
COMMUNITY CONCESSIONS AND CERTIFICATION IN THE MAYA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

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BACKGROUND ON THE AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE

It is not as an expert in certification but for my curiosity about participatory forest management that I took part in the conference on the social and political dimensions of forest certification. When I was working with non-governmental organizations on the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel/Forum on Forests and the Convention on Biological Diversity during the mid-1990s, I was exposed to lively discussions about certification, governments being then obviously bewildered about how to handle this new “thing” and NGOs worried about how to keep governments from spoiling the experiment. At this international level, it was difficult to understand how certification could actually work on the ground. I took the opportunity during a recent trip to the region of Petén in Guatemala to look more closely into how local communities are actually involved in certification and what their own perspectives are. On the basis of this experience, I think that certification should be more conceptualized, valued, and practiced as a multi-stakeholder-based policy-making process rather than being considered merely as a market instrument. Certification would then become a more effective institution for strengthening local capacity building, for motivating collaborative and iterative learning, and for integrating, in addition to environmental considerations, dimensions of social justice and cultural diversity.

GENERAL CONTEXT

The Maya tropical forest stretches from the Mexican state of the Chiapas into Northern Guatemala and Belize. It is - after the Amazon - the greatest stretch of tropical forest in Latin America.² Many of the Mayan civilization's vestiges are still buried under the luxurious vegetation of these forests. The three countries hosting this exceptional biological and

¹ I thank in particular Ileana Valenzuela and her colleagues from the Asociación de Comunidades Forestales del Petén, without whom I would not have been able to do this case study, as well as Piers Voysey from Mundo Justo for his precious comments to this paper's drafts; all mistakes are, however, mine.

² About 800 species of trees, 422 species of birds, and large populations of mammals, including monkeys (hauling monkeys, etc.), tigers, and many species of bats have been identified in the Maya tropical forests (Nations 1999).

cultural diversity have declared more than 20 wildlife reserves and national parks. The largest of these protected areas (including most of the other types of protected areas) is the nearly 2-million-hectares-wide Maya Biosphere Reserve (BR) of Guatemala. The Maya BR was established in 1990 and covers 19% of Guatemala's territory; the core area amounts to 747,800 ha. and the multiple-use zone to some 864,440 ha. Both, the core and multiple-use zones are property of the state; the rest of the reserve is constituted of buffer zones, which include private property. The BR is also classified as World Patrimony and as a Ramsar site for its numerous wetlands.

Whereas Petén was about 90% forested in 1970, more than half of the region has been deforested since; large forest fires were particularly destructive during the 1990s. The causes of deforestation are multiple and related: They include the advance of the agricultural frontier, with large farms - mostly cattle ranches - being installed even in the reserve's territory, and new settlements of people in search of land. Land speculators came from all parts, using resource-poor people to enter and clear the forest before selling the land to large cattle owners. Land hunger in other parts of the country is very high³ and rather than attempt land reforms, the various governments in place since the 1960s have encouraged settlement in Petén.⁴ Access to forests is facilitated by logging-, oil-, and trade-related road constructions.⁵ Further causes related to the unsustainable use of forests include political instability and insecurity, speculation, illegal logging and trading, and, not least, oil exploration and extraction within the reserve.⁶ These causes often also take advantage of short-term, deficient, inadequate, or locally non-adapted policies stemming from national and international levels.

Conservation policies also have played a non-negligible part in the causes of unsustainable uses and livelihoods in the context of Petenese forests. When the Maya BR was established, between 1990 and 1996, major discontent arose among local communities that were not taken into account in the conservation plan and hence were often evicted from - or curtailed in their access to - the forested land. It was mostly the small-scale users of the forest who were repressed, whereas the more destructive activities of illegal loggers and large

³ About 2% of Guatemala's population owns between 60% and 80% of the country's land (Fort and Grandia 1999:87)

⁴ Population growth rate in Petén is about 9.5% per year, two thirds of which is attributed to immigration (due in part to the improved political situation) (Fort and Grandia, 1999:88).

⁵ A new project of a road linking Uaxactún to the south of México (Río Azul) running through the middle of the BR is being discussed.

