



Designing a REDD+ Program that Benefits Forestry Communities in Mesoamerica

Synthesis Report

PRISMA



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Methodology and Acknowledgements

This paper is an integrated synthesis of the primary results of the project “*Designing a REDD Program that Benefits Forestry Communities in Mesoamerica*,” implemented from October 2009 to September 2010 by Fundación PRISMA and Grupo CABAL, with funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Ford Foundation. The objective of this project is to orient the actions of the Climate Works Foundation in Mesoamerica, under the concept of a Mesoamerican Program on Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation that includes the equity and social justice concerns of indigenous peoples and forestry communities.

In the framework of the project, dialogue meetings and discussion workshops were held with different indigenous and peasant leaders, specialists, and program officers from different countries, who provided useful input for the orientation of the proposed program. Several of the reports herein are based on interviews, held between October 2009 and September 2010, with different stakeholders in government entities, representatives of indigenous peoples and community forestry organizations, civil society organizations, and cooperation agencies and research centers in the countries of Mesoamerica. Additional information contained in this report was obtained from different media sources (electronic and print), forums, seminars, and secondary sources of interest to the project. The working team would like to recognize the different people, organizations, and entities that provided information for this project and express our gratitude for their assistance.

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Introduction

During the Conference of the Parties (COP-11) in Montreal, Canada in 2005, following the new evidence on the global importance of forests in climate change mitigation, once again the reduction of emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) was introduced as a key theme in the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). As part of the agreements reached at the COP-13, the UNFCCC adopted the Bali Action Plan, which included REDD, as well as the importance of forest conservation, sustainable forest management, and the expansion of forest carbon reserves as key elements for the mitigation of climate change. The exposure and broad support that REDD received in the international talks led to the creation of funds and initiatives designed to promote REDD readiness.

Mesoamerica as a region has significant forest masses and shows signs of being in an important forest transition, although in comparing its forests with those of other countries and regions, they might seem less relevant. However, for different reasons, this region has been the object of much interest for promoting readiness processes for the implementation of REDD actions. These factors include conditions where forestry communities and indigenous peoples have access and tenure over large swaths of forest, and in addition, the fact that they have developed sustainable community management schemes and diverse programs that make this substantially different from other regions of the world. There is clear interest in Mesoamerica to prepare itself to implement actions under a possible REDD regime. This interest includes diverse stakeholders, from governments and conservation organizations to

community organizations, cooperation agencies, universities, and research centers.

This interest is no accident, as REDD could mean the strengthening of technical and institutional capacities of governments, especially for forest management. For other stakeholders, such as forestry communities and indigenous peoples, it could open opportunities for buttressing livelihoods and constructing new institutional arrangements that increase the prospects for governance and sustainability in the territories.

There are evident differences in perspective and approach, not only among the different countries of Mesoamerica, but also within the countries, since REDD readiness processes are also revealing new power scenarios for diverse stakeholders who are vying for advantageous positions for specific compensation mechanisms linked to REDD. With different scopes, the countries of Mesoamerica have begun their processes to prepare for implementing REDD actions, which are supported by different programs. Practically without exception, the approach adopted in Mesoamerica includes the “+” (plus) on REDD, which is not by chance, since the role of forest conservation, sustainable forest management, and the need to expand forest carbon reserves is fundamental to any REDD strategy in the countries.

This report demonstrates how generalized the REDD readiness process is in Mesoamerica. In addition to the enormous challenges regarding information, participation, and consultation, readiness processes are also facing serious challenges regarding greater openness and commitment to authentic processes that include the

strategic participation of fundamental stakeholders, especially in the case of indigenous peoples and forestry communities. The preparation process for REDD in Mesoamerica is recent and is evolving with important celerity, but it reflects the urgent need for commitments decided through greater openness and the inclusion of stakeholders who are fundamental for greater legitimacy of this process.

Mesoamerica has the opportunity to play a leading role internationally in the design and operation of an inclusive REDD+ scheme that addresses the underlying causes of deforestation and degradation, and especially, that strategically integrates the role of indigenous peoples and forestry communities. However, imbalances in the way the REDD+ agenda is institutionalized in Mesoamerica could have highly harmful effects for forestry communities and indigenous peoples, since in addition to the lack of consultation and participation, fundamental concerns such as the distribution of benefits and rights are sorely missing from almost all of the region's countries.

In this context, REDD offers particularly strategic potential for advancing toward an agenda that delves deeper into the inherent complexities, such as those relative to the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation and their relationship to conditions of territorial governance. It also has potential for addressing other core issues that include equity and social justice, which are concerns that require a determined effort to adequately address the dimensions related to forestry communities' rights of ownership, use, access, management, and exclusion, and to strengthen their livelihoods and conditions that improve territorial management and governance.

This synthesis presents the principal results of the project *“Designing a REDD+ Program that Benefits Forestry Communities in Mesoamerica”* and is organized in three sections: the first summarizes the main trends in deforestation dynamics and forest regeneration in the region; the second presents the main programs and initiatives for REDD+ readiness and the critical themes from the perspective of forestry communities and indigenous peoples; and the third presents, in summary, a proposal for a Community REDD+ Program in Mesoamerica.

Forests, deforestation, and carbon in Mesoamerica

Forests and deforestation in Mexico and Central America

In Central America, the processing of information for the assessment of forest resources has mainly been the task of the forestry institutes and ministries of agriculture and livestock. In addition to this, a considerable body of information and knowledge about forests has been produced for conservation purposes, related to the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC) and the region's Protected Areas System. Ironically, no systematic or regionwide studies have been done on the extent and implications of deforestation or degradation.

According to the most recent National Forest Resource Assessments from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the region of Mexico and Central America has 84.3

million hectares of forests, of which 77% is found in Mexico, with some 64.8 million hectares of forest and jungle (34% of Mexico's land area). For their part, the seven Central American countries contain the remaining 23%. El Salvador has only 1.5% of Central America's forests (excluding Mexico), and although 61% of Belize is forested, this represents only 7.1% of the total for Central America. Honduras has the largest forested area, representing 26.6% of Central America's forests (46% of its national land area), followed by Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, and Costa Rica, respectively.

Given the deficiencies in existing statistics on changes in forest area for Central America, the magnitude of deforestation reported in the documents of public entities is often based on FAO statistics. The region is continuing to lose its forests, but significant changes have taken place in the last 20 years; compared to the

Table 1: Forest Area in Mesoamerica

Country	Forest (Thousands of hectares)	National land area (Thousands of hectares)	Percentage of national land area	Percentage of forest area	Percentage of forest area, excluding Mexico
Belize	1,393	2,280	61.1	1.7	7.1
Costa Rica	2,605	5,108	51.0	3.1	13.4
El Salvador	287	2,065	13.9	0.3	1.5
Guatemala	3,657	10,820	33.8	4.3	18.8
Honduras	5,192	11,190	46.4	6.2	26.6
Nicaragua	3,114	12,117	25.7	3.7	16.0
Panama	3,251	7,439	43.7	3.9	16.6
Subtotal	19,499	51,018	38.2	23.20	100.0
Mexico	64,802	190,594	34.0	76.9	
Total	84,301	242,244	34.8	100.0	

Source: Based on data from FAO

Map 1: Forest Cover in Mexico and Central America

726,000 hectares of forest lost annually in the 1990s, FAO reported annual losses of 395,000 hectares between 2005 and 2010.

Most of the progress has been made in Mexico, Panama, and Costa Rica. From 2005-2010, annual loss of forest decreased by 56%, from 354,000 to 155,000 hectares, which means that the annual deforestation rate dropped from 0.5% to 0.2% per year. Panama has reduced its deforestation rate from 1.2% to 0.4%, and Costa Rica, which is the only country with a net gain in forest, went from an annual loss of 19,000 hectares to an annual gain of 23,000 hectares. In contrast, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala continue to have high rates of deforestation. Honduras has an annual rate of change of 2.0% in forest cover; however, in absolute terms, it has twice the forest area of Costa Rica,

which has the second highest percentage of forested land area, following Belize.

Despite these advances, however, diverse “fronts” of deforestation exist in areas close to the great forest masses. Some of the most striking cases are the Laguna del Tigre and Sierra Lacandón reserves and the buffer area of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala; and Pine Ridge, Deep River, and Swasey Bladen in Belize. In Honduras, fronts surround the major forest areas, such as the Reserve of the Plátano, Tawahka, and Patuka Rivers. In Nicaragua, the most aggressive fronts are severely affecting large sectors of the Caribbean, among them the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve and the protected areas of Wawashan and Silva Hills and the Indio-Maíz River. In Costa Rica, the major fronts are concentrated in the northern zone between

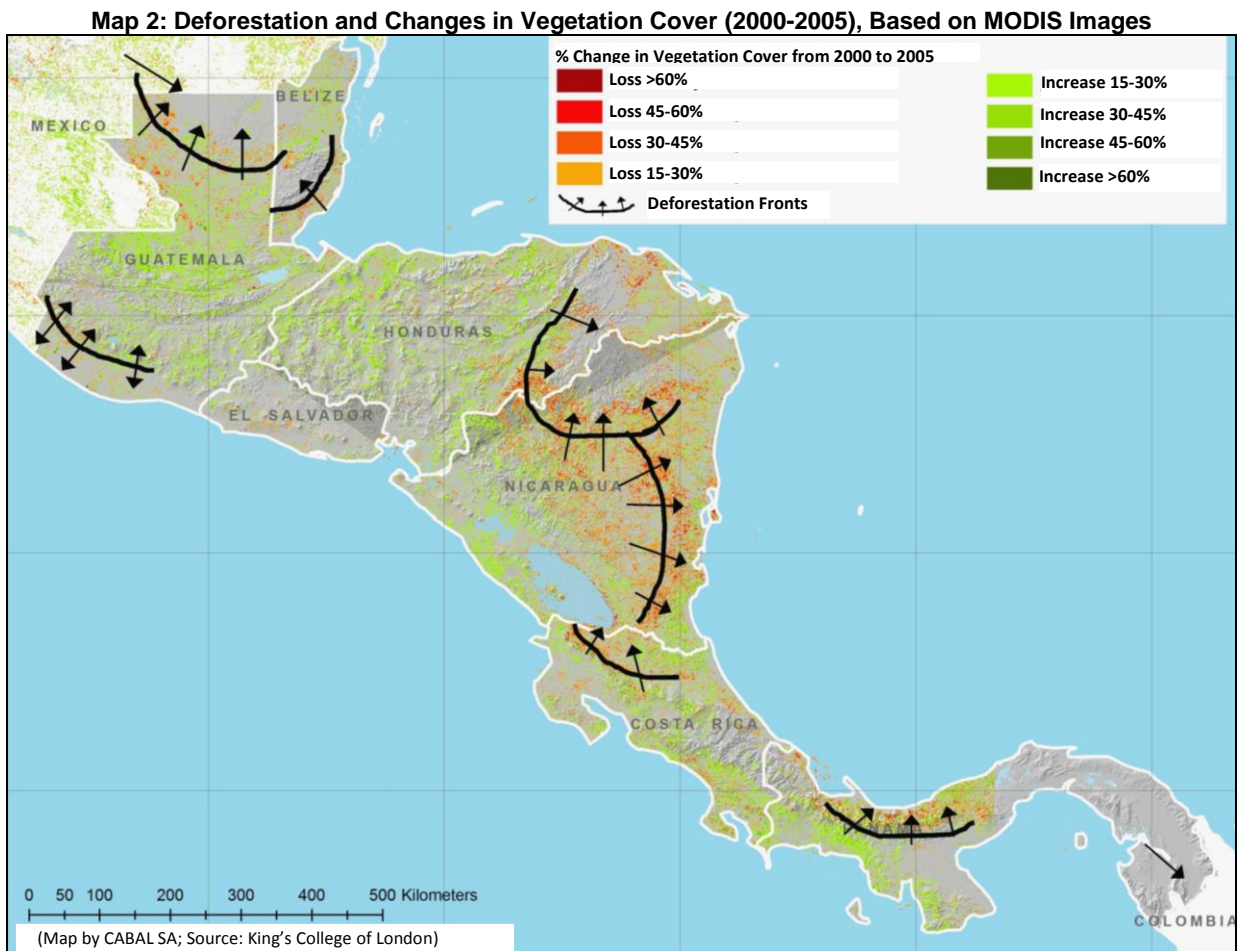
the San Juan River and the central volcanic mountain range. In Panama, the deforestation dynamic is strongly affecting the Ngöbe Buglé district.

