caused the decline of the local economy, damaging the livelihoods of a whole chain of stakeholders: woodcutters, carpenters, hauliers, and traders.

A more successful source of revenue has been state subsidies from the PINFOR programme, which communal forests are eligible for because the communities are the legal owners of the land. Under this programme, communities have been able to receive payments in exchange for forest conservation, restoration and sustainable management.

The community concessions model of Petén

The Maya Biosphere Reserve, in the northern department of Petén, covers nearly 2.3 million hectares. Although it is a nature reserve, CONAP granted some concessions to private enterprises and communities, giving them a shared responsibility for managing the protected areas whilst allowing them some limited rights to extract forest resources. These concessions are given out for 25 years, and forest resources must be used sustainably as set out in a management plan approved by CONAP.

Initially environmental organisations feared community concessions would increase deforestation, but over the last 20 years they have actually been among the best-conserved areas in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (see map below).

At the same time, they have offered communities opportunities for economic development. In 1995, ACOFOP was established to promote community livelihoods and economic development through sustainable forest management. Currently, this association comprises 22 community organisations, some 2,500 people who, between them, manage around a half a million hectares of forest.⁸ Communities belonging to ACOFOP undertake a diversified range of activities, including exploitation of high-value timber, secondary timber and non-timber species such as *xate*, *chicle* and *pimenta*, as well as craft activities and tourism. ACOFOP also created the FORESCOM company to process and market communities’ harvested products. They have managed to obtain Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for 482,000 hectares of community-managed forests. ACOFOP and CONAP are now negotiating a Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) project called GuateCarbon. The initiative aims to reduce 800,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂), and thereby generate an annual income of up to US\$ 1-1.5 million from the carbon market.⁹

The Petén community concessions are increasingly under threat from illegal logging, land speculation, the steady advance of agriculture, and large-scale tourist initiatives that exclude local communities. In general, these threats come from influential groups outside communities, which benefit from the state’s inability to exercise control over forests. ACOFOP is campaigning

8 Monterroso and Barry, 2009.

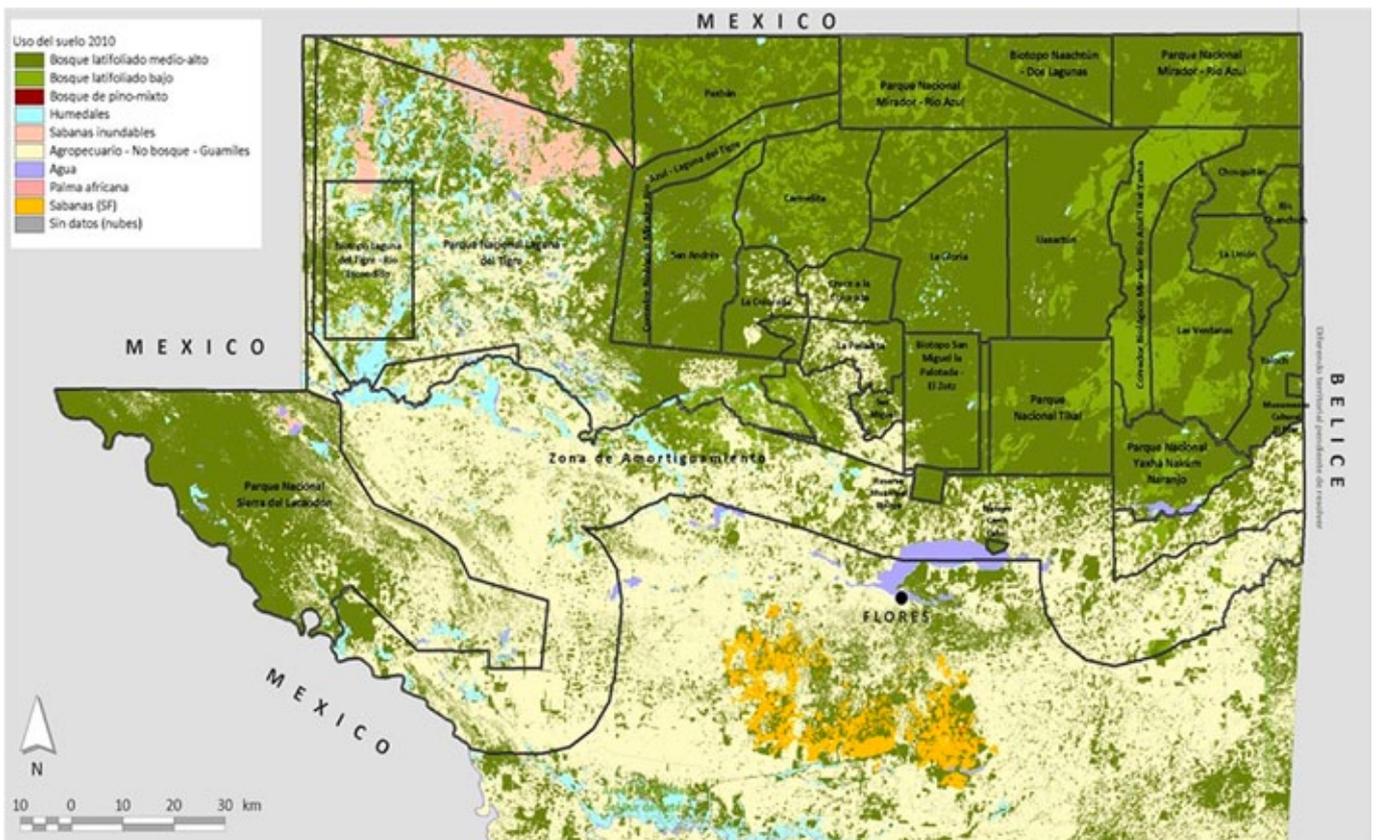
9 Hodgdon, Hayward and Samayoa, 2012.