⁶ Oil exploration in Guatemala started in the 1920s; according to national law, no exploration or exploitation of oil should take place within national parks (decreto 109-83, art. 66). However, Basic Resources International Limited (Bahamas) obtained exploration and extraction rights within the National Park of Laguna del Tigre and Biotope Laguna del Tigre - Río Escondido. When the BR was established in 1990, CONAP in its Master Plan forbade exploitation in the nucleus zone of the BR but not in the multiple-use zone. Since the mid 1990s, the International Finance Corporation of the World Bank has provided credits to Basic Resources International Limited and pressures to obtain new oil concessions in the multiple-use zone greatly increased during early 2000. However, in response to a strong local, regional, national, and international campaign (<http://www.nrdc.org>), (the president stated that no new concession for the oil industry was to be granted in the Mayan BR (Strickland 2000)). Substantial uncertainty still lurks, with the Plan Puebla Panama promoting large infrastructure development projects across Central America (<http://www.sre.gob.mx>).

farmers as well as oil companies continued with impunity. Some exclusive environmental protection and archeologists' interests, stemming mostly from Northern countries, do still persist in failing to consider local communities' needs and their knowledge and capacity in sustaining natural and cultural resources.⁷

The Granting of Community Concessions: A Historical Process

In the early years of the Maya BR, the conflicts between the local communities and state agencies reached such point that, in order to avoid the escalation of violence and repression, the search for participatory forms of conservation and sustainable management became a priority. The establishment of forest concessions granted to communities then appeared as an alternative. Under the impulsion of the Peace Agreements in 1994, the National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP)⁸ established a regulation allowing local communities' organizations, in the name of one or several legally entitled representatives, to obtain a concession for the sustainable use of the forests within the multiple-use zone of the Maya BR.⁹ The concessions are granted for 25 years; the leases are renewable, but the land remains the property of the state.

Community organizations applying for concessions need to prove their determination to respect conservation measures and to sustainably use natural resources. The communities need to organize and legalize their status, constitute a committee with an elected representative, and be recognized by the municipality.¹⁰ Furthermore each community association needs to be linked to an NGO for technical support. To obtain concession rights, the community¹¹ with the support of an affiliated NGO draws a map of the area it wishes to lease - taking into account the zones of protection (including archeological sites) - within the multiple-use zone of the Maya BR. The proposed zoning is then discussed with nearby communities, and the final consideration or decision for the granting of the concession is submitted to a public consultation (30 days). Within the next 15 days, CONAP is in charge of approving - or arguing on reasons for rejecting - the proposal. Once the concession is approved, the community develops a forest inventory and a management plan. Both of the latter procedures have to follow a certain format and are subject to the approval of CONAP.¹² CONAP determines a lease on the basis of the concession's acreage and the

⁷ There currently are pressures to extend the cores zones, at the detriment of the community concessions in the multiple-use zones, such as around the National Park of El Mirador - Rio Azul.

⁸ Guatemala's government issued its law for protected areas in 1989 and created thereafter the CONAP.

⁹ At this stage, besides local organizations, the German Cooperation (GTZ) and IUCN - the World Conservation Union provided support, and, later on, the National Programa de Frontera Agrícola.

¹⁰ Three types of community-based organizations have obtained such leases: civil societies, associations, and cooperatives. The status and involvement of members vary among these various organizations. Although in cooperatives the members are acting mainly as workers, they may in other cases be co-investors and co-beneficiaries.

¹¹ The definition of communities varies according to the group of producers - these may be loggers, xate producers, chicle and pimienta extractors, carpenters, or other artisans working with wood and non-wood forest products. The community may also be a group of families or neighborhood residents.

¹² The Plan de Manejo Integrado/Diversificado is divided into 5-year plans of cutting. Zones of annual cutting are measured in lots of 500 ha. The cutting cycles vary between 30 and 40 years, the diameters of trees that can be cut vary from 60 cm for species like Mahogany (*S. Macrophylla*), up to 45 cm for Cedar (*Cederla odorata*) (Carrera et al. n.d.).

type of resources exploited - forestry, agriculture, and tourism uses are evaluated equally in order not to influence the conversion of one into another. For the first concession admitted, the lease was set at 1 Quetzal per hectare per year.¹³ Once all these elements are agreed, the contract can be concluded in front of a lawyer (with the guarantee of a fiduciary). CONAP has the responsibility of monitoring the management of the concession in the terms agreed (CATIE-CONAP 1996); however, the responsibility of implementing the management and activities is the community's. Since last year, a new requirement has been added to the concession regulation: The concessions operating in the multiple-use zone of the BR have to be certified within the 3 years following their establishment.