Deforestation, changes in land use, and forest regeneration

The Mesoamerican countries are going through differentiated processes and dynamics that include territories with a strong persistence of deforestation, but also of forest transition, including territories in which important forest regeneration processes are in evidence. Some of the main processes occurring recently in the region are discussed below.

Mexico: Forestry transition, degradation, and forest regeneration

In Mexico, the National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) reports a net deforestation rate of 160,000 hectares for the 2002-2007 period, which is the same rate reported by FAO for the 2005-2010 period. These figures reveal substantial changes from Mexico's historical deforestation patterns reported in the 1980s. The literature identified historical deforestation rates ranging from 370,000 to 1.5 million hectares per year (SARH, 1991; Repetto, 1989; FAO, 1988; Masera et al., 1992; Castillo et al., 1989; Myers, 1989; Toledo et al., 1989). One of the main reasons for the variations in the estimates is the



multiplicity of criteria and definitions of classes of vegetation used (FAO, 1990).

In June 1998, the Undersecretary of Natural Resources of Mexico estimated that illegal clearing of land for soil-use changes was responsible for 90% of the deforestation in Mexico, with greater momentum in southern Mexico. In an evaluation of the annual deforestation rate for the 1972-1990 period (18 years), considering three forest inventories (1961-1985, 1991, 1992-1994) and retrospectively comparing the soil and forest cartography of two periods, annual deforestation of 230,000 hectares was calculated. The most relevant changes were the degradation and fragmentation of forests, affecting more than 1.3 million hectares. The process of fragmentation had the highest annual rate of change and is the origin of the future deforestation identified by INEP.

Looking at the jungles of Quintana Roo and Campeche in the Yucatan Peninsula, Turner et al. (2001) analyzed land use changes that occurred from 1987 to 1997. This region experienced annual deforestation rates of 2% from 1975 to 1990, falling drastically to 0.2% in the following five years due to the Mexican economic crisis (Villar et al., 1999). Nonetheless, the succession of vegetation has not remained stable due to an increase in the cutting of regrowth, preventing regeneration from reaching a mature structure and composition. Today, pressure on the forests is coming mainly from the Mundo Maya tourism project, which is developing large-scale tourism infrastructure, and also from the pressures exerted by chili producers, corn patches, and livestock development projects.

A study conducted by ECOSUR and UNAM in the Lacandona and El Ocote jungles confirmed that the forests have shrunk substantially in northern and eastern Mexico and are the object of degradation and of transformation to pastu-

reland and agriculture, primarily. In contrast, a forest restoration process has been seen in Altos de Chiapas and the northern mountains. As other studies have documented, close proximity to highways and increased population density are two factors related to the deforestation process, although the transformation of perturbed forest areas into pastureland has been documented in other studies and seems to respond not only to accessibility but also to the ease of removing this type of vegetation cover (Ben de Jong et al., 2006).

Nicaragua: New livestock boom and expansion of nontraditional crops

Consistent with the analysis of Rudel (2007) related to the drivers of deforestation, forest cover losses were identified in the 2000-2005 period in areas of cattle expansion in Nicaragua with spatial characteristics very similar to the historical cattle expansion, which ranges from Chontales and Boaco to Nueva Guinea, in Rama; northwest to Wawashan; and southeast to San Carlos. Nonetheless, the agents that are pushing this cattle front have changed, as greater integration in the regional export market for beef, milk, and cheese are newly energizing this sector, now with greater participation by small and medium size producers, according to van der Zee et al. (2007). They stress that 46.17% of Nicaragua's land area is occupied by extensive livestock production, with an average gross income of only \$110-\$135 per hectare. The entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement between Mexico and Nicaragua in July 1998 meant that cattle ranchers would obtain a better price with the arrival of Mexican companies, and consequently entry into a sizable market for young bulls.

Others studies of deforestation by Zeledon and Kelly (2008) to retrospectively analyze changes in vegetation cover and land use in southeastern Jinotega challenge the existence of an

eastward moving agricultural frontier cutting through the region. They concluded that the most dramatic changes occurred before 1978 and that from 1978 to 1987 regeneration dominated (secondary growth with fragments of forest loss), and although the area converted to agriculture increased from 1987 to 1999, the net effect was a gain in cover, with greater vigor near the urban center. In effect, the most dramatic changes in the conversion of forests to agricultural land use in Jinotega occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, with the expansion of coffee growing and livestock production, and the decrease in deforestation in the 1980s due to the war has been well documented. However, the advance of the agricultural frontier toward the Atlantic coast, although with a different intensity, has continued since then.

Nicaragua has a long history of corporate agriculture, with sugar, rice, coffee, livestock businesses, and some agroindustry. In the past 14 years, food chains have been installed, but based on the production of nontraditional crops, mainly from Costa Rica. One variant has been the planting of citrus orchards on the southern border with some integration with processing, but these are still medium scale operations (20,000), compared to Costa Rica. The most notable change is the expansion of the cultivation of African palm in Kukra Hill and El Castillo. In Kukra Hill, the first plantations were planted on land that had previously been used to grow sugarcane. However, the expansion to the current 15,000 hectares has been achieved at the expense of significant areas of forest. These plantations are part of a consortium formed to market palm oil, which has similar plantings in Honduras and Guatemala.

In summary, there is a strong reactivation of the cattle front in Nicaragua as a result of the economic policies of export promotion and of the opening of markets for cattle on the hoof. Cattle ranchers are responding very quickly to price

incentives, which is translating into rapid changes in land use. The fast growth of the export market for cattle on the hoof, meat, cheese, and milk also produced the reactivation of pastureland in historical cattle lands in Boaco and Chontales, and the enormous expansion of the cattle frontier in the regions of the mining triangle (Rosita, Siuna, and Bonanza), Rancho Grande, Río Blanco, Bocana de Paiwás, Nueva Guinea, and San Carlos.

Costa Rica: Forestry transition and expansion of the agricultural maquila (processing plants for re-export)

Costa Rica had high deforestation levels in the 1970s and 1980s, reaching rates of up to 66,000 hectares per year. From 1987 to 1997, these rates dropped to a little over 16,000 ha/year, and from 1997 to 2000, according to the Tropical Science Center, deforestation was 3,000 ha/year and was localized in the Osa Peninsula, the Atlantic region, and the northern part of the country.

Costa Rica is in a solid stage of forest transition, with more gains than losses in the dynamics of changes in cover. Nonetheless, important transformations have been occurring in recent years with shifts in the areas where the greatest changes are taking place, putting strong pressure on mature forests and the system of reserves and protected areas. These transformations are due to the large-scale expansion of corporate cultivation of pineapple for export, with an impact on ecosystems, suggesting a new version of the old banana model (CUDECA, 2006; COECOCEIBA, 2008; ASEPROLA, 2010). Pineapple production in Costa Rica covers 40,000 hectares and is the second largest agricultural export. It is grown primarily in extensive, technologically cutting-edge plantations, distinct from Costa Rica's traditional pineapple production.

Panama: Incipient forest transformation and teak plantations

The National Environmental Authority of Panama reports a deforestation rate of 1.12% with an annual loss of 41,325 hectares for the 1992-2000 period. Nonetheless, a more recent study indicates that in the 2000-2008 period, the deforestation rate was down to 0.4%, with an annual loss of forests of just 13,420 hectares.

Various researchers have tried to explain the variations in the deforestation rates between regions. In one geographic analysis, using demographic information and spatial forest cover data for the 1992-2000 period, Wright and Samaniego (2008) relate forest cover patterns to historical soil uses in Panama. The areas deforested in the first deforestation period before 1947 showed a vigorous forest transition in the 1992-2000 period, with an increase of 85% in secondary forests. Employment in agriculture in the forest transition areas dropped 31%. In contrast, the areas that had primary forests in 1947 did not have net changes given the regeneration of secondary forests, although they lost 8% of mature forest cover. As a result, they found that although mature forests shrank 1.3% annually, forest cover increased 0.36% annually, suggesting an incipient forest transition in the country.

In general, Panama's poorest provinces are also the ones with the greatest rates of deforestation. In these territories, deforested land is primarily destined for small-scale agriculture and livestock production (Nelson et al., 2001; Potvin et al., 2008). Coincidentally, several indigenous comarcas have the highest rates of poverty and although they have had high deforestation rates, according to recent studies, these trends are changing. In Darien province, from 1987 to 1997, the main changes in land use occurred along the Pan-American Highway, to the edge of the Emberá indigenous comarca, legally in-

corporated in 1983, the same year the highway was completed. The Nelson et al. (2001) study, analyzing the changes that have occurred, suggests that cultural practices regarding land use, together with effective ownership rights, clearly make a difference in the resulting landscape. Their results indicate that a significant loss in forest cover would have occurred if ownership rights were taken away from Comarca Emberá. Furthermore, the inhabitants of Comarca Emberá to the west of the highway use farming practices that are similar to those used by communities outside the comarca. While cultural values and ownership rights exert a significant effect on land use and forest cover in some parts of Darien, the study shows that causality is not universal and is location-dependent. Likewise, it concludes that the legal protection of Darien National Park seems to have made little difference in the use of land inside the park, due to difficult access, topography, and remoteness.

Taking a more focused look at changes in forest cover at the agricultural frontier in the Bayano-Darien region, Sloan (2008) proposes a reconceptualization of the processes of deforestation and revegetation, when affirming that not only have changes in forest cover become more complex, but also simultaneous, interwoven by ascending land-use opportunity costs being taken advantage of by new agents.

In this region, despite the depopulation occurring in the area, simultaneously, pasturelands increased, with ranchers pushing on the agricultural frontier. Teak forestry plantations expanded significantly in areas previously occupied by pastures and fields that were left in stubble, given new opportunities for access to lands for farming in other locations.

This revegetation with plantations, which at the same time is part of a dynamic preceded by deforestation, is a topic of controversy between

the National Environment Authority (ANAM) and the environmental community, alarmed at the surge in a forest transition lacking in environmental or social benefits.

Although these research studies illustrate the highly heterogeneous dynamics of forest cover, they also reveal the temporary nature of some patterns of land use and the strong influence of cultural patterns. The intense revegetation of land in historically agricultural areas is explained in the literature, in part, by a decrease of over 500,000 agricultural hectares, the insertion of agricultural day laborers in the service economy, and the increase in forestry plantation area (70,000 hectares by 2008). In contrast, subsistence agriculture increased from 7.5% to 10.9% of the country's land area, which would be explained by shifting cultivation that is still converting forests into fields and pastures (Fischer and Vasseur, 2000; Potvin, 2005).