to institutionalise the community concessions within wider forest policies, and to increase the concession term limit so that communities have longer-term security over the forests.

The Petén community concessions have been more successful in generating profit than the Altiplano communal forests. However, the conditions and objectives of the two models are very different. First, the Petén community concessions cover larger areas, which sometimes include very high value tree species. Second, the groups managing the community concessions are generally smaller than those running the communal forests, and are wealthier and of a higher, non-indigenous social class. Third, conservation objectives in the community concessions are more market-oriented, rather than being subsistence-based as in the highland communal forests. Finally, the community concessions model enjoys significant support from international development aid, which is not the case for the highlands model.

Deforestation in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve, 2010

Source: INAB-CONAP-UVG, 2012



5 Challenges to community forestry in Guatemala

Insecurity around forest ownership and access rights

For community forestry to achieve environmental and economic success, communities' right to land must have legal backing. Insecurity around land access forces many families to clear forests for agriculture, and discourages sustainable forest management in the long term.

Community concessions are particularly vulnerable. Despite the fact that most community concessions are now about halfway through the terms laid down in their concession contracts, there is a lack of clarity about renewing these contracts. Community organisations are concerned that their contracts will not be renewed and that they could lose access to their land in favour of other projects. This situation has a negative effect on conservation, since communities are unable to develop long-term plans beyond the term limits agreed with the state. ACOFOP, for example, has no guarantee that the community concession contracts will remain in force in the long term, hampering negotiations around the GuateCarbon initiative.

Capture by local elites

Socially and economically elite sections of the community often exert influence to ensure community forests are run in their favour. Underprivileged groups, such as the very poor and women, are excluded or marginalised in community decision-making. However, some communities are making real efforts to combat this exclusion. For example, in a community in Totonicapán, only the poorest families have commercial exploitation rights.

Increased pressure from other land uses

Over the last 15 years, community-managed forest areas have been invaded by a booming mining industry, the construction of new dams and the expansion of large-scale industrial agriculture plantations. This increased pressure has caused a re-concentration of land ownership and the emergence of agrarian conflicts, which are intensifying in indigenous areas where customary land tenure systems prevail (meaning people lack state legalised land titles). These developments have also increased deforestation and threatened communities' ability to protect and sustainably manage their forests.