The state can have access at any time to the accounting books of the concession to verify uses. Although the concessionaries benefit from the protection of CONAP to guarantee the exclusivity of their user rights, CONAP holds the right to limit some uses for conservation purposes if required. If these restrictions are going to damage the concessionaries, CONAP has to provide compensation. On the other hand, CONAP can abrogate the contract as a sanction for unaccomplished terms - concessionaries causing damage to the natural resources may have to pay the costs, as CONAP and the municipality require. A committee of control including members of CONAP, the municipality, and the local community has the responsibility to discuss and follow up on the use and management of the concession. This collaborative monitoring committee also has a coordination, a communication, and a non-judiciary conflict-resolution role (Instituto de Derecho Ambiental y Desarrollo Sostenible 1996).

In 1994, the first two community-based concessions were constituted: San Miguel la Palotada and la Pasadita. These were model initiatives motivated mainly by outsiders (CATIE - CONAP 1996). Their examples were not replicated swiftly; it was only several years later that local communities started to organize among themselves and to appropriate the process.

LOCAL FOREST COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS: BUILDING COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

In November 1995, an umbrella organization constituted by representatives of the communities living and/or working in the multiple-use zone of the BR was established. The Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén (ACOFOP) stated as its main goal "the conservation of the forests and the improvement of the quality of life of the communities". Its primary task was to develop and legalize opportunities for alternative resources management. By March 2001, ACOFOP was legally constituted as a federation of 16 community organizations (i.e., associations, civil societies, and cooperatives). Although the

¹³ This amount stands for the total value of the concession - estimated in this case at 10 Quetzal per hectare - and divided by the number of years the lease is meant for (10 years); 7.6 Quetzal equals about US\$1 as of September 2001. In addition to the lease, the communities must also pay taxes according to the type and volume of resources extracted; part of these taxes goes to CONAP, and part goes to the municipality. There are also additional taxes proportional to the revenues related to the sale of forest products.

board of ACOFOP is composed of the legal representatives of 7 of its member organizations, it has worked since its beginning with many more local forest-management-related organizations.¹⁴ ACOFOP has also gained national, regional, and international visibility and credibility as a key actor in making Guatemala the world's second country in coverage of forests managed by community enterprises, and certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. In fact, by spring 2001, 17 community organizations were managing 425,854 ha. of the Mayan forest, which ACOFOP estimated - based on the number of members involved in these organizations - to benefit close to 5,000 families. According to ACOFOP over half of this forest coverage is already being certified. FSC on its latest announcement on its website (June 2002) estimates actually 245,350 ha. of these community concessions to be certified (excluding the two industry concessions on another 67,111 hectares -likewise certified and situated in the multiple use zone of the BR.).

Some of ACOFOP's main objectives are to enhance local communities' continuous communication, democratic leadership, participatory management, rigorous and transparent administration and accounting, entrepreneurship, and autonomy (depending less on intermediaries, establishing revolving funds, etc.). ACOFOP seeks to develop a shared vision for an integrated and diversified approach to forest ecosystem management, including sustainable use of timber and non-timber forest products and community-based ecotourism. It also works at making gender a cross-sectoral theme (ACOFOP 2001, personal communication)

ACOFOP does not consider itself an NGO but a community-based association, and it sees its role as strengthening the organization and capacity of local communities. At a national level, ACOFOP is actively working for the development of forestry laws and regulations that are adapted to local realities. Locally, it is a center for social learning where communities from Petén exchange their experiences and develop their own visions and capacities for enhancing local economic opportunities that are compatible with the conservation and sustainable use of the forest. Such seminars allow face-to-face exchange, as few members read, write, or have access to the media and modern communication tools. Exchanges also take place regionally with communities from Mexico, Belize, and other Central American countries.¹⁵ The challenge for ACOFOP in order to be effective as a representative of local communities is to gain sufficient weight to ensure that the activities of the different governmental organizations and NGOs and local associations working in the region coordinate their respective activities.