Incipient regeneration processes

Important forest regeneration processes also coexist in Mesoamerica. In Guatemala, for example, 18% of indigenous territories show evidence of regeneration processes, compared to only 3.5% in protected areas. The western highlands stand out as the area of indigenous influence where the greatest increase in forest cover is observed.

A similar situation is occurring in Belize, as 3.5% of indigenous territories show regeneration compared to 0.7% in protected areas. The territories where this regeneration is most evident are those of Kekchi (Q'eqchi') influence in the south and Yucatec/Itza' in the north.

In Honduras, 2.4% of indigenous territories are regenerating their vegetation cover, while the balance is negative in around 3.7% of protected areas. The lands with increased cover are concentrated in Lenca and Tolupan territory. In

Nicaragua, the balance is negative in both cases, with the difference that the loss is nearly three times greater in indigenous areas.

In Costa Rica, the balance is positive in indigenous territories (6.2%), while in protected areas it is 9.7%. In Panama, regeneration has a positive balance of 9.2% in indigenous territories, compared to 1.9% in protected areas (five times greater).

Trends in land use change and potential for REDD in indigenous territories

Recent interest in land use dynamics and the development of tools for interpreting satellite images have led to a proliferation of models that make land use projections for different conditions. In general, these models use change factors contextualized for each region under study (Verburg et al., 2004; Briassoulis, 2000; Verburg y Veldkamp, 2004).

For Central America (except Belize and El Salvador), Wassenaar et al. (2007), using the CLUE model, projected a loss of 2,445,000 hectares for the 2000-2010 period. According to this projection, over half of the deforested area in the region occurs because of pastureland expanding into forests (70%), and the rest is due to cropland expansion (30%). Although the model predicts a significant expansion in pastureland in the forests of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in the northern Petén region of Guatemala, primarily in Laguna del Tigre National Park, on average, less than half of deforestation is located in the hotspots identified. The more diffuse processes of decreasing secondary forest that are predicted as dominant for extensive areas in the region (diffuse deforestation) appear repeatedly in the literature as the most relevant changes occurring at present. The loss of 244,400 hectares per year projected by this model for the 2000-2010 period does not differ

greatly from the latest data reported by FAO for the region.

Using the same CLUE model, as part of the study of the economy of climate change done by ECLAC, the Center for Tropical Research and Education (CATIE) built a land-use change trend scenario to the year 2100, using 2005 as the reference year, and based on the changes, it has estimated the impact on greenhouse gas emissions. In the results of one of the two scenarios, forests decrease by 30% due to demands that increase agricultural and livestock use by up to 62%. Almost all the change would occur by 2050, with the risk of losing 45 gigatons (Gt) of total carbon stocks, equivalent to 30% of the stocks recorded in 2005 (CCAD, 2009). Once consideration of the model is that given that the most fragmented forest areas have historically been the most affected (the most threatened), the model “deforests” these forested areas first, as being under greater threat.

Without diminishing the importance of these modeling exercises, the high risk of overestimating future deforestation is clear, due to limitations in the quality of the information used and the presumption that economic development (demand for land) will follow historical trends.

The forest cover that indigenous territories and community lands have in Central America represents considerable potential for contributing over 10 million hectares of forests to strate-

gies that have prevented deforestation and have sustainable forest management. Additionally, these territories have the potential to contribute considerable land area to activities to increase carbon reserves in the region. If we add the community lands of states in southern Mexico, such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Quintana Roo, they exceed 40 million hectares, which suggests a considerable potential for promoting and consolidating a Mesoamerican Community Carbon Initiative, which could easily become the most significant one in the region.

Considering that an important set of sustainable forest management experiences has been implemented in these indigenous and community forestry territories, it is extremely critical that the efforts to promote, prepare, and implement Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) in Mesoamerica strategically incorporate the stakeholders in those territories. They represent not only the main potential of REDD in Mesoamerica, but also the main allies for actions and strategies that effectively deal with the dynamics of deforestation and degradation and even options to expand forest carbon reserves in the region. Nonetheless, as we discuss in the next chapter, the predominant efforts of the official REDD readiness processes in Mesoamerica generally do not include these stakeholders either adequately or strategically, which suggests the need to promote preparation processes focused on community forestry organizations and indigenous peoples.

Map 3: Forests, Protected Areas, and Indigenous Territories in Mesoamerica



Trends and critical issues in the preparation for REDD+ in Mesoamerica

Main REDD+ readiness programs

While the nature and structure of REDD+ have yet to be defined, various efforts in Mesoamerican countries have nonetheless moved forward in preparation for a possible REDD+ regime. Interest from different stakeholders in the perceived opportunities that such a regime represents has led to the creation of funds for REDD+ readiness initiatives. The first of these programs—and the one with greatest presence in the region to date—is the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). By mid-2009, all countries, with the exception of Belize, had submitted their Readiness Plan Idea Notes (R-PIN). Since then, only Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama have submitted their REDD Readiness Preparation Proposals (R-PP), while the remaining countries are either in the process of developing these proposals or have shown interest in doing so.

One important aspect of the FCPF-led readiness process has been speed. The need to guarantee REDD feasibility has created a certain degree of urgency, since the first commitment period for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions under the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012.

The second program with a key role in the region has been the United Nations Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Program), which began in Panama in January 2010 and concludes in November 2012, with a \$5.3 million operating budget. The program will contribute to preparation and capacity-building for a REDD system, designed in accordance with United Na-

tions Development Group principles, and specifically referencing the rights of indigenous peoples.

The third is the Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Central America and the Dominican Republic (REDD-CARD), run by GTZ through the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD). This program complements and supports a variety of existing initiatives in Central America and the Dominican Republic, primarily through the regional integration system. The first phase runs from September 2009 to December 2012, with the option to eventually expand to additional phases. The program has been allocated \$16 million to conduct its various phase one activities. GTZ's REDD-CARD Program has come on the scene in the context of the FCPF-led process, and has proposed to align itself with it. It has also sought to align itself with the institutional framework of the Central American Integration System (SICA) and its various regional environmental strategies. In addition to existing regional strategies, the REDD-CARD Program also emphasizes a regional approach because of its potential to avoid leakage among countries and to optimize the ability to control and conserve cross-border forest ecosystems, among other reasons.

While these programs are the most prominent in the region, the agreement between Mexico and Norway through the REDD+ Partnership should not be overlooked; nor should the various civil society organizations and even community networks and organizations preparing for eventual REDD implementation. NORAD,

with support from the Norwegian Development Fund, approved funding to begin implementation of the Community Agro-forestry Project in Central America in connection with REDD (*PASCA-REDD Comunitaria*), to be conducted in four rural communities in the region. This project seeks to promote REDD mechanisms through agro-forestry and community-based natural resource management systems, including compensation for environmental services. The project would be implemented by the following organizations: Global Village Project (Honduras); Foundation for Autonomy and Development of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (FADCANIC); the Research and Forestry Studies Institute (INISEFOR, *Instituto de Investigación y Estudios Forestales*) of the National University of Costa Rica; and the Cuchumatanes Association of Organizations (ASOCUCH, *Asociación de Organizaciones de los Cuchumatanes*) of Guatemala.

The case of Mexico is particularly important, not only because of the enormous scale of its forested territory and the powerful influence of its community forestry sector, cooperatives, and indigenous peoples, but also because of the various REDD readiness strategies it is promoting. These include the FCPF, international and national conservation organizations, and even development of national carbon markets. An important element in this country has been the role of the different states, such as Campeche, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Michoacán, which have begun to prepare their own REDD initiatives, as has the municipal government of Othón Blanco in Quintana Roo. The state of Campeche is part of the first international REDD initiative, along with 14 other states in the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, and Nigeria. The initiative, led by the Governor's Climate and Forest Taskforce (GCF) of California and backed by Climate Works, operates with sub-national performance-based payments. It seeks to show how

REDD can actually work in practice, by developing rules for credit allocation that link projects of scale to national systems for carbon accounting.

The methods, designs and contents of these programs have already begun to define the REDD readiness process in a significant way. Likewise, the shortcomings and limitations of these programs are beginning to be seen. As will be discussed later, if left uncorrected, these inadequacies could substantially reduce the likelihood that REDD+ strategies will truly benefit indigenous peoples and forestry communities, and could even cast doubt on how effectively they will actually reduce deforestation and forest degradation.

Stakeholders, roles and positions surrounding REDD+

In recent years, the region has witnessed a growing interest in REDD+ mechanisms. This has paralleled an increase in attention paid to the topic at global climate change negotiations and on the international agenda, as well as in funding availability for readiness initiatives. Clear expectations, in turn, have been created for accessing resources under a possible REDD+ regime. Nevertheless, there is an enormous imbalance in knowledge and participation from the different stakeholders involved in the REDD+ dialogue and readiness processes.

Following is a summary of the different groups of stakeholders in the region who have adopted varying positions concerning REDD. Government stakeholders are discussed first, given their central role in preparation of national strategies, conducted primarily with support, or in order to gain support, from regional programs and emerging funds.

Government stakeholders

Every country in the region has taken its own path towards the opportunity to join REDD+. Costa Rica has played a strong, driving leadership role in negotiations on climate change in general and on REDD+ in particular. It has done so not only through membership in the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, but also by holding the position of Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC, and through its own experience consolidating its national system of payment for environmental services – a measure closely linked to qualifying for funding under a REDD+ regime. Mexico, in addition to having vast expanses of forested land, is also implementing a REDD+ strategy through its programs for community forestry and payment for environmental services.

While Mexico and Costa Rica have taken the lead in preparing for REDD+, the rest of the countries in Mesoamerica have also demonstrated increasing openness, especially in the last two years. That said, each country is currently at a different stage of REDD+ readiness, not only because of having begun the process at different times, but also because of having started at different places. Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, and even Guatemala are currently further along in developing their strategies, while Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras are still in the initial stages of preparing their national strategies.

In effect, even though Guatemala has not prepared its R-PP, it has actually made substantial gains in developing a REDD+ strategy. This is, in part, due to initiatives led and supported by international conservation organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and later facilitated and expanded by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN). Nevertheless, these efforts have revealed some basic problems, such as the com-

plicated situation around land tenure and carbon rights, which have hampered several current initiatives.

While Panama won approval of its R-PP in 2009, the proposal was considerably flawed in terms of consultative and participation processes, as well as certain underlying issues including the territorial rights of indigenous peoples. With the change of government in 2009, the strategy underwent significant turns, and is currently being redefined. In the case of El Salvador, change in government also affected strategy development. The R-PIN was prepared in 2009, but only in recent months has the government returned to the process, with a shift towards risk and vulnerability reduction in the country. Similarly, Nicaragua, through its Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA), has resumed development of its REDD+ strategy and preparation of its R-PP with an adaptation approach, and from the perspective of a REDD+ focused on funding, not on carbon markets. Lastly, Honduras, which had begun its process with the FCPF in 2008, came to a standstill in 2009 with political events in the country, and has only recently taken up the process again in 2010.

Despite differences in the status of REDD+ strategies and ongoing design in each of the countries, certain parallels can be drawn, as discussed below.