Lack of community involvement in national policy-making

The extent to which forests are exploited or conserved depends on issues beyond the local level, such as state policies and market changes. Yet local forest populations are often excluded from decision making around these issues. National forest programmes still take too little account of communities' land rights, traditional knowledge, and local forms of organisation. This is changing somewhat, as the government is increasingly recognising communities' contributions to forest conservation, but the government continues to prioritise the interests of economically and politically powerful groups in policy-making around forests.¹⁰

¹⁰ Examples of such progress include the approval of the National Communal Land Strategy (*Estrategia Nacional de Tierras Comunes*), the adoption of PINPEP, community participation in the National Climate Change Committee (*Mesa Nacional de Cambio Climático*), community inclusion in the Group for Forests, Biodiversity and Climate Change (*Grupo de Bosques, Biodiversidad y Cambio Climático*) and the invitation to community organisations to participate in implementing Article 8j of the Convention on Biological Diversity, relating to the protection of traditional knowledge.

Public policies prioritise agriculture

The Guatemalan government continues to place too much importance on the agricultural sector in defining its policies and investments. This is reflected in the scant budget allocated to the forest sector, specifically community forests. As a result, many rural Guatemalans prefer to engage in short-term agricultural production, which is one of the country's biggest causes of deforestation.

Insufficient state subsidies for community forestry

Current state incentive programmes do not fully compensate communities' efforts to protect their forests. Community forests receive just a quarter of total national payments in forest incentives. Communities are still motivated to manage and conserve forests because of the means of subsistence they offer, but this effect would be magnified if the contribution of community forests to national economic development and environmental protection was fully recognised.

Illegal logging and agricultural conversion

Guatemala continues to face serious problems in terms of controlling illegal logging and conversion of forests to agriculture. Recent studies have revealed that up to 90 per cent of timber harvested from Guatemalan forests each year is illegal; this has a negative impact on community forests and discourages conservation efforts. Illegal logging normally comes from outside the communities, is most common in areas where community organisations are weakest.

Lack of community participation in protected area management

Community forests are not currently included in the Guatemalan System of Protected Areas (*Sistema Guatemalteco de Áreas Protegidas (SIGAP)*). This means they cannot receive state aid for their conservation efforts.¹¹ Moreover, despite the success of indigenous conservation systems, some environmental organisations are pushing Guatemala's National Council for Protected Areas to convert communal forests into protected areas. This would reduce community access to means of subsistence, especially for the poorest families, and—if the experience of other countries is anything to go by—likely increase deforestation in the long run.¹² A new vision of protected areas is necessary, where communities are placed at the centre of management and conservation. A group of governmental, non-governmental and community bodies, the Group Promoting Communal Lands (*Grupo Promotor de Tierras Comunes*), is encouraging the state to include a new category of protected areas for indigenous communities within the Guatemalan System of Protected Areas.

11 Elías et al., 2008.

12 Elías, Larson and Mendoza, 2009.

6 Recommendations and conclusion

Ensure forest communities' land rights are respected

When there is recognition and respect for collective and individual tenure rights, communities are more motivated to invest in long-term forestry activities. In order to ensure successful community forests, the state needs fully recognise and protect customary ownership systems.

This is particularly true for indigenous peoples, where protection of natural resources is central to their culture and existence. Forest conservation goes hand in hand with protection of these peoples' collective rights to land, natural resources and self-determination, as set out in International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This rights-based approach is often missing from environmentalist agendas, which generally focus on flora and fauna.

Strengthen local community institutions

The most successful community forests are run by local institutions with the power to manage the territory and regulate actions relating to shared resources. Successful institutions take charge of adopting and clarifying regulations, applying sanctions, sharing costs and profits and resolving conflicts. They are established by the communities themselves, within the framework of long-term institutional agreements.

Guatemalan communities have been operating such institutions since long before the government bodies for managing productive forests (INAB) or protected areas (CONAP) existed. For example, the Association of the 48 Cantons of Totonicapán (*Asociación de los 48 Cantones de Totonicapán*) is a local institution founded more than 400 years ago to regulate usage of communal forests. The state should provide more support to these kinds of organisations. Local communities should be given the resources and authority to end unauthorised land use changes and reduce illegal logging. Organisations like ANOFCG, which works with politicians to ensure the adoption of policies favourable to community forestry, should take the lead in pushing for these changes.

Incorporate community forestry into national land-use planning

Forests play a key role in protecting river basins, reducing the risk of natural disasters and lessening the impact of climate change. Forest management should therefore be incorporated into wider national development policies and land-use planning, with the full participation of community representatives.