¹⁴ ACOFOP works with a permanent staff of about 15 persons. The member organizations federated in ACOFOP at the time of the study (Spring 2001) were: Cooperativa Selva Maya del Norte; Sociedad Civil Custodios de la Selva; Cooperativa la Felicidad; Sociedad Civil Para el Desarrollo - Arbol Verde; Cooperativa Union Maya Itza; Cooperativa la Technica; Sociedad Civil el Esfuerzo; Asociación de Productores Agroforestales de la Pasadita Arolapa; Cooperativa Monte Sinai; Asociación Forestal Integral del Cruce la Clorada; Asociación de Productores San Miguel la Palotada; Sociedad Civil Impulseros Suchitecos; Cooperativa Bethel; Sociedad Civil Laborantes del Bosque; Concesión Forestal la Colorada; Organización Manejo y Conservación; Cooperativa de Comercialización Integral.

¹⁵ For example, ACOFOP participated in the constitution of the Coordinadora Indígena Campesina de Agroforestería en Centro América.

AN EXAMPLE OF A COMMUNITY CONCESSION: THE SUCHITECOS

After the more experimental and directed establishment of the community concessions of San Miguel la Palotada and la Pasadita, the Suchitecos of the Eastern area of Petén, near the border with Belize, were the first community to use proactively and in a self-mobilized mode the legal opening of community concessions. The local community claimed that obtaining such a concession would help it to combat illegal logging. The Suchitecos were not all residents of the area; some also came from nearby towns. After 10 years of negotiations, the Suchitecos finally received in March 1998 the concession contract of the Unidad de Manejo Rio Chanchich. Since then, out of its 12,217 hectares' concession, the community has exploited about 400 ha. For planning and regularizing this extraction, the Sociedad Civil de Impulsores Suchitecos developed an annual plan of operations as part of a more general management plan.¹⁶

The Rainforest Alliance Smart Wood program - accredited by the FSC - started certifying the concession in 1998 with norms adapted to Petén. In January 1998, it delivered the certificate of good compliance to Rio Chanchich, the first community to receive such a certificate in Guatemala (No. SW-FM-COC-063). The certifiers' team was composed of one sociologist, one forest engineer, and one biologist and has been actively supported by the Fundación Naturaleza Para la Vida (NPV), whose role has been to provide technical support to the forest concessionaries.¹⁷ The NPV has the mandate of helping to draw a strategy for commercializing certified wood at national and international levels. In 1999, the community did not gain access to the certified market, for which prices would have been better; however, it obtained for the collective sale of the various types of quality grades (the major part going to the United States, and some going to Denmark) almost double what it obtained in the previous years. Half of the extra income was used to create a fund for investing in equipment, and half was distributed among the members of the Sociedad Civil.¹⁸ Beyond financial benefits, the NPV claims that the experience enhanced the community's feeling of ownership over its concession's territory, which raised its sense of responsibility and

¹⁶ The annual plan outlines how resources will be extracted in order to allow their sustainable use, describing measures to limit damage to standing trees: leaving young trees standing, cleansing remaining vegetation from lianas, building logging paths (i.e., skidders), using machinery in ways that ensure soil and water conservation, developing the capacity for appropriate monitoring, decreasing waste in the amounts of cut wood, increasing security of forest workers, preventing forest fires, and countering illegal logging and poaching in coordination with CONAP. The concessions comprise 12,217 ha., of which 10,000 are considered productive; 8% is non productive, and 10% is reserves for the protection of nature and water. The management plan includes wood and non-wood products such as xate, chicle, pimienta, bayal, and, in the future, ecotourism (see Footnotes 25-29).

¹⁷ NPV and the Project CATIE/CONAP under the Maya BR are financed by USAID Guatemala (Fundación Naturaleza Para la Vida, 1999). NPV, or the Nature for Life Foundation helps residents develop and follow forest management plans and provide them with training in sustainable forestry (Carlos Gomez, npv@guate.net). CATIE stands for Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza, it is a non-profit organization based in Costa Rica. It seeks to improve the well-being of humanity through the application of scientific research and higher education through Central America (<http://www.catie.ac.cr/wcatie/qchistoria.htm>).

