

Association of Forest Communities of Petén, Guatemala

Context, Accomplishments and Challenges

Ileana Gómez and V. Ernesto Méndez



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Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|----------|--|
| ACICAFOC | Central American Indigenous and Peasant Coordinator |
| ACOFOP | Association of Forest Communities of Petén |
| BCIE | Central American Bank for Economic Integration |
| BID | Inter-American Development Bank |
| BIOFOR | Biodiversity and Sustainable Forestry Project |
| CALAS | Center for Environmental and Social Legal Action |
| CATIE | Tropical Agricultural Center for Research and Higher Education |
| CCAD | Central American Commission on Environment and Development |
| CGIAR | Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research |
| CI | Conservation International |
| CIR | Romero Christian Initiative |
| CONAP | National Council for Protected Areas |
| CONCOFOP | Consultative Council of Forest Communities of Petén |
| DED | German Development Service |
| FARES | Foundation for Antropological Research and Environmental Studies |
| FORESCOM | Community Forestry Concessions Enterprise |
| FSC | Forest Stewardship Council |
| FYDEP | Promotion and Economic Development of Petén |
| GHF | Global Heritage Fund |
| HELVETAS | Swiss Cooperation Agency |
| ICCO | Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation |
| INAB | National Forestry Institute |
| INTA | Institute for Agrarian Transformation |
| ITTO | International Tropical Timber Organization |
| KFW | KFW Banking Group |
| MAGA | Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food |
| MBR | Maya Biosphere Reserve |
| ONG | Non Governmental Organization |
| PPP | Puebla Panamá Plan |
| PROSELVA | Program for the Conservation of the Peten Tropical Forest |
| RUTA | Regional Unit for Technical Assistance |
| SEGEPLAN | General Secretariat for Economic Planning |
| SIGAP | Guatemalan Protected Areas System |
| TLC | Free Trade Agreement |
| SUCHILMA | Union of Chicle Tappers and Wood Workers |
| TNC | The Nature Conservancy |
| UICN | The World Conservation Union |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNO | United Nations Organization |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| WWF | World Wildlife Fund |

Summary

The Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) covers 2,112,940 hectares (ha). It is located in the Peten region of northern Guatemala along the border of Mexico and Belize. The MBR is part of the Mayan Forest (Selva Maya), shared by these countries. In the MBR, 445,804 ha are managed by community forest concessions, which in just a few years have developed a forest management model that is having a positive impact on natural resource conservation and community livelihood strategies.

Reducing the impact of forest fires and ending illegal lumbering and the encroachment of new settlements are the primary social and environmental accomplishments of community management. As a result, families are reorganizing and improving their livelihood strategies, integrating the forest as their primary natural asset. In addition, community concessions have made successful inroads in the certified timber market and are taking the first steps to organize around its commercialization.

The history of how community forest concessions developed is enmeshed in the changing social and political dynamics of a territory that played several different roles during the past century. The once isolated and unknown forest, dominated by the extraction of chicle and precious woods, became a receiving zone for domestic migrants in the mid-20th century, with intense pressure on the agricultural frontier and serious national

security problems from illegal trafficking in flora, fauna, archeological resources, undocumented migrants and illegal drugs. This trend was in contrast to the conservation initiatives that resulted in the establishment of the MBR in 1990.

The creation of the MBR led to a restructuring of local institutions under the direction of the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP); this centered on land use regulation, which is especially strict for the protected areas and extraction zones.

The urgency and efforts to conserve the Petén's natural resources, the signing of the Peace Accords and pressure from local residents from the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) who were fighting for access to land and forest concessions, allowed communities to gain control of 445,804 ha of forest concessions.

International assistance agencies have played an important role in managing the MBR, using different strategies and contributions that have evolved over time. One of the most important institutions has been the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), not only because of its financial support, but also because of its involvement in designing the institutional management structure. As CONAP's primary counterpart, USAID focused mainly on conservation technical assistance,

provided by international conservation NGOs, which in turn worked with local NGOs created specifically to implement these projects. The most significant advances were in the area of technical training, which includes forest management and commercialization. However, NGOs adopted a leadership and technical assistance style that failed to strengthen community capacity for integrated forest management and organizational and business administration. By 2001, this model had run its course and a new phase began in which communities had to develop their production and commercialization capacities more autonomously.