Improve forestry production chains

Communities can benefit more from community forests if they begin to develop value-added processing alongside raw material extraction. The creation of the community forest enterprise FORESCOM within ACOFOP has enjoyed success because it has allowed communities to take on timber processing (cutting and drying), added-value manufacturing (such as furniture or construction components), and accessing domestic and export consumer markets. All of this has increased income and employment opportunities for the communities involved.

Increase communities' business and forest management capabilities

If community forest organisations wish to sell their products commercially, they need to comply with increasingly stringent national and international market requirements on quality, quantity, deadlines and prices. This is something many have found difficult. Community forests need technical and financial support to ensure their goods are of high enough quality.

Significant progress has been made on providing this support, but work remains to be done. There are some private companies and non-governmental organisations that provide training on technical issues, market and finance access, and how to add value, but these are not sufficient to fulfil the needs of all communities. One important step was the creation of the Group Promoting Communal Lands (*Grupo Promotor de Tierras Comunes*), an inter-institutional platform of governmental entities, non-governmental organisations, development aid organisations, academic groups and community organisations. The Guatemalan government has also created a small unit called the Project for Strengthening Municipal and Communal Forestry (BOSCOM), charged with offering technical support to community organisations.

Academic institutions can offer valuable research and training for community organisations, the government, and non-governmental bodies. Several graduate courses in community forestry have been created at Guatemalan universities since 1996. Studies like the National Diagnostic Report on the Conservation and Management of Natural Resources in Communal Land (*Diagnóstico Nacional para la Conservación y Manejo de Recursos Naturales en Tierras Comunes*) have been important in indicating future policy directions. Links between universities and community forests should be strengthened.

Respect the cultural importance of nature

Nature has a symbolic and sacred value to indigenous peoples. This fact is often not acknowledged in discussions related to Guatemala's forests and protected areas. Sacred sites, for example, have an incalculable value in indigenous cultures; forest protection initiatives must respect this.

Ensure commercial forestry activities respect local needs

Community forest organisations have increasingly moved into commercial forest extraction due to its potential to create income and jobs. There is a risk that this could create conflict unless there is sufficient oversight of revenue distribution. Commercial forest extraction could crowd out traditional forest uses to the detriment of the most vulnerable families. Communities must put in place measures to ensure fair distribution of revenues. In San Vicente Buenabaj, Totonicapán, for example, the poorest members of the community are prioritised in the allocation of forest management activities and revenues.

Ensure indigenous peoples are actively involved in decision-making

According to ILO Convention No. 169 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, indigenous peoples have a right to free, prior and informed consent, to make decisions about their development, to self-organise, and to control their territories and natural resources. Guatemalan indigenous communities are currently fighting to have these rights recognised by the state. This is a difficult battle because economically-powerful groups are pressuring the government to get licences for extractive industries in indigenous areas. The government should take the side of the indigenous peoples and protect their right to be involved in decision-making concerning their forests.

Encourage the participation of women in community forest management

If community forests are to achieve solidarity and equity, gender and inter-generational relations must be improved. Due to Guatemala's patriarchal social culture, women have been relegated to a secondary role despite many community forestry organisations being mainly comprised of women. Measures must be put in place to guarantee participation of women in higher-level decisions concerning community forests.

Support traditional forest knowledge and management techniques

All communities possess traditional forest knowledge, passed down through generations, on how forests and local ecosystems function, as well as important cultural and management practices to protect forests. Government policies and projects should incorporate this valuable knowledge.

Conclusion

Community forestry is an increasingly viable way of managing forests. Not only has it made a significant contribution to environmental conservation in Guatemala; it also offers considerable value in terms of rural economic development and poverty alleviation. The models presented in this document – communal forests and community concessions, supported by forestry incentives – each offer different lessons that could help the development of community forestry in other countries, depending on the social, political and cultural variables.

Community forestry in Guatemala has enabled a new form of governance based on recognising collective rights to land and resources. Protection efforts led by communities are exercised through their respective forms of governance and rules. Therefore, rather than pressuring communities and indigenous peoples to restructure their organisations to make them compatible with governmental mechanisms, such mechanisms must recognise and strengthen traditional organisations.

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