Readiness funds to strengthen state institutions and programs

The first thing that comes to light when comparing national REDD+ strategy preparation processes is the clear tendency to use funding to strengthen governmental institutions and programs, as well as technical capacity. Practically without exception, there is across-the-board agreement that REDD+ readiness processes should serve as mechanisms for bols-

tering existing government programs: in Mexico, the national system for payment for environmental services (PES) and community forestry; in Costa Rica, the conservation areas system and its PES program; in Panama, the national environmental strategy and “green businesses” as a way of mitigating pressure on forests; in Honduras, though still in its embryonic stage, the intention to strengthen the protected areas system, as well as forest management and production; and in Guatemala, proposed strengthening of the forest incentive systems (PINFOR and PINPEP), as well as expansion of its protected areas system -- which explains, in part, why the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP, *Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas*) is defending the carbon rights of community forestry enterprises in a REDD+ pilot project, as these could generate significant cash flow.

Finally, while El Salvador also ties REDD+ to a possible National Ecosystems Restoration Program, it is looking to fit the strategy into a climate change adaptation approach, in which risk management and vulnerability reduction objectives come before any form of REDD+ monitoring, reporting, or verification.

Positions on scale and baselines

The units by which emissions reductions are calculated and compensated is a key factor in any REDD+ strategy, since they determine how the baseline is set, how different stakeholders are organized within the system, the way that leakages are avoided, and how responsibilities and potential benefits are distributed. In several countries, this point remains to be determined, as in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Costa Rica is working on establishing a national mechanism, while Guatemala and Mexico are looking to establish a mechanism that can be used sub-nationally, with information compatible on a national scale. Underlying

implications here are tied to policy commitments that governments assume as they relate to those forces actually driving deforestation, changes in soil use and degradation. These scenarios have yet to be addressed in the region, even in those countries in more advanced stages of readiness.

Growing interest in REDD's “+”

Several initiatives are underway in the region that relate to the scope of REDD (RED, REDD and REDD+). With the exception of El Salvador and Costa Rica, there is strong interest in avoided deforestation activities (RED), due in part to the fact that this is one of the categories with the greatest funding potential, as well as more highly-developed methodologies, which provide the solid foundation needed to obtain credit. Degradation reduction activities, on the other hand, seem to have received less attention, despite their considerable relevance to the region.

While at first failing to garner much attention, new interest has emerged in the region around REDD's “+”, which includes forest conservation, sustainable forest management, and increased forest carbon reserves. As REDD's “+” gathers strength, other stakeholders could also influence the directions strategies take. While there is still much to be defined in terms of how and under what conditions REDD's “+” will be put into practice, the political foundations are clearly being laid for it. In El Salvador, with its extremely low forest coverage, there is clear support for increasing carbon reserves, which could grow to be a fundamental pillar in driving ecosystem restoration.

In Honduras, a country with a politically and economically important forestry sector, it is not surprising that its National Plan 2010-2022 calls for linking forest production and management to international carbon markets. Nevertheless,

the REDD strategy is still in its initial stages in this country, and it is still unclear just how much importance will be given to the “+”, especially when considering the country’s currently high rate of deforestation.

Guatemala, despite its strong interest in avoided deforestation and degradation, has involved the forest management and production sector in discussions through the National Forest Institute (INAB), and has considered dedicating resources to forestry incentive programs. Both Guatemala and Nicaragua see the potential for REDD+, closely linking it to vulnerability reduction and climate change adaptation strategies. Panama has also recognized the importance of the “+” in its national REDD strategies and forest policies. Furthermore, this component is also the most relevant in terms of inclusion of indigenous peoples and territories.

Costa Rica claims that it should receive credits for its “early action” in deforestation reduction. Its relatively low rates of deforestation in recent decades have earned it a central role in sustainable forest management as well as conservation, which could support the National System of Conservation Areas. In Nicaragua, conservation and sustainable forest management would be a fundamental element of its REDD+ strategy. In Mexico, the “+” has been emphasized to support community forestry programs and forest conservation. Moreover, it is the only country in the region that has also proposed eventual inclusion of agricultural emissions—which is to say, the need to move towards a national REDD++ strategy.

Participation from governmental stakeholders and coordination on local and regional scales

Upon a closer look at governmental stakeholders leading and participating in readiness ef-

forts, it is clear that strategies have been designed primarily by environmental and forest institutions, with little participation by organizations from other sectors or from state or municipal governments.

In Mexico, the REDD+ strategy has been mainly led by the National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR), in coordination with the National Institute of Ecology (INE), and by the climate change teams of the Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) and the Secretary of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries, and Food (SAGARPA). Other state and municipal institutions have little representation in this group, and in general have not been fully integrated into the national REDD+ strategy. A similar situation can be observed in Panama, where the process has been centralized in ANAM. In Honduras, despite the fact that the new forestry law calls for participation from municipal governments in forestry policy, these institutions had little or no input into the design of the R-PIN, which was developed primarily by the country’s environmental and forestry institutions: the Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment (SERNA) and the National Institute of Forest Conservation and Development (ICF). El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua experienced generally the same dynamic as Honduras in terms of preparing their R-PINs, which is reasonable, considering that these documents are no more than questionnaires seeking statements of interest in participating in the FCPF-supported readiness process. It remains to be seen, however, whether in developing their respective R-PPs, countries like Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador will adequately involve state agencies other than those for environment and forestry, as well as municipal and regional governments.

Organizations and networks of indigenous peoples and forest communities

The region is distinguished by a strong presence of indigenous peoples and communities in forested areas. As such, they are key stakeholders for future REDD+ programs, due to their location as well as their role in forest management. There is a great variety of forums, networks, and organizations of indigenous peoples and community forestry in the region that have held different roles and positions regarding REDD+. However, they share several common points of view regardless of the type of organization or level at which they participate in dialogue. In effect, indigenous peoples and forest communities suffer from serious knowledge deficits about REDD+. This is due in part to a lack of openness to the fuller participation of indigenous peoples and community organizations as well as to their internal weaknesses and lack of a more clear and determined position with regards to REDD+. In addition, REDD+ is still not a well defined issue despite its demonstrated progress.

Despite this, important and different positions exist among social movements and peasant and indigenous organizations, both country to country as well as regionally and globally. Indeed, the Americas Social Forum and Vía Campesina have rejected REDD+ because in their view it promotes commercialization of and loss of sovereignty over forests (Americas Social Forum), insofar as forest protection is the obligation of governments that should be implemented without limiting the autonomy, rights, or control of indigenous peoples and peasants (Vía Campesina). Operating under a different logic, the recently created Latin American Indigenous Forum Abya Yala has attempted to influence the negotiation process of the UNFCCC to protect and guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples. With regards to REDD+, this Fo-

rum has protested the lack of safeguards and measures to ensure their rights. In the Forum's declarations there is a notable evolution in its positioning with regards to REDD+, moving from initial rejection (of REDD+) as a market mechanism to more recent positions that indicate relative flexibility if the rights of indigenous peoples as contained in the UN Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and in Convention 169, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, of the International Labor Organization (ILO) are guaranteed. Despite the diversity, the organizations that make up this Forum have both important levels of representation and legitimacy as well as large extensions of forested areas under their control in countries in the region.

ACICAFOC, a regional organization that brings together some 60 peasant and indigenous organizations is engaged in several activities about climate change and REDD+. These include support for initiatives arising out of forestry community and indigenous peoples' organizations to build strategies about REDD+, capacity building, and raising the visibility of the contributions of indigenous and peasant communities toward mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

There is also a great variety of actors that work regionally or territorially parallel to regional forums and organizations. Despite their different connections to REDD+, it is also clear that there is a need to ensure greater knowledge, participation, and representation by indigenous peoples and forest communities. In Panama, COONAPIP's high capacity has allowed it to respond effectively to strong conflicts related to the consultations. While representation and participation continue to be crucial for this organization, its ability to mobilize has made it possible for the organization to make significant progress such as gaining support from the UN-REDD program and developing a proposal

to prepare its own REDD+ strategy with or without coordination with the government.

The strong capacity of COONAPIP exists in contrast to the situation of representation in the rest of the region. For example, in Guatemala there are many organizations with varied levels of representation who speak in the name of the country's indigenous peoples. Recently the *Alianza Nacional de Organizaciones Forestales* (National Alliance of Forest Organizations) was created, bringing together eleven forest organizations. It is perceived by the government and other stakeholders as the entity which best represents forest communities, including indigenous peoples. However, its recent creation and the distinct interests and types of organizations belonging to it, do not make it clear to what point the group might be representative. In any case, it is still far from the strong organization and representation that exists in Panama.

Other community organizations in the region also have different states of representation of indigenous peoples and confront different challenges. In Honduras, there are confirmed problems within at least one of the indigenous organizations present in the REDD+ discussions with the government, presenting major challenges to achieving a legitimate consultation with the communities represented by this organization. Another example can be observed in Guatemala with the *Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén* (Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP), which, despite its enormous experience in forest management and having worked for more than three years implementing a pilot project about REDD with support from the Rainforest Alliance, has not participated in a meaningful way in the definition of a national strategy. In addition, the majority of the technical information related to the pilot project has been handled mainly by international organizations.

This can be seen in the lack of greater knowledge among the community organizations in the pilot project and shows the insufficient mechanisms of participation and representation that are important factors not only in the definition of the REDD strategy in general but also in the face of specific, fundamental problems such as carbon rights.

The experience in Guatemala contrasts with the way local initiatives in Mexico are being implemented. In Mexico, there are forest management experiences that have managed to sell carbon certificates, such as the 2008 experience of the *Asociación Civil Servicios Ambientales de Oaxaca* (Civil Association of Environmental Services of Oaxaca, SAO). In Mexico, interest in marketing emission reduction certificates is only one part of the diverse experiences and initiatives that follow the logic of diversifying income generation options arising out of community forest management. Organizations such as the *Grupo Autónomo para la Investigación Ambiental* (Autonomous Environmental Investigation Working Group –GAIA), the AMBIO Cooperative, and diverse local organizations supported by the *Consejo Civil Mexicano de Silvicultura Sostenible* (Mexican Civil Council on Sustainable Forestry - CCMSS) are promoting pilot projects in different states such as Oaxaca, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Campeche, and the State of Mexico following the logic of preparation for participating in the REDD+ implementation mechanisms in Mexico. There are many other organizations and local initiatives working under this same logic. Despite these experiences, it is important to point out that there have been significant shortcomings in the inclusion of indigenous peoples as can be witnessed by the lack of inclusion of the *Comisión de Desarrollo Indígena* (Indigenous Development Commission - CDI) in the process of preparing the REDD+ strategy in Mexico.

Conservation organizations and other international bodies

International conservation organizations are playing a key role in the readiness processes leading up to REDD+, both in regional program frameworks advising governments as well as in supporting implementation of pilot initiatives in many regional territories. Rainforest Alliance, the Worldwide Wildlife Fund (WWF), Greenpeace, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and Conservation International (CI) are organizations playing diverse roles in the development of REDD+ strategies in countries in the region. While it is true that interests, motives, and approaches are broad, the positioning of these organizations in several cases places them not only in an advisory role but also as possible intermediaries of the financial resources for REDD+ actions. Most of them participate systematically in forums and workshops about REDD+ as part of their international activities and rather than opening new programs, generally speaking, they have broadened their existing programs to include actions related to REDD+. Through workshops, dialogue, and advocacy in key forums these organizations take advantage of their international connections, which include negotiation processes, their knowledge of the issues, and project results in other regions in the world to participate and contribute to REDD+ processes in the region.