Another type of assistance, more focused on strengthening community capacity, has coexisted alongside this model, providing valuable input for the development of community concessions and ACOFOP. Different donor agencies have provided direct support to ACOFOP and its institutions to strengthen their organizational and advocacy skills and capacity at the Central American and international level. This has enabled ACOFOP to become the leading organization in community forest concession management.

These models have each made very different, yet complementary, contributions. Each type of assistance has facilitated the development of components crucial to the success of community concessions and ACOFOP, although there are now new and more complex challenges requiring new types of assistance. Current challenges go beyond the area occupied by the concessions and their management model. ACOFOP has set its sights on the Petén as a territory where it needs to participate politically to address economic integration and free trade proposals such as the Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP) and the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA); the Mundo Maya Sustainable Development Tourism Program proposed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Mirador Basin Park conservation proposal. At the same time, the institutional framework for community forest management needs a revamping that focuses on its territorial role and takes an ecosystem or environmental services perspective that guarantees the recognition of the ecological and social values of community concessions.

Introduction

One of the greatest environmental challenges faced by tropical countries is the design of development models that fight rural poverty while preserving natural resources (Scherr *et al.*, 2004). Accordingly, the loss and degradation of tropical forests is currently one of the international community's major conservation concerns (Guariguata and Kattan, 2002). This deterioration has many causes, and as with other environmental problems, they are related to social, ecological and economic processes that originate locally and extend to a global scale (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001).

Recently, experiences have been documented where communities have developed forest management techniques that sustain their livelihoods and, at the same time, conserve the forest. A number of publications have identified similar processes in India (Poffenberger and McGean, 1998), Cameroon (Jum *et al.*, 2003) and Mexico (Bray *et al.*, 2003), to mention a few. All of these cases show that peasant and indigenous communities can make a rational use of forest resources and conserve them.

However, the question remains as to just how sustainable these types of strategies are for the future and how forest communities will face important present-day challenges. These challenges include the communities' capacity to commercialize products, a resurging "conservationist wave" vying for control of

managed forests to convert them into protected areas, and the institutional and community management models weakness in responding to newly-proposed economic integration, free trade and tourism initiatives.

Given these major issues, it is of utmost importance to systematize successful community forest management experiences that currently face the dilemma of having to confront the abovementioned challenges. Through this analysis, not only can the context and factors affecting these processes be better understood, but solutions and actions to ensure that community strategies work well can also be explored.

Even though the experience of community forest concessions in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) has been widely analyzed (Gretzinger, 1999; Reyna Contreras *et al.*, 1999; Finger-Stich, 2003), there has been no up-to-date systematization of the process. This paper attempts to fill part of this gap by providing a historical analysis of the social, economic and political context in which concessions operate. This will provide a better understanding of the experience, origins and role of the concession-holding communities, and useful lessons for people in the Petén and in other communities engaged in similar efforts. Finally, this analysis will hopefully aid international assistance agencies and government institutions.

Community Forest Concessions: Stages in Their Development



Location and Ecology

The department of Petén is located in northern Guatemala; bordering Belize to the east and Mexico to the north and west, and, internally, with the departments of Alta Verapaz and Izabal to the south (Map 1). It is the largest department of Guatemala, covering 35,854 km². Lacking roads through the dense forest, the Petén was extremely isolated until the 1960s.

According to the official census, 366,735 people were living in Petén in 2002 (INE, 2002), most of them migrants from other departments. Half

of the population is female and young and are Maya Indians from the Kekchi, Itzá and Mopán ethnic groups, living primarily in rural areas. This large territory consists of at least two broad ecological zones – tropical moist forests and tropical wet forests – with variations in precipitation and seasonality (Universidad Rafael Landívar, 1984). The Petén is known worldwide for its huge biological diversity and cultural wealth, with some 1,400 known plant species and approximately 450 animal species, including birds (Elías *et al.*, 1997).

Map 1. Location of Petén in Guatemala



Source: Modified from <http://www.propeten.org/mapas.htm>. Consulted June 30, 2004.

Petén (1954-1989): The Development of a Territorial Role

This period witnessed historical processes that brought about the institutional and environmental transformation of the Petén. The evolution of the Petén's territorial role is closely related to its gradual integration into Guatemala's social and political life.

The once isolated unknown forest, which traditionally had served for the extraction of chicle gum (*Manilkara spp.*) around 1898 and other non-timber products (Schwartz, 2000), rapidly turned into a zone of migration in the mid-20th century. Additionally, there was intense pressure on the agricultural frontier and serious national security problems due to the proliferation of activities related to organized crime, drug trafficking and the movement of undocumented migrants. This trend was in sharp contrast to the conservation initiatives that led to the establishment of the MBR in 1990.