¹⁸ In 1999, the income was 1,230,882.05 Quetzal. In its five concessions, in 2000, as in other years, the Suchitecos of Melchor exploited 400 ha. and gained 1,300,000 Quetzal, or US\$216,000 (Carrera et al. n.d.).

efficiency, consequently lessened damage to the wood. The most visible effect has been a net decrease in forest fires during the last years in the areas that became concessions.

COMMUNITY FORESTRY AND CERTIFICATION PROCESSES: OPPORTUNITIES AND PROBLEMS

What are the costs and the benefits of having already over 245,000 ha of community concessions certified in Petén? Although, so far, the sale of certified wood does not compensate for the costs of certification, the access to the market with certified wood is presently quite good (interview with ACOFOP 2001). In 2000, for the 10 community concessions that have produced timber, a total volume of about 7,652 Mts. has been extracted out of 3,139 ha. Although about 17 tree species were identified in this production, 62% of it was Cedar (*Cedrela odorata*) and Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophilia*).¹⁹ Most of this wood went to the United States, a substantial part to Mexico and some to Europe and national markets (ACOFOP 2000). It is more difficult to find access to markets for other types of wood. Mundo Justo is presently studying potentials for the extraction, processing, and commercialization of wood from secondary forests and of less known species.²⁰ In late 2001, ACOFOP, with Mundo Justo and associated community groups, launched a commercial development office whose aim is to advise and help coordinate local communities on contracts and relations with buyers.²¹

In fact, the FSC-led certification process in the area (the Rainforest Alliance being the certifier) so far focuses only on wood production. Even though the FSC includes the certification of non-timber forest products (NTFP), little has been done in this realm in the Maya BR.²² However, local communities and the ACOFOP presently aim to diversify and develop uses and options for NTFP that constitute a substantial asset for local livelihoods. NTFPs extracted in the Maya BR for commercial purposes include *chicle*,²³ *xate*,²⁴ *pimienta*,²⁵ medicinal products,²⁶ etc.²⁷

¹⁹ Total income was 7.5 million Quetzal (about US\$800,000), and net income was about 3.6 million Quetzal (slightly over 500,000 Quetzal were paid for taxes - of which four fifths went to CONAP). Generated employment totaled about 22,531 working days for an average of 47 Quetzal per day.

²⁰ Piers Voysey and Brenda Castillo, personal communication, San Benito, 2000, mundojusto@itelgua.com.

²¹ This initiative is related to the Alianza para un Mundo Justo and is supported by the UK Department for International Development. For more information see www.justby.co.uk.

²² CONAP has not yet developed norms for the sustainable use of non-timber forest products (CATIE-CONAP 2000)

²³ Chicle has been extracted in the region for more than a century from the tree *Manilkara zapota*. About 1,000-1,300 people work and live on chicle for 3 to 4 months during the year (with a salary more than double the Guatemalan minimum daily salary). The entire production outlet depends on the demand of only one or two enterprises of natural gum in Japan, which makes the market particularly vulnerable.

²⁴ Xate is a palm belonging to the genus *Chamaedorea*; it is used for flower arrangements. It has been extracted from the forests of Petén for over 35 years and is collected through the entire year (but with a higher intensity during the dry season). It benefits about 4,000 families in the region (collectors earn, on average, US\$5.15 a day; the average daily salary in Guatemala in 1995 was between US\$2.73 and US\$4.55).

²⁵ Pimienta gorda is the fruit of the tree *Pimienta dioica*. This (called allspice in English) has been harvested since the late 1950s for essential oils, spice, and medicinal purposes. The industry employs about 1,000 families during a

Given the exceptional natural and cultural richness of the region and the need to create new opportunities for local livelihoods, the potential for community-based ecotourism is being assessed by ACOFOP. Among visitors entering the country,²⁸ one fourth visit the national park of Tikal, central to the Maya BR core zone, but they tend to leave the region right after. There is a great interest in diversifying the spots of attraction around the many yet undeveloped Mayan vestiges (CONAP, USAID 1996).²⁹ However, challenges for meeting visitors' demands in the context of poor public services in the distribution of drinking water, sanitation, garbage disposal, and access are high for local communities. Large-scale tourism infrastructures - often part of multi-national hotel chains - have the capacity to meet these demands by installing these infrastructures for their own uses, but they tend to provide few benefits to local communities. Collaborative organization among local communities may, however, help to develop the offer - and to meet demands - for more personalized, simple and authentic accommodation, using and valuing local products and capacities. Hence, the certification and labeling of the products used is part of the concept of ecotourism.