Rainforest Alliance (RA) is one of the most active organizations in Mesoamerica. Its knowledge and direct involvement in the design and implementation of pilot projects has made it possible for the organization to play an advisory role in several REDD+ readiness processes in the region. This includes Guatemala, Mexico, and Honduras, where RA has worked locally with territorial initiatives and nationally on strategy development. In El Salvador, Rainforest Alliance works in coordination with Salva-

NATURA, an organization that is implementing several carbon initiatives in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua by developing and promoting certification structures that are guaranteed by Rainforest Alliance.

WWF, TNC, and Greenpeace have been more involved in Mexico, where they have participated actively in the many dialogue forums and have been systematically involved in the drafting of the National REDD+ Strategy. Outside of Mexico, Greenpeace does not appear to have a major presence in REDD+ issues. On the other hand, TNC together with CI have played an important role in Guatemala, supporting the *Mesa Nacional de Pueblos Indígenas sobre Cambio Climático* (National Roundtable of Indigenous People on Climate Change), CI, and Rainforest Alliance, which also participate in the *Grupo de Bosques, Biodiversidad, y Cambio Climático* (Forest, Biodiversity, and Climate Change Group) in that country.

In addition to the influence they have had in REDD+ readiness processes, some organizations have begun programs in support of political advocacy agendas of indigenous peoples and community forestry organizations in the region, mostly on central themes such as the territorial rights of indigenous peoples.

Other organizations, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), have supported training processes that emphasize issues such as the rights of territorial leaders and organizations such as the Latin American Indigenous Forum Abya Yala.

National and local NGOs

The role of national and local NGOs is quite diverse as they each tie in differently to the REDD+ initiatives. However, it is possible to identify a relatively important group of civil

society organizations that have rapidly accumulated a wealth of significant knowledge about REDD+; mainly those organizations that are directly linked to the dialogue processes, with the REDD+ strategy formulation processes, with pilot initiatives, and even because they have a critical vision of REDD+. In this regard, there is a broad spectrum of national and local organizations with an important accumulation of knowledge, as in the cases of CCMSS, GAIA, and SAO in Mexico; the *Fundación para el Desarrollo Integral del Hombre y su Entorno* (the Foundation for the Integral Development of Man and His Environment - CALMEACAC), the *Coordinación de ONGs y Cooperativas* (the Coordination of NGOs and Cooperatives - CONGCOOP), ACOFOP, and *Defensores de la Naturaleza* (Nature Defenders) in Guatemala; Mosquitia Pawisa Apiskamopawi (MOPAWI) and Mosquitia Asla Takanda (MASTA) in Honduras; PRISMA, SalvaNATURA, and the *Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña* (Salvadoran Ecological Unit - UNES) in El Salvador; the Centro Humboldt and the *Centro para la Autonomía de los Pueblos Indígenas* (the Center for the Autonomy of Indigenous Peoples - CADPI) in Nicaragua; *Fundación para el Desarrollo de la Cordillera Volcánica Central* (Foundation for the Development of the Central Volcanic Corridor - FUNDECOR) and ACICAFOC in Costa Rica; and the Dobbo Yala Foundation in Panama.

Despite all of this, there is still evidence that local organizations lack knowledge and systematic information about REDD+. For this reason, the training and information efforts undertaken by organizations such as IUCN, CADPI, and PRISMA not only seek to contribute to overcoming this gap directly with social organizations, but also to build their own agenda so that issues such as rights can be incorporated in the REDD+ initiatives.

In this context, at least three national and local groupings can be seen in the region in relation to REDD+. The first group refers to organizations that are working with REDD+ pilot projects, such as CCMSS and CALMECAD. The second group is made up of organizations with a direct link to developing the national REDD+ strategies, such as FUNDECOR in Costa Rica, which has a privileged role in the development of the national strategy, one that is perhaps unequalled in the region. Finally, the third group of organizations includes those that play a critical role with regards to REDD+, and generally link it to issues of forest and territorial governance, with territorial rights and livelihoods, and the cultural dimension, among others, as occurs with MOPAWI, MASTA, CCMSS itself, the *Red Indígena de Turismo Alternativo de México* (the Mexican Alternative Tourism Network - RITA), the Resource Rights Initiative (RRI), and PRISMA, among others. There are also organizations that oppose REDD+ initiatives in noteworthy ways.

Universities and research centers

With a few possible exceptions, there have been significant contributions from universities and research centers in all of the countries in the region, principally in methodological aspects related to carbon mediation, monitoring, and verification. This includes the Universidad del Valle of Guatemala, with notable leadership in quantifying carbon. In Mexico, several universities and research centers contribute directly with studies about formulating REDD+ strategies, including the *Colegio de la Frontera Sur* (Southern Border College - ECOSUR), *Colegio de Post-Graduados* (Post-Graduate College - COLPOS), *Colegio de México* (Mexico College - COLMEX), and the Mexican Carbon Program - PMC, which have contributed technical input. The Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) has also made important contributions to drafting a national REDD+ strategy,

mostly in themes related to community forest management, social capital, and forest governance, among others.

In Panama, CATHALAC has done studies to draft the national REDD strategy, while its experience with regional programs puts it in a strategic position to play a particular role in regional initiatives, possibly linked to monitoring, reporting, and verification.

The Center for Tropical Agricultural Research and Education (CATIE) has supported the development of the national strategy in Costa Rica and in recent months, has also begun contributing to the national process in Honduras with support from GTZ and the FINNFOR Project (Forests and Forest Management in Central America, with financing from Finland). CATIE is part of worldwide working alliances on REDD+, among them, REDD-Net (with ODI, RECOFTC, and UCSD). It is also involved in training and educational activities supported by the Peace with Nature Initiative and the *Centro Latinoamericano de Competitividad para el Desarrollo Sostenible* (Latin American Competitive Center for Sustainable Development - CLACDS). CATIE's academic record and its specialized capacities in the region have allowed it to break-in quickly on many themes related to REDD+. Several specialists in the region in these issues have been trained or have spent academic time at CATIE.

In Nicaragua, despite the fact that the REDD+ readiness process has only recently started reactivating, there are universities such as URACCAN and centers like NITLAPAN and CADPI that are making incursions into the issue of REDD+, emphasizing issues related to community and indigenous peoples' rights, which can be explained more by the process of land titles in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) than by an interest as such in REDD+. This opens important opportunities

not only in Nicaragua but in all the countries where there is a notable absence of analytical efforts coming out of the social sciences field. Finally, there are diverse actions in the region promoted by some organizations that operate simultaneously on several scales and have different institutional profiles. RRI, IUCN, and PRISMA are among these organizations. It is common for organizations such as these to make joint efforts in dialogue, research, advocacy, and training in diverse processes lead by community forestry and indigenous peoples' organizations, but they also are linked with other academic efforts within and outside the region.

Private sector, voluntary carbon industry, and REDD+

Throughout the REDD+ readiness process in Mesoamerica, in both readiness programs and pilot initiatives, there is a notable absence of the business sector in all countries in the region, and in particular in those that are linked to the dynamics of deforestation and degradation. This is not just any omission and it cannot be resolved with participation strategies or consultations because it means confronting the interests that are behind the dynamics of deforestation and changing land use. Without a moderate commitment from the principal players in deforestation and degradation, it is doubtful that a real reduction in emissions due to deforestation and degradation in the region can be guaranteed.

The caution coming from this sector is logical, considering the lack of criteria and rules for a future climate change regime at the world, regional, and national levels, which is due not only to the need for greater results in the UNFCCC negotiations but also the political correlation of forces that determine key legislative developments about climate change in countries such as the United States.

This does not mean, however, that REDD+ actions cannot be implemented by business sectors. Indeed, their interest in accessing carbon markets and/or funds is not new in the region. During the 1990s, there was hope that through Joint Implementation actions and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) carbon maintenance and capture would be financed in forest-lands, even though in general these initiatives did not bring about the desired results. In this context, the “+” of REDD could be a far more attractive component for these sectors, as were CDM initiatives implemented in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, or proposals such as that of the coffee producers sector in El Salvador, which hopes to put emissions reduction certificates into the volunteer carbon market. In the case of Mexico, this is more relevant, because it shows a possible path to greater involvement of important productive sectors linked to large-scale agriculture, which helps to explain the interest in broadening the Mexican strategy to REDD++ and also because Mexico is a country that is further along in developing an internal carbon market.

Furthermore, there are a number of pilot forestry projects directly oriented to producing emissions reduction certificates. This seems to be precisely the logic of Scolel Te, a project that, after promoting reforestation actions, intends to move on to other activities such as the reduction of deforestation and degradation. This may also be the case of Pico Bonito, a project in Honduras promoted by ECOLOGIC in which reforestation actions have been planned together with avoided deforestation actions, although the latter have not been implemented.

In Panama, Forest Finance is implementing at least two projects and Forest Friends has one. In Nicaragua, a project called Paso Pacífico was based on reforestation and natural regeneration on pasturelands with certification from CCBA (Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Al-

liance). Another notable initiative is the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama that directly supports avoided deforestation activities (among others) in the Ipetí community, although without the use of any standard, nor third party involvement. TNC seeks to establish a project that includes avoided deforestation in several relatively small sites in Panama, mostly in protected areas.

In Guatemala, the *Grupo Agroindustrial de Occidente* (Western Agro-industrial Group) has already produced carbon credits through at least one forest plantation. Furthermore, there are at least three pilot projects in the design phase in Guatemala— in the Lachuá Eco-Region, the Sierra del Lacandón National Park, and the community forest concessions in Petén. The experience of the forest concessions with this pilot project, being implemented with Rainforest Alliance, is important because despite significant financial, social, and political efforts and investments for over three years, they have been unable to fulfill the technical and legal requirements of the project.

In Costa Rica, Bauminvest is implementing a reforestation project certified by Carbon Fix. Pax Natura and FUNDECOR have attained CCBA certification for avoided deforestation, although it is limited to social and environmental benefits and does not certify emissions reduction.

In Central America, the Tropical Science Center (TSC), together with the Central American Indigenous Council, intends to implement pilot projects in indigenous territories (as yet to be identified) certified under CCBA and the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS). This is part of a broader TSC initiative that also includes a pilot project in Ecuador.

The majority of the projects that have produced credits are located in individually owned fo-

rests and plantations or in private forest concessions. Regionally, most forest carbon projects work with NGOs that are attempting to link communities or local groups with international firms that want to obtain credits to improve their corporate image or who are speculating with ‘pre-regulatory strategies’ through which buyers acquire cheap bonds in anticipation of much higher prices under future regulated systems.

These initiatives should not be viewed in isolation from the context of carbon market trends, nor the factors influencing them, such as occurs with climate change negotiations, for example with the political dynamics of the United States, as well as the context of the economic crisis, whose impacts have led to considerable volatility in the voluntary carbon market. However, it is difficult to confirm the impact of these fluctuations on projects in Mesoamerica because they occur bilaterally and most carbon forestry projects in the region are still in their initial phases or, in the best cases, in negotiations.

In addition to the volatility in carbon markets, particularly the voluntary ones, another important obstacle for the future is on the “supply” side of emission rights and carbon certificates. While it is true that there is a new trend toward forestry carbon projects in Mesoamerica, the majority of them are limited to reforestation and forestation, considering the numerous requirements of the carbon markets. This preference has large-scale limitations particularly if compared to the potential for REDD+ in the territories of indigenous peoples and forestry communities.