Until the 1950s, the Petén had been an area totally isolated from Guatemala's productive life. Its ecological richness had fueled different extractive activities, such as chicle tapping, illegal logging of precious woods and the indiscriminate hunting of wild animals such as alligators and turtles (Elías *et al.*, 1997). Due to the absence of government institutions which could control development patterns in the region, the first human settlements began to grow up around the hunting of wild animals. It was at this time that communities like Carmelita and Uaxactún were founded, populated primarily by extractors and small farmers.

Petén's territorial role began to change in 1954, when the area turned into what Elías *et al.* (1997) have called "the escape valve for Guatemala's agrarian problems" by becoming the main supplier of government lands for poor, landless peasant and indigenous populations. This agrarian colonization policy was successfully promoted by the government during the military dictatorship (1954-1986), and as a result, Petén's population increased from approximately 25,000 inhabitants in the 1960s to an estimated 730,000 in 1999 (Shriar, 2001; Sundberg, 2003). However, it led to serious social conflict and had important ecological impacts since the forest was cleared to grow subsistence crops and create pastures.

The aim of the rural colonization policy was to control the conflicts caused by the demand for land in socially vulnerable regions, including the Verapaz region, the highlands and the Pacific coast. In 1959, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Enterprise for the Promotion and Development of El Petén (FYDEP) was created. This autonomous agency served as the only governmental entity in Petén from 1959 to 1987. FYDEP's objectives included the following (Schwartz, 2000):

- Integrate the Petén region to the country, due to its extreme historical isolation;
- Promote the settlement and economic development of the region through the sale of land;
- Harvest precious woods;
- Increase basic grain production in Guatemala.

According to Elías *et al.* (1997), the FYDEP sold a total of 1,980,000 ha to 39,000 beneficiaries. However, Schwartz (2000: 30-32) and Elías *et al.* (1997) hold that the FYDEP, charged with the task of selling land, gave preference to large plots for the middle- and upper-class mestizo population. Thus, the rural colonization policy put strong pressure on the forests of southern Petén, since one of the requirements for obtaining a plot was to clear the forest and prepare the land for planting. This practice caused a dramatic shift in land use, which led to the development of precarious human settlements on land that did not have the potential for long-term, sustained farming.

Additionally, the FYDEP was assigned to set up cooperatives along the banks of the Pasión and Usumacinta rivers to prevent Mexico from building a hydroelectric plant.¹ During this period, oil exploration also began in an area between what are now two large national parks: Laguna del Tigre and Sierra del Lacandón.

The dynamics of production in Petén were closely linked to extractive activities at different scales,

¹ The development of these cooperatives was motivated by the Guatemalan government's desire to prevent Mexico from building a dam on its side of the Usumacinta River and the immigration of Mexican peasants (Schwartz, 2000).

complemented by extensive livestock production and subsistence agriculture. Foreign companies and Guatemalan private companies controlled the extraction of chicle gum, timber and oil, whereas small local groups were involved in the harvest and commercialization of xate palm and allspice, illegal logging, subsistence agriculture and extensive livestock production. Power groups included chicle gum companies, the oil industry, loggers, landowners and the military, who enjoyed great autonomy in the absence of government regulation. In addition, a large organized labor force was expanding around chicle production.

By the late 1980s, the agrarian colonization policy was beginning to run out of steam, while at the same time international conservation tendencies were coming to the forefront. Organizations such as Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Rodale Institute and CARE International (Sundberg, 1998) started to exert pressure in light of the loss of biodiversity resulting from the settlement pattern and uncontrolled extraction. Together with other international assistance agencies, including USAID, which had supported rural colonization, they launched an offensive to protect Petén forests. Adding to plans for building a highway to Petén, which would facilitate access by human groups to the territory, were conservationist concerns to protect the Petén forest, which provided the initial driving force for establishing the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

During this period, several guerrilla corridors ran through areas of the Petén. Additionally, there was a strong presence by the army, the state institution that historically had had the greatest coverage, resources and profile in the territory (MINUGUA, 2004b). During the war, the army had important military bases in the region, such as the Kaibil Center for Training and Special Operations, the training center of Guatemala's army's counterinsurgency force, commonly known as the Kaibiles. Additionally, thousands of civil patrols were created, which received direct orders from the army.