Potentials and limits related to the commercialization and certification of wood coming from well-managed forests have been discussed by ACOFOP in conjunction with the regional associations of the Comunitaria Centroamericana (CICAFOC) and the Union Nacional de Organizaciones de Forestería Comunal (UNOFOC) during a seminar taking place in Northern Petén (COMUNITARIA CENTROAMERICANA ET AL. 2001).³⁰ We summarize some of the points made during this event.

Concerning limits, besides market fluctuations that may be more or less favorable, the difficulty for local communities to gain more control over the production chain from the forests to the consumers creates insecurity; transport is one of the immediate problems that results in great amounts of wasted wood (RUANO 1993). For the community concession of Carmelita,³¹ there were problems with the marketing of wood products. Although the community recognized that the prices it would get for its timber would be even lower

2-month period (during which a collector may earn some US\$6.51 daily). The figures on uses of xate, chicle and pimienta are based on the work of C.S. Manzanero (1999).

²⁶ Medicinal plants are still well known and much used by local people. According to a study from the University of Tulen, the 60 species of medicinal plants that are most used come actually from the bosque (secondary forests) and not from the monte (primary forest; Comerford 1994).

²⁷ Other NTFP products include bayal (*Desmoncus*) for baskets, hats, and furniture making (I have no data about hunting-related incomes, but these are based mostly on catches of wild turkeys).

²⁸ Tourism is a fast growing industry in Guatemala too, in 1996 over half a million tourists entered the country. During the 90s average income per year from tourism reached some US\$ 250 million (Manzanero, 1999:51). We may compare this figure to the relatively low country level income from wood exports: US\$ 15,3 million, in 1999 www.agexpront.com/pdf/analisisexportpdf:22.

²⁹ ACOFOP organized in the spring of 2001 one week of exchange among Petenese communities in order to assess potentials and obstacles to the development of community-based ecotourism.

³⁰ CICAFOC is a regional indigenous organization in Central America, it works since 1990 on various eco-development and empowerment projects. UNOFOC focuses on forestry and federates member organizations involved in communal management of forest resources, it is funded through governmental assistance and various international development organizations (<http://www.acicafo.org/02/02.html>).

³¹ The concession of Carmelita encompasses 53,775 ha. For the cooperative of Carmelita, members need to provide 300 Queztal to become associates; the cooperative keeps on recruiting new members.

without certification, it also recognized that without the support of NGOs, it would not have been able to cover certification costs.³² Concern was expressed during the same workshop about the future of certification in the area, because NGOs are bound to diminish their presence (partly because of a CONAP policy requiring a progressive stepping out of NGOs). Local communities' capacity (for monitoring, etc.) along the FSC certification framework needs first to be enhanced.

As communities seek to add value to the timber prior to selling and/or exporting it, participants to the seminar proposed as an interesting option to sell wood-carved crafts to tourists, and to process some carpentry and house-building material for selling them on the local markets. However, the FSC label so far does not give a sensible advantage to these efforts.

Looking toward potentials, participants noted that the community concessions system in the BR and the related certification process foster the participation of a wide array of local actors and provide them with learning opportunities for collaborative management. The seminar's recommendations were that the communities should further work on ways to:

- Cross-fertilize their respective experiences across the Central American region
- Keep record of certified products and organize collaboratively their access to the market;
- Develop certification for less well-known species;
- Prospect into potentials of local and regional markets;
- Transform wood locally for greater added value;
- Influence international trade agreements toward equitable trade;
- Build the capacity of local certifiers, and
- Develop, in addition to the FSC, a label of origin valorizing socio-cultural origins (in this case, community forest enterprises in the Mayan region).