Trends and critical issues in preparation for REDD+ in Mesoamerica

Los The results of the initial stages of preparation for REDD+ in Mesoamerica demonstrate a clear orientation as well as a series of limitations and absences that if not addressed, could end up being highly detrimental to forestry communities and indigenous peoples, since many of the territories being looked at for implementing REDD+ actions are inhabited by and/or are under their control. Although Mesoamerica has “favorable conditions” for REDD+ actions, it will be imperative to go deeper into the inherent, complex, and conflictive aspects such as the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation; those dynamics determine much of the governance context in the diverse territories in the region. REDD+ readiness processes in Mesoamerica reveal that fundamental issues such as equity and social justice require more determined attention to adequately address the implications of rights regarding forest ownership; usage and access; management and exclusion by forest, indigenous, and peasant communities; and livelihoods. These are central elements for REDD+ to be able to contribute to improving territorial management and governance, or to make a substantial contribution with broader strategies for vulnerability reduction and climate change adaptation.

In this context, Mesoamerica offers a valuable and, especially, a timely opportunity to redefine a REDD+ focus from the perspective of forestry, indigenous, and peasant communities. This is true despite the fact that the panorama is com-

plex and strongly marked by the uncertainty of the new climate change regime, by the low expectations for significant progress in the upcoming COP-16 in Cancun, including REDD+, and by the failure of legislative initiatives on climate change in the United States Senate, since all of these directly influence carbon markets and funds.

Preparing for REDD+: governments and technical agencies first

The national REDD+ strategies being developed in the region have emphasized strengthening existing governmental programs and are being hammered out primarily in the central offices of environmental and forestry entities. This is due to the fact that with the exception of Costa Rica, national entities have led the discussions about REDD at the UNFCCC, and the fact that these national, non-environmental public agencies have participated very little in the negotiation processes in general, and those on REDD in particular. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on institutional strengthening and on technical studies of environmental and forestry entities tied to REDD+, but insufficient attention is being paid to crucial issues such as the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation. This is due in part to the existence of a convergence of market interests promoted through instruments such as REDD+, and government interest in taking advantage of financing opportunities in any possible REDD+ regime. This is reflected more in the way in which certain technical aspects are emphasized and lesser attention is given to the underlying causes of deforestation and degradation. The technical studies are a key element to set baselines and validate the sale of emission reduction certificates since that is the only way to prove the reduced emissions in the territories and/or

identify those that have the greatest potential to reduce emissions.

On these aspects, the logic of the market and the interests of the State converge, but there is a broader range of interests that also explain the emphasis on technical aspects and other weaknesses in REDD+ readiness. Uncertainty about whether resources will really be available and the conditions that will accompany them have led to a cautious attitude. In this context, it will be difficult for governments to enter negotiations with other national sectors because there could be high political costs. Emphasis on the technical aspect is understandable, as it is one of the components of least resistance and controversy in the readiness processes. The government agencies linked most closely to the technical aspects of REDD+ can go forward in their preparation, as they are less subject to political dynamics, and to a lesser degree, to criticism and conflict.

The regional REDD+ readiness programs are interested in seeing the processes advance, but also seek to ensure coherent strategies and protect them from critiques by civil society, indigenous peoples, and forestry communities. The FCPF has clearly been aware of the deficiencies in the R-PP and has tried to improve them, but those efforts have been limited in part due to the need to prepare quickly. Even if the national strategies are limited, donors accept them even though governments are not proposing something better because they are not willing to see the preparation processes get stalled. International conservation organizations have been actively involved in these processes and have positioned themselves as advisors to governments and in some cases, to national and local NGOs.

Preparing for REDD+ but avoiding or putting off confronting deforestation and degradation

Deforestation and degradation are continuing in Mesoamerica. The deforestation rates are dropping relative to previous decades as a result of forest transition, where economic growth, migration to urban centers, and non-agricultural employment opportunities have resulted in fewer pressures on forestry resources and lower deforestation rates. Although there is a general sense of the factors that have led to the reduction of deforestation, and to its persistence and intensification in some territories of Mesoamerica, there is a marked absence of systematic efforts to analyze the underlying causes of those processes and their interrelation with more widespread dynamics, including public policy frameworks and new private national, regional, and transnational investment flows.

Mexico is one of the countries in the region with a more advanced view of REDD+. Despite having received a relatively positive TAP (Technical Advisory Panel) assessment of their R-PP proposal, its inadequate analysis of deforestation and forest degradation in this country was highlighted because of a lack of differentiation between the different regions and different causes of deforestation, the lack of linkage to a policy framework, and for not sufficiently considering market forces and the impact of migration. This is a common challenge throughout the region, including the countries with greater information and analysis capacities, such as Mexico and Costa Rica, and of course the challenge is even greater in countries that do not have systematic or updated information. Addressing deforestation and degradation requires robust analyses of their causes and a more in-depth understanding in specific territories, with the different contexts, actors, and factors that are propelling them. Efforts such as

these would have to inform the design stages of the REDD+ strategies; however the tendency is to do the opposite.

Preparing for REDD+ or for the “+” in REDD?: relevance for adaptation

The growing interest in the “+” in REDD is no minor or trivial issue. Not only is it becoming extremely important, but it explains the role of diverse stakeholders in possible actions around the “+” in REDD, under its components for conservation, sustainable forest management, and carbon reserves expansion. These components are fundamental to any REDD strategy in Mesoamerica, although their approaches respond to different logics.

Mexico, as mentioned above, is heavily basing its REDD+ strategy on the role of community forestry due to its role in sustainable forest management; it has even suggested interest in the second “+” (REDD++), due to the relevance of emissions from agriculture. Costa Rica is interested in the “+” due to the weight of its National Conservation Areas System (forest conservation). For its part, El Salvador, is putting forward its potential to expand carbon reserves in the framework of a National Ecosystems Restoration Program, due to its importance in a broader climate change adaptation effort. Guatemala and Nicaragua also envision the potential of REDD+ schemes, strongly linked to the reduction of vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.

While there are formal positions on the intentions of linking REDD+ with broader strategies, it would appear that the readiness programs still have not clearly incorporated this set of intentions, connections, and political positions from the countries. However, the convergence around including the “+” in REDD presents an interesting and genuine opportunity for the region, particularly considering the need to

articulate more strategically between mitigation and adaptation; Mesoamerica is a highly vulnerable region which cannot be ignored nor avoided. More aggressive and innovative efforts might make it possible for REDD+ schemes in Mesoamerica to become more relevant, more visionary, and more inclusive, and to perhaps have even broader political backing than they appear to have now.

The institutional challenge for REDD+: beyond the government's institutional framework

Addressing the underlying causes of deforestation and degradation involves a set of institutional challenges. Nonetheless, the advances in REDD+ readiness show that the institutional process and linkages being constructed are limited. There is broad consensus among environmental and conservationist sectors that greater inter-sectoral coordination will be needed to design a coherent REDD+ strategy, but progress in this area is weak. In Guatemala, several ministries and sectors have convened through the Inter-Institutional Commission on Climate Change. However, an example of the deeply opposing interests among sectors emerged just after the first meetings of this group: the renewal of an oil concession signed by the Ministry of Energy and Mining and vetoed by the MARN (Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources) was finally approved by the government. Other countries have formed similar entities, such as the Inter-ministerial Commission on Climate Change in Mexico, which brings together several of the key ministries in the country, although it does not include the Indigenous Development Commission (CDI). There is also the recently created National Working Group on REDD+ in Honduras, which has representatives from the private sector, civil society, and academia as well as governmental entities. In Costa Rica, several key sectors are not directly connected to

the REDD strategy. Despite its weaknesses, these actions are more advanced than in the rest of the countries, which puts in doubt the political will to launch serious efforts to reduce deforestation and degradation.

No less important is the challenge of incorporating different levels of governance, not only horizontally among different sectors and stakeholders, but also vertically, to include both governmental and nongovernmental territorial and local entities. Not only the public consultation and the safeguards, but also the direct participation of other government levels, including territorial and municipal authorities, which are noticeably absent from the initial preparation processes, will be extremely important to achieving effective coordination.

It is also necessary to underscore the strategic role that indigenous peoples and forestry communities play in the sustainable management and conservation of forests in the region. There is a lack of inclusion of indigenous peoples and forestry communities in these processes. The lack of inclusion of the Indigenous Development Commission in Mexico's Inter-ministerial Commission on Climate Change is just one example of a broader pattern of inadequate representation and consultation with indigenous peoples and forestry communities. Although all countries have started consultation and participation processes or plans, they have done it simultaneously with the development of their national strategies, thereby excluding these communities from the initial steps. It is highly important for the participation of indigenous peoples and forestry communities to be formalized and institutionalized as one of the first steps in preparation for REDD+, rather than dealing with it as one more element in a list of components or requirements that include consultation workshops in the readiness process. The reasons are not only of an ethical nature; they are also strategic and political,

given the large extensions of Mesoamerican forests under indigenous and forestry community control. The most stable forests, those with the most carbon, are found in indigenous territory, which, in turn, coincide with protected areas. However, these forests are also facing heavy threats or they are already being impacted by different deforestation and degradation dynamics.

REDD+ strategies have focused nearly exclusively on national legal frameworks and on governmental rules and regulations that influence forest management. With this logic, interest, which could rapidly turn into a trend, is being reactivated in strengthening protected area and national park systems, as well as their management plans, and with this, regulations based on conservation objectives. This trend runs the risk of having an impact on local livelihoods, above all considering that the approaches to rights related to REDD+ in the region are limited almost exclusively to ownership of forests and carbon. This could easily become the route to reinforcing previous efforts to reorganize forest management based on simplified government approaches to land tenure that do not consider the complex local tenure and management systems that communities have developed. Recognition of these systems not only avoids negative impacts, but presents a significant opportunity to strengthen forestry and territorial governance through the coexistence of formal and informal governance mechanisms. In the context of a weak formal institutional framework, the government would seem to be avoiding or ignoring their best allies in effective governance, which will be required to implement RED, REDD, or REDD+ actions.

Concerns about equity and social justice in preparation for REDD+

Equity and social justice in REDD+ revolve around the rights of the indigenous peoples

and communities that live in and/or depend on the forests. Nonetheless, a good part of these concerns seem limited to the distribution of benefits resulting from the possible financial flows for REDD+, which in any event would be available in the implementation stage (2012 and thereafter). Different positions can be seen. There are those who reject it, stating that the real threat of REDD+ is that it could be used as a mechanism to restrict the rights of the communities to both their territories and resources, and to territorial rights in general, since they are constituent elements of their livelihoods and their worldviews in a broader sense. Those who are more receptive toward REDD+ know that it is not exempt from real threats, but that it also presents an unprecedented opportunity that could strengthen and expand rights, livelihoods, and in some cases even the conditions of forest and territorial governance.

In this context, it is clear that protection of community rights is fundamentally important, and their expansion could and should be one of the main focal points of expanding opportunities for a REDD+ mechanism, as it is particularly important to promote broader equity and social justice objectives. For this reason, it is not only discouraging, but also worrisome that the preparation activities so far have not had a greater focus on rights. This does not mean that they have been completely absent. The Mexican strategy has integrated community forestry as an important component of its national strategy. Honduras has also included community forestry as part of its national strategy. However, with the exception of Mexico, community forestry has been relegated to a very low profile in these strategies. In cases such as Panama, territorial and land tenure conflicts, inside and outside of the indigenous comarcas, are not even mentioned in the proposals to the FCPF. In Mexico, conflicts over land tenure are mentioned, but no plans are proposed to resolve them. As is known, there are serious territorial

conflicts and complex dynamics challenging land tenure in all the countries of the region (with the possible exception of Costa Rica) that will require rigorous and sustained efforts at resolution. However, these problems have essentially been absent from the discussions and preparations of REDD+ strategies.