The militarization of the Petén created an environment that led to the proliferation of accusations and revenge by local residents, especially because of the stiff competition between migrants for land. During the war,

thirteen massacres took place, such as the 1982 Dos Erres Massacre in the department of La Libertad, where a Kaibil commando unit murdered 350 people, including children, accusing them of being guerrillas (Amnesty International, 2002).

Because of the violence, thousands of families abandoned their communities and fled into the forest; fearing further persecution, many fled to Mexico as refugees, staying there for some 10 years. This situation led to a further breakdown in governance across the country and to increasing pressure to seek solutions to the social causes of the conflict.

Establishment of the Maya Biosphere Reserve (1989-1994)

In the 1970s, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) formed the Man and the Biosphere Program, which set up the World Network of Biosphere Reserves² (UNESCO, 1996). Central America, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, defined a regional conservation policy based on the environmental agenda developed at the Earth Summit. Using this framework, biosphere reserves were created in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Complementary to these policies, other plans are being developed to ensure the future of forests outside the reserve areas.³

During this period Petén went from being Guatemala's agricultural frontier to being a conservation zone of international interest. According to Klein (2000), the international community and the Guatemalan government were very concerned with the preservation of the Petén's forest, which led to an institutional overhaul that began with the dissolution of the FYDEP and the establishment of new government institutions.

² Biosphere reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal/marine ecosystems or a combination thereof, internationally recognized as such. They are intended to fulfill three complementary functions: conservation, sustainable economic and human development, and logistic support for research and education (UNESCO, 1996).

³ These include the Forestry Action Plan for Central America (PAFCA) of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Maya Forestry Action Plan and CATIE's Madeleña Regional Program (Pasos, in preparation).

In 1989, the National Council on Protected Areas (CONAP)⁴ was established as the highest administrative and coordinating authority of the Guatemalan Protected Areas System (SIGAP). With USAID support, CONAP established the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) in 1990, through Decree 5-90 (Klein, 2000; Soza, 2003). The MBR covers 2,112,940 ha and its creation has led to a new distribution of the uses of the territory (UNESCO, 2002).

As a result, CONAP became the most important government body in Petén. The new institutional structure was centered on regulating land use, with a strong focus on protected areas and extraction zones. In order to control land pressure and conflicts resulting from the eviction of inhabitants from the protected zones, the National Institute for Agrarian Transformation (INTA) took over the land transfer functions of the FYDEP, although with less authority and fewer resources (Elías *et al.*, 1997).

According to CONAP (1996:15-16), these were the MBR's management objectives:

- Conserve the archaeological and natural wealth of the MBR, so that they can provide opportunities for sustainable development to the country's present and future generations;
- Safeguard the different tropical ecosystems in the MBR;
- Develop the sustainable use of the existing natural and cultural resources to provide long-term development options;
- Provide sustainable economic activities within the MBR and surrounding region, to improve community living conditions;
- Conserve the aesthetic value of the MBR for the purpose of promoting tourism in a natural environment.

CONAP became the governing body charged with enforcing regulations and the Master Plan for the Maya Biosphere Reserve. For this purpose, CONAP set up its main office in Flores, Petén, enabling it to be closely involved in zoning, management and monitoring.

Using the prevailing conservation categories of the time and observing the conditions for belonging to the biosphere reserves network,