During our visit in Petén we have further learned from local craftsmen, that they wished to develop their capacity to export value-added wood products to consumers who are sensitive to environmental and socio-cultural criteria, and needed to better assess such demand. NGO related professionals engaged for the sustainable commercialization of certified timber suggested that local communities should further develop their capacity to run enterprises that manufacture timber for construction material or furniture for international markets (VOYSEY, personal communication, 2001). According to local community organizers, the key asset provided by certification is the enhanced legitimacy and credibility it provides for local communities to manage forests and their multiple benefits. Such credibility is not only useful

³² Some of these NGOs are Pro-Petén, NPV, (Fundación Naturaleza Para la Vida, see footnote 17) and Centro Maya (a non profit organization created by the government of Guatemala in 1992, including governmental, non-governmental and academic members, it is working in Peten for appropriate technological transfer for sustainable agriculture and for community forestry, <http://www.guate.net/centromaya/organizacion.htm>).

for gaining access to markets - in particular in the North (by-passing the boycott against tropical wood) - it also helps for gaining access to international donors.³³

COMMUNITY-BASED FOREST GOVERNANCE IN PETÉN: MAIN ACTORS AND ROLES

From the conference on the social and political dimensions of forest certification, it became clear to me that there is a great need to assess more clearly, on the basis of case studies, who are the different actors taking part in the entire production and market chain, what their respective interests are in the certification process, and how they are developing collaborative processes for sustaining natural resources and livelihoods. Considering the main actors identified in this succinct case study, one can already crystallize some opportunities and constraints that certification processes entail for the communities of Petén. I distinguish the main actors in four categories: associations of local communities, governmental organizations, various NGOs (mostly operating with international support), and some less known intermediaries and buyers.

Local Communities

Problems that frequently constrain the large-scale participation of local people are lack of time and lack of resources. Community representatives for the forest concessions are often the ones who are most active in other community tasks. This does sometimes lead to a concentration of power - and, hence, inequity and conflict - among certain members or families within the communities. Few women are at present members in the local organizations or among the representatives at ACOFOP, but the latter develops a gender program that actively seeks to involve women. According to local communities' representatives, the opportunities related to certification should go beyond commercial objectives and contribute in broader terms to the entire community's socio-cultural well-being. In keeping with this vision, the concern for building a governance system that allows equitable cost and benefit sharing becomes central. Such a system implies participatory decision-making and management as well as effective conflict resolution mechanisms.

NGOs

As said earlier, NGOs are given a key role in the management of the multiple-use zone of the Maya BR, but in the longer term, the idea is that the NGOs gradually step out - once this technical transfer has been provided. Some NGOs have, however, a tendency to monopolize control of business management and to act more as timber traders than as facilitators. There is some discontent and disillusion among local communities about this outside assistance, much of it having to do with equity questions related to financial resource management and low effectiveness of certain projects. However, it is also recognized that without NGOs,

³³ Personal interview with Luis Alfonso Argüelles, Programa Selva Maya, Marcedonio Cortave, and Ileana Valenzuela, ACOFOP, May 2001.

under present conditions, the local resources and capacity for satisfying FSC certification requirements would not suffice.

The State

Even though the state still owns the land in the multiple-use zone of the Maya BR, it has actually devolved the management of its forests by enabling the establishment of community concessions. While devolving management, the state has still defined a clear framework of responsibilities and rights within which the community-based forest management occurs. Actually, the state has further delegated its role in controlling forest management to third party certifiers by legally requiring that the community concessions be certified within the 3 years following their establishment. Although this management policy clearly has a positive impact on forests and communities, the state as well as governments and related donors from abroad (including the World Bank) do not take seriously enough their responsibility in lessening the pressures on the forests of Petén that stem mostly from outside the forest and the local communities; that is, from other sectors, such as agriculture or cattle ranching, energy, commerce, and transport.

The Intermediaries and Consumers

Although intermediaries are key in developing access to international markets for the timber coming from the community concessions, the intermediaries often seem to get confused about who should be their local interlocutor among the various community representatives and NGOs. Interviews with community producers show that communication is neither satisfactory for them, they feel rather powerless in having any influence on remote, multiple, and largely unknown intermediaries, processors, and buyers. In fact, there is very little information flowing back from consumers - through various processors and intermediaries - toward the local forest communities of Petén.