Rights: strategic emphasis on preparing communities for REDD+

Another worrisome element is the tendency to discuss land tenure rights only along the lines of formalizing individual ownership relations, as this not only reinforces the restriction of communal and/or indigenous peoples' rights, but also could end up strengthening and expanding protected areas. Virtually no national REDD+ strategy preparation process contains plans to strengthen the rights of communities or indigenous peoples to resource access, use, extraction, and management. Even the discussion about carbon rights has threatened those rights, as is occurring in Guatemala. Although agreements to develop a carbon bond or a certificate of emissions reduction seem innocuous, this has a huge capacity to influence how, for whom, and for what the forest will be used. In other words, carbon rights are deeply connected to a set of rights about forests and as such, livelihoods, and communities' productive and cultural practices. In Petén, distinct interpretations about carbon rights have complicated the situation and made it impossible for community forest concessions to access international carbon markets. Community concession holders demand the right to share them with the State but this issue has not yet been cleared up. This example illustrates the importance of carbon rights, because it could be an instrument in rolling back the progress made with rights over previous decades. It is fundamentally important that indigenous peoples and forest communities recognize this threat.

However, at the same time, carbon rights, depending on how they are institutionalized, could be a strategic opportunity to strengthen, claim, and expand community rights as a key and indivisible element that forms part of a broader set of rights for forest communities and indigenous peoples. These issues require support, sharing, platforms of various scales, and systematic accompaniment of indigenous and forestry communities, networks, and organizations. This is necessary not only to keep the discussions on equity and social justice from being restricted, as in the recent past, to conventional approaches limited to financial payment mechanisms for environmental and/or ecosystem services. While necessary, these are clearly insufficient for addressing the complexity of concerns and in-depth issues in dispute regarding the implementation of REDD+ actions. This support and sharing is also necessary with respect to other territorial dynamics, from the perspectives of forestry communities and indigenous peoples.

The urgent need for community pathways in preparation for REDD+

This report points out major weaknesses and important concerns about the course that the REDD+ readiness process in is taking Mesoamerica. The implications for the future design and institutional framework of REDD+ mechanisms are significant, considering that the initial decisions are already beginning to mark a route that in practice is excluding other possible opportunities.

The review reveals two main routes toward the implementation of REDD+ in Mesoamerica: *the official institutional route and the route of initiatives seeking carbon markets*. The official institutional route is that of governments, supported by the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and other regional programs, preparing their national REDD+ strategies. This route's common

denominator is that it continues to be a sectoral and centralized construct with insufficient attention to the underlying causes of deforestation or to representation and consultation processes with indigenous peoples and forestry communities and respect for their rights. As part of this route, the UN-REDD Program is fulfilling the mission of a kind of social arm in the preparation process, promoting prior, free, and informed consultation with indigenous peoples. Although its role is still being defined, this route also includes the REDD-CARD Program of GTZ, considering its implementation logic and its contribution toward support of governments in preparation for REDD.

The second route refers to the initiatives in search of carbon markets, mainly promoted by international conservation organizations to develop compensation schemes that respond to the international methodological requirements of the markets and the carbon funds. The technical and legal complexities of the REDD pilot projects have been quite problematic and have hindered the production of benefits for participating communities, as is occurring with the community forestry concessions of Petén.

Although both routes show worrisome tendencies that are guiding and defining the REDD+ institutional framework in Mesoamerica, it is relevant, opportune, and legitimate for indigenous peoples and forestry organizations to develop and promote their own REDD+ readiness strategies in Mesoamerica, as they have

important forest areas that are duly delimited and demarcated. They also have concrete and relevant experience for an alternative community-based route that would not only directly benefit indigenous peoples and forestry communities, but would also contribute effectively to reducing deforestation and degradation. There is thus a less publicized, but much more promising **third route, that of community REDD+ initiatives.**

Indigenous territories and community lands in Mesoamerica exceed 40 million hectares. Many of these territories coincide with protected areas and because of their location and management have concretely contributed to the concept of buffer zones, limiting the impact of the fronts on the agricultural frontier. In addition, effective rules and regulations for resource management have been developed for these territories and they maintain diverse types of governance structures, such as the Indigenous Congresses and community forestry management arrangements. **The route of community REDD+ initiatives** has the potential to position Mesoamerica in a leadership role at a worldwide level, but this requires a significant effort in the process of preparing and implementing an alternative and inclusive REDD+ scheme that deals with the underlying causes of deforestation and degradation, but above all that strategically integrates the role of indigenous peoples and forestry communities as the principal stakeholders in REDD+ schemes.

Proposal for a Mesoamerican Community Carbon Program

General objective

Create conditions to strengthen the processes of defending, strengthening, and expanding the territorial and forestry rights of the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests**, consolidating the rights of indigenous peoples and community forestry organizations in Mesoamerica without neglecting advocacy in the development of national REDD+ policies to benefit forestry communities and indigenous peoples..

Specific objectives

1. Accompany processes that have comparative advantage with respect to forestry and territorial governance, where community rules and regulations for resource access and use function **to anchor REDD+ strategies and promote an alternative and practical model of initiatives based on community capacities and agendas**, strengthening the territorial management capacities of local institutions.
2. Help consolidate the effort of indigenous and community forestry organizations in Mesoamerica, supporting geographically broad-based territorial platforms that enable them to produce a critical mass of REDD+ experiences
3. Help consolidate the efforts of indigenous and forestry organizations in Mesoamerica to develop a **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir** as a territorial platform of initiatives that facilitate the scaling up and geographic scope that enable them to pro-

duce a significant critical mass. These initiatives could be linked to broader territorial strategies, promoted by regional, municipal, associated, or even central governments.

4. Support territorial stakeholders with potential to develop political advocacy processes to promote changes in the predominant approaches of the national REDD+ strategies and in the negotiation of their own sub-national initiatives, without intermediation.
5. Support a proposal that integrates the issues of climate change adaptation and mitigation, based on an integrated ecosystems management approach that goes beyond carbon.

In summary, this involves a REDD+ strategy focused on indigenous peoples and community forestry organizations dedicated to the gradual and sustained development of the social and human capital of communities that manage forests, such that the social stakeholders have an influence over the definition of the rules and regulations that benefit their interests and their own development strategies.

Components of the program

To move forward in these objectives, the strategy proposes combining contributions in the following components:

- I. Development of the territorial initiative for the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir**.
- II. Advocacy on the political process and national strategies for REDD+.

III. Generation and mobilization of knowledge about REDD+.

I. Development of the territorial initiative for a Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir (MCCR)

Indigenous territories and community lands represent the only social sector in Mesoamerica in condition to contribute more than 40 million hectares and forests to sustainable forest management strategies.

In Mexico, since the 1980s, the resistance movement of communities and ejidos against the government's policy to grant concessions of their forestry territories to private enterprises successfully influenced forestry legislation, enabling community initiatives for the formation of forestry enterprises. Over 2,300 ejidos and communities applied for their own permits for forest use and became the managers of their forests. Close to 25% of these communities have made substantial progress and control a large part of the production processes.

The progress made by these peasant and indigenous communities has influenced and inspired the development of community forest management schemes in other regions of Central America. In recent years, a significant social forestry movement has developed across the region that is involved in relevant experiences, such as community forestry management in Petén (Guatemala), which manages half a million hectares of certified forest. Panama has seen the emergence of the most notable indigenous forestry management experience, in Comarca Emberá-Wounan, on over 100,000 hectares of forest (the Panamanian government

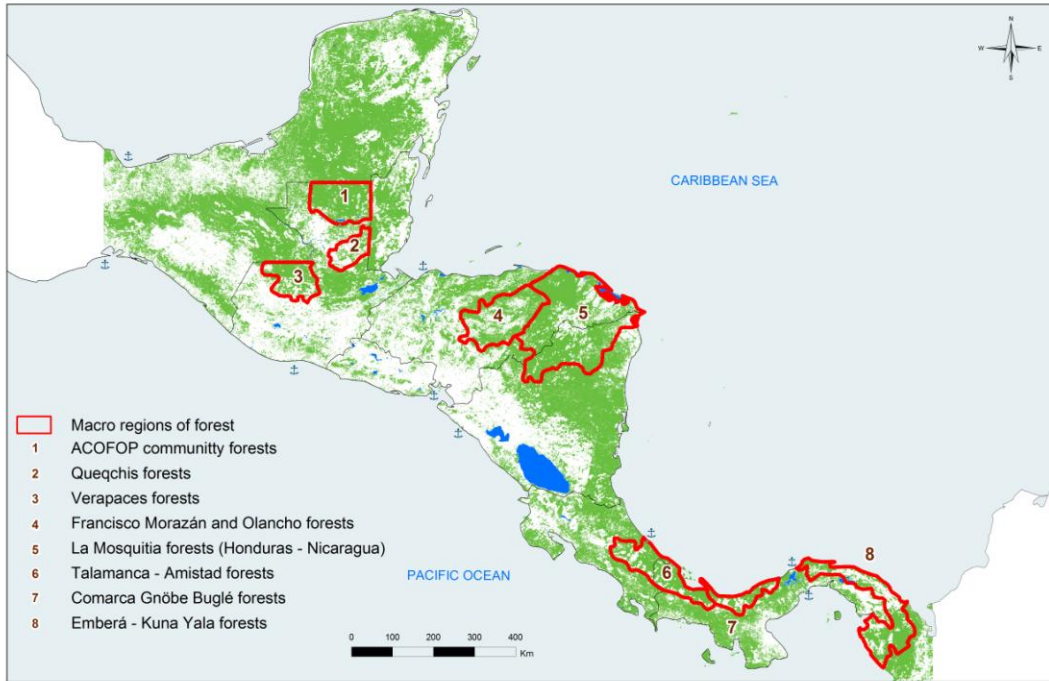
has a goal of 300,000 hectares under forestry management).