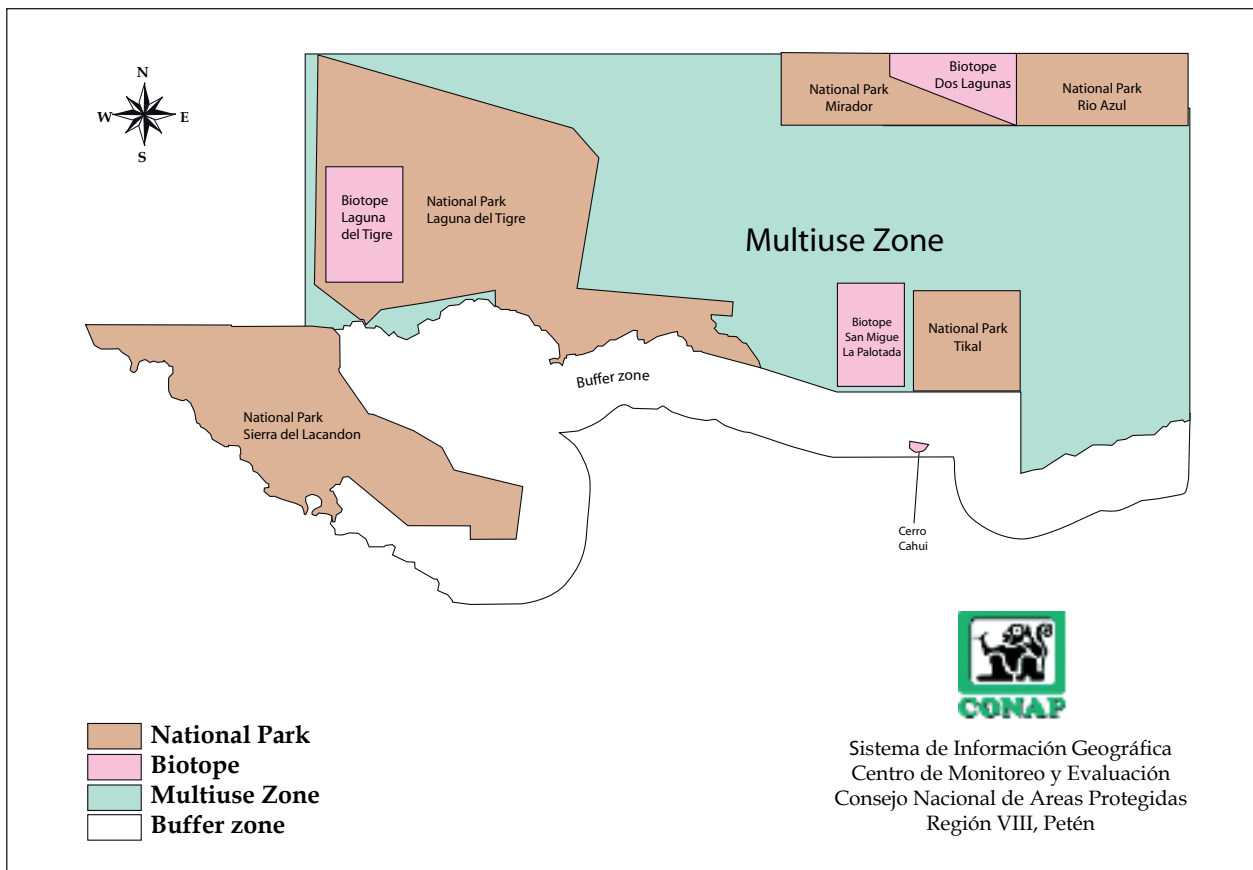
CONAP zoned the MBR with the objective of encouraging and executing "activities and programs conducive to preventing negative effects on the natural resources in the Maya Biosphere Reserve" (CONAP, 1996:17). Following is a description taken from CONAP (1996:17) of each of the three zones that were established for this purpose (see Map 2):

1) **Core Zones (CZ).** "These are strict conservation areas located at the heart of the MBR. They are heavily protected wilderness and archeological areas kept free of human intervention. Demarcation of the strict conservation zones shall be done in the field, this being a priority activity; likewise, CONAP will define a management strategy for the purpose of interconnecting the core zones to improve fulfillment of the MBR's objectives".

2) **Multiple Use Zones (MUZ).** "These areas function as a buffer for the core zones and are intended for a variety of sustainable activities and uses, depending on their resource potential. They constitute approximately 50 per cent of the Maya Biosphere Reserve and are devoted to the sustainable harvest of xate palm (*Chamaedorea spp.*), allspice (*Pimenta dioica*), chicle gum (*Manilkara spp.*), wicker (*Philodendron spp.*) and other wild plants, seeds, timber and fauna, and contain restricted areas for carrying out traditional activities and the utilization of non-renewable resources under strict controls. The MUZ in turn is divided into Special Use Zones and Cultural and Archeological Preservation areas."

3) **Buffer Zone (BZ).** "The primary objective of the Buffer Zone (BZ) is to relieve pressure from the MBR through the stabilization of appropriate uses of the land and natural resources in the area adjacent to the MBR. In this zone, neighboring communities will be provided environmental education and rural extension programs on sustainable ways to use the land that do not depend on the exploitation of the MBR's natural resources, and as a result, permit their conservation. CONAP will collaborate with public and private organizations to provide the services and infrastructure necessary in the Buffer Zone is to satisfy the basic needs of the rural population settled in the zone. Attention

⁴ CONAP is a public entity that reports directly to the President of Guatemala (Legislative Decree 4-89 and its amendments).

Map 2. Zoning of the Maya Biosphere Reserve

Source: CEMEC-CONAP

will be given to seeking a solution to land tenure, in a way that will provide greater security for the occupants and will reduce pressure on the MBR.”

This land use plan allows for the controlled use and extraction of forest resources in the multiple use and buffer zones. However, this zoning did not take into account the presence of human settlements or the complex social, political and economic dynamics of Petén. Instead, a restrictive policy was enacted that indefinitely suspended all extractive activities, pending the development of an acceptable master plan to regulate the use and management of natural resources.

The restrictions over the protected areas led to serious conflicts with the population because they included the placement of guards and the confiscation of timber and firewood, clashing with the social pressure for access to land. Matters became even more complicated with the wave of internal migration in the 1990s caused

by several factors, including the economic crisis and the return of persons displaced by the armed conflict (Elías *et al.*, 1997).

This new wave of migration set off “*agarradas*” or illegal land invasions, provoking serious clashes with government authorities. Conflicts also arose with the communities that had remained in the reserve. At this point, CONAP realized how difficult it was to manage a reserve with human population. Strong local opposition to this exclusionary model led to serious outbreaks of violence; CONAP employees were targeted with the burning of vehicles and guard posts and even kidnappings (Cuellar, 2004).

In support of the MBR’s management, the government of Guatemala signed an agreement with USAID to create the Maya Biosphere Project, opening the door for many conservation NGOs. These include CI, TNC, IUCN and CARE, which are implementing project components on environmental education, enterprise development and park protection. Later on,

other international organizations got involved, such as the Tropical Agricultural Center for Research and Higher Education (CATIE) and the Rodale Institute. Another group of national NGOs was created to work as partners with the international conservation NGOs; these include Naturaleza para la Vida (NPV), the Asociación Centro Maya, and others (Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ, 2000).

Creation of Community Forest Concessions (1994-1996)

Of the 2,112,940 ha in the MBR, 445,804 are being managed by community forest concessions. The communities that were awarded concessions vary widely in their ethnic background, composition and development. The following types of settlements can be distinguished:

- Petenero communities: originating as extractive communities, they appeared in the region during the chicle era between the 1920s and 1950s (e.g. Carmelita, Uaxactún and Melchor de Mencos);
- Peasants of indigenous and mestizo origin in search of access to land for farming and livestock after the 1960s (Elías *et al.*, 1997);
- Indigenous communities from different ethnic groups⁵: these communities had been displaced during the war and then returned in the mid-1990s (Elías *et al.*, 1997).

Some of the communities that were awarded concessions have a mix of these groups, making them quite heterogeneous, also in terms of land tenure. Many of the communities got land through FYDEP programs; others settlements were created by repatriates and demobilized ex-combatants while other communities invaded land.

The establishment of the multiple use zone in the MBR raised the expectations of the different social groups in the territory, especially loggers, soldiers, communities and migrants.

Therefore, how was the MUZ defined as an area to be managed by community forest concessions? This question is not easy to answer; however, four key contextual factors determined the formation of community forest concessions:

- The signing of the Peace Accords contributed to the visibility, international support and strengthening of community management processes during the administration of President Álvaro Arzú (1996-2000);
- Because of ungovernability and especially conflicts with peasant communities, CONAP was open to alternatives that involved communities in an effort to help resolve these problems;
- Community concessions were one of the most viable options, given the conservation objectives of the time. The urgency of the situation and efforts displayed by CONAP, USAID and international conservation NGOs to preserve Petén's natural resources led them to reject concessions to industrial logging operations as an option;
- The growing pressure from organized communities fighting for land tenure and access to forest concessions.

These elements led us to examine in detail the historic creation and development of the MBR. In the early 1990s, the region had reached a point where it was ungovernable; at the same time, the FYDEP's centralized model had become outdated and the territory lacked development alternatives. The agrarian situation was worsening with unfettered encroachment of the agricultural frontier, intense land speculation and continuing conflicts over access to land.

In the department's agricultural areas, powerful groups were demanding control of the land (MINUGUA, 2004b). Meanwhile, the illegal extraction of timber and other products as well as the looting of archeological sites remained unpunished. There was also increased insecurity due to the proliferation of transit routes for undocumented migrants, contraband and drug trafficking. Despite the army's strong presence, the government seemed to be unable to face any of these problems, which increased societal demands in terms of access to land and attention to the region. The discontent resulted in roadblocks, public demonstrations and takeovers of oil refineries (Elías *et al.*, 1997).

⁵ Especially Qeqchi, Mopan, Itza, Canjober, Jacalteco