LEARNING FROM PETÉN: SOME CONCLUSIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

The certification process in this case of the multiple-use zone of the Maya BR comes more as a posteriori confirmation that the management of the forest is “sustainable”. Indeed, the law requires plans for the sustainable use of the forests as a condition to obtaining a concession. However, CONAP’s requirements do not fully encompass the tripartite approach of the FSC, which includes, in addition to conservation objectives, economic and social objectives. The FSC should more proactively promote these two latter types of values - for instance, by considering the safety of workers tapping *chicle*.

The case of Petén offers an interesting experience in combining FSC certification with protected areas management, and it shows an effort to move away from an exclusive approach to conservation to a more integrated and inclusive approach. Open questions remain, such as whether the spirit and effectiveness of FSC certification gets lost when it is made a mandatory process. Is such collusion with governmental organizations detrimental to the self-development capacity of local communities?

For all actors taking part in the management of the Maya BR, the FSC certification contributes to the solidity of the governance framework, mainly in terms of the credibility it provides to the local communities, the state agencies, and the NGOs.³⁴ For the local communities, after the climate of insecurity they have experienced over many decades, certification provides a precious outside support and actual legitimacy to their uses and rights over land, forests, and related resources.

Certification provides an incentive for communities to enhance their entrepreneurship. However, with the overall difficult local socioeconomic and, frequently, climatic conditions; little support from the state; rather insecure back up from international donors; and difficult access to markets that are furthermore capricious and not inclined to pay for the extra costs of sustainable forest management, it is a true challenge for the local communities to develop some relatively autonomous capacity for sustaining their forests and livelihoods.

If the FSC certification process strengthens local communities' organizational efforts at enhanced transparency and accountability, one may wonder whether the other actors of the market chain are also making similar efforts. Primary producers seem to have little information or opportunity to negotiate more equitable cost and benefit sharing with the other actors of the market or more distant stakeholders.

More research would be needed for estimating to what degree the certification system has brought the local communities of the BR to develop timber production catering to international markets at the expense of other forest uses and livelihood strategies, possibly oriented more toward domestic and local markets. Isn't there a risk that such global certification systems contribute to further eroding cultural and environmental diversity?

Even though there are only a few years of experience with community forest concessions in the Maya BR, some successes are already visible: Forest fires and entry of settlers in the zone have declined. A less visible part of the success is the development of a participation culture based on - to a large extent - self-mobilized experiential learning processes. This is clearly demonstrated by the quality of public meetings organized in the villages. Such enhanced participatory governance capacity is probably the greatest asset for sustainability, improving both the quality of life of the local people and the quality of their environment. The collaborative organization and learning capacity we have presented in this case clearly involves not only members of local communities in Petén but reaches across regional, national and international boundaries, involving a variety of actors from governmental and civil sectors. Certification appears to be one of the vehicles for developing such linkages.

The timber certification process is only one of many activities local communities organize for improving the management of their local resources and developing their livelihood basis. The overall governance context across various institutional levels needs to be taken into account when one assesses the impact of - and future opportunities and limitations of - a particular certification scheme in a given region. Such assessment should involve, as much as possible, all actors concerned in order to build learning capacity across

³⁴ Personal interview with Luis Alfonso Argüelles, Programa Selva Maya, Marcedonio Cortave, and Ileana Valenzuela, ACOFOP, May 2001.

the entire production - marketing and consumption process and across all related policy decisions that foster a certain allocation of benefits and costs, of rights and responsibilities.

If there is some slowing down of deforestation in Petén, it is still not halted, much less reversed. The many combined pressures on the Mayan people's livelihoods and on the forest ecosystems, coming mostly from outside the forestry sector and from beyond local communities' control, continue quite unabated. Obviously, these pressures are also beyond the reach of any kind of forest certification system.

The people living in Petén seem nevertheless to know a lot about the importance of sustainability. As they so often stumble over the 1,000- year-old stones of their ancestors - the Maya - they keep on remembering that deforestation, overpopulation, and poor governance lead to social conflict, climate change, and, quite soon, extinction, however amazing a civilization's science and art may be.

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