Development of the territorial initiative of the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir** requires:

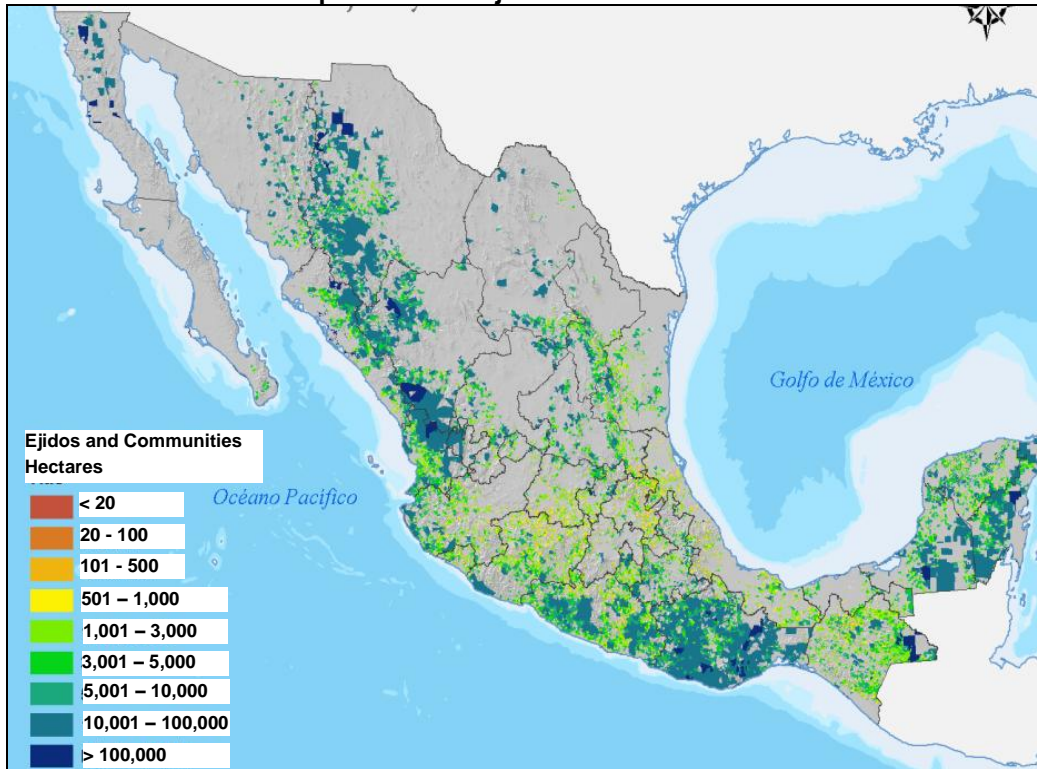
- **In territories of indigenous peoples:** Support the indigenous authorities of at least eight territories, including the Emberá-Wounan and Kuna general congresses in Panama; Mayangna Nation and Tawahka Indigenous Federation in Honduras; Miskitu territories of Tawira and Prinzu Awala in Nicaragua; and the Federation of Indigenous and Natives of the Mocerón and Segovia areas, FINZMOS, and MASTA ASLA TAKANKA in Honduras. Support must extend to the formulation of technical REDD+ proposals as part of the consolidation of the Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir.
- **In community forestry areas:** Support the community forestry initiatives of at least six organizations, such as ACOFOP and the National Forestry Alliance in Guatemala; FEPROAH in Honduras; and Red MOCAF and CCMSS in Mexico. Support must extend to the formulation of technical REDD+ proposals as part of the consolidation of the Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir.

For the purpose of aiding the assessment of the carbon potential of these territories, nine macro-regions have been identified (Maps 4 and 5) that have conditions and characteristics that would enable them to develop, with proper assistance, into sub-national REDD+ initiatives, led by territorial stakeholders, guided by community concepts.

Map 4: Forest Macro-regions in Central America



Map 5: Mexican Ejidos and Communities



II. Advocacy on the political process and national REDD+ strategies

One of the primary deficits of political advocacy work at the international level is its limited connection with the territorial authorities of the peoples themselves. Given that the architecture of the global climate change regime is based on national representation, social and indigenous organizations need to get involved in national processes. However, there are large differences in the dialogue venues of the governments; while Mexico has made substantial progress, these venues are not yet functioning regularly in the other countries. Instead, the involvement of indigenous, academic, and civil society organizations in discussions on REDD+, in the broad sense, has occurred in forums or events organized by networks, commissions, roundtables, or groups with more likeminded interests.

This component seeks to ensure that the national REDD+ strategies recognize and strengthen community carbon initiatives, recognizing the right of communities to usufruct rights to forests and their services as part of broader forestry and territorial management strategies. This assumes going forward with their own REDD+ approach and negotiating their own sub-national initiatives without intermediation, as the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests** proposes.

For this to happen, the starting point is to solidify the territorial and political rights of indigenous peoples and forestry communities, as a precondition for any REDD+ initiative, whether official, national government programs, or initiatives by international organizations that seek to join carbon markets or funds.

To make progress with political advocacy around REDD+, the strategy proposes combining contributions at several levels.

At the international level

- Project the Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir initiatives internationally, publicizing the potential of a model for REDD+ initiatives based on territorial governance.
- In the framework of negotiation processes, urge promoters of official REDD+ initiatives to include the concerns of indigenous peoples and forestry communities with regard to the safeguarding of their special rights recognized in international legal instruments, including clear, equitable determinations of the distribution of benefits, which prioritize stakeholders who are managing and preserving forests.
- Strengthen the indigenous forestry agenda at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, supporting a working group at the next period of sessions.
- Develop a “Critical Path” to COP-17 in Johannesburg for the launching of the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir**, identifying international strategic opportunities and defining advocacy messages, as well as a communications strategy for projecting the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests** with different interlocutors.

At the level of the official Mesoamerican regional institutional structure

- Advocate in the framework of the CCAD and the Mesoamerican Environmental Sustainability Strategy (EMSA) to promote greater openings for consultation and participation in the national process for preparing REDD+ strategies, organizing a **Regional Social Monitoring System on REDD+**.

- Promote a ministerial resolution in the framework of the CCAD on **Guidelines for Social Participation for the Preparation of National REDD+ Strategies** that contains a section referring to indigenous peoples in line with United Nations standards.
- Support the integration and consolidation of the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir** as a strategic pillar of the Regional Climate Change Strategy.
- Influence the design of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor II (MBC II), based on the concepts of “Corridor of the People,” “Social Connectivity,” and “Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir.”
- Promote technical assistance agreements for forestry organizations and indigenous authorities in the framework of regional projects implemented as part of the CCAD, as a path to capacity building to strengthen the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir**.
- Prepare and manage a **Development Fund for Forestry Financial Products**, with resources from the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), to address the lack of funding for community forestry management and to promote linking PERFOR (Strategic Regional Forest Program) with Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) processes in the context of the cooperation agenda of the European Union’s Association Agreement with Central America, setting the stage for a **Project for the Development of Community Forestry Trade between Central America and Europe**.

At the level of the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests

- Financially strengthen the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests** as a roundtable for political integration and mobilization of knowledge on REDD+ that enables it to:
 - Develop and implement its advocacy strategy at the Mesoamerican level.
 - Support community forestry organizations and indigenous peoples to influence the definition and implementation of national REDD+ strategies.
 - Promote the political consistency of the strategy and its actions at different levels, through a matrix negotiated among the partners in the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests**, in which each organization assumes responsibility for its own contribution and calls for the contribution of the other partners in each action area.
 - Determine how the political representation of the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests** will function regarding the official Mesoamerican institutional structure (EMSA, CCAD, CONAFOR, etc.) and regarding international cooperation agencies.
 - Develop and implement a **Special Plan for Advocacy and Ties with the Nordic cooperation agency**.

- Explore the regional launching of a **Community Forestry Cooperation Roundtable**, which would offer a means for linkages among all the different projects and initiatives supported by international cooperation agencies that support community forestry.
 - Support the strategy of indigenous organizations and forestry communities aimed at linking their territorial initiatives to the REDD-CARD Programs of GTZ and UN-REDD, to create synergies and support for implementing pilot REDD+ projects.
 - Support the development of a **Mesoamerican System for Community Monitoring of REDD+**, based on the experience with Independent Forestry Monitoring implemented in Honduras and Nicaragua by ACICAFOC and Global Witness, along with the experiences with territorial management by CADPI in the RAAN, Nicaragua.
 - Support the development of the **Indigenous Climate Change Forum** and the **Latin American Indigenous Forum Abya Yala**, promoting their participation in the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests**.
 - Strengthen the role of ACICAFOC as a regional platform for linkages and mobilization of local knowledge.
- posals and ensuring that they are integrated into the national strategies.
- Develop and propose a **Basic Consultation Methodology for REDD+** in the framework of the national strategies, to promote their official adoption at the national level.
 - In applicable cases, contest the consultation processes, analyzing them critically and documenting how they have been organized and carried out.
 - Support the institutional strengthening and advocacy plans of the national coordination bodies for indigenous and forestry organizations.
 - Support the advocacy efforts of national indigenous and community forestry organizations aimed at legislative agendas, forestry policies, and regulatory frameworks related to the rights and use of natural resources to the benefit of indigenous and forestry communities.

At the national level

- Influence the readiness processes for national REDD+ strategies, based on recognition of the comparative advantages of indigenous territories and community forestry for implementation of pilot REDD+ projects. This involves mobilizing technical assistance for developing community pro-

III. Production and mobilization of knowledge about REDD+

Major information gaps and very uneven progress exist among stakeholders regarding their knowledge of many issues of importance to the development of REDD+ in Mesoamerica. Despite the importance that REDD+ could have as public policy, discussion has centered on the spheres of government, international conservation organizations, and some nongovernmental organizations. Therefore, it is important to promote broad discussion and informative programs. As the process to prepare REDD+ strategies progresses, the need for information on increasingly specialized topics will become greater (legal studies, regulatory measures, emissions reduction potential of different fore-

stry options, design of financial mechanisms, etc.).

Given this broad range of needs, it will be extremely useful to build a broad platform of stakeholders (indigenous and community leaders, academics, community networks, and NGOs) committed to strengthening the rights of indigenous peoples and the social forestry movement in Mesoamerica for the production and mobilization of relevant information. This platform can then develop profiles for the types of studies, research, materials, courses, etc. that would be crucial to produce, to provide broad, well-informed information on REDD+ and to develop capacities.

The following are possible activities to produce and mobilize knowledge about REDD+ in Mesoamerica:

- Promote public discussion about REDD+ among key stakeholders (public officials, community leaders, private sector, agricultural organizations, etc.).
- Produce easy-to-understand materials on key topics, so that a variety of stakeholders can follow the development of REDD+ with a critical eye.
- Develop materials that demonstrate the importance and relevance of indigenous territories and of community forestry with regard to emission mitigating potential, carbon capture, and adaptation to climate change.
- Produce policy briefs for advocating around national REDD+ policies and strategies.
- Produce specific research on the dynamics of deforestation in indigenous territories.

- Systematize the experiences of indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica in the struggle for their territorial rights, particularly the political and judicial cases working their way through the Inter-American Court of Justice (Awas Tigni in the RAAN, Nicaragua; Toledo Maya Council in Belize; San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipakapa in San Marcos, Guatemala; and the Naso case in Panama).
- Systematize knowledge on forest management systems with the greatest carbon capture potential and develop methods for establishing baselines adapted to community conditions, including community inventories, resource mapping, etc.
- Conduct studies of experiences with the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir** that provide important lessons for the specific institutional design of REDD+.

Activities to build capacities and deepen specialized knowledge

- Provide technical and financial resources to forestry and indigenous organizations to develop technical skills on REDD+, through technical assistance that is appropriate to the local and cultural realities of community stakeholders.
- Strengthen the training of community forestry leaders through the design of a **Mesoamerican Course on REDD+ and Community Forestry Management** aimed at strengthening the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir** and sharing the methodology for prior, free, and informed consultation.
- Promote the formation of **Technical Support Groups on REDD+ for Communities** in each country that enable channeling input from technical personnel, the scientific network, NGOs, and pro-community

projects to advise indigenous and forestry organizations, to accompany the political process, and to provide backing and credibility to future REDD+ activities in the field for indigenous and forestry communities. This is vitally important so that indigenous communities and community forestry organizations will receive quality advice before the arrival of external agents offering alliances and services that could end up being extremely costly and inappropriate.

- Design and implement a **Mesoamerican Digital Learning Platform on REDD+** that provides Internet connectivity to the organ-

izations and leaders of the **Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests**. This platform should focus on forestry and territorial management where rural communities maintain control over the processes and where governance, collective ownership, and sustainable use are fundamental pillars of REDD+ and of the **Mesoamerican Community Carbon Reservoir**. Furthermore, this platform should enable sharing the use of digital tools and instruments for territorial management and political advocacy (use of video, online meetings, georeferenced community mapping, etc.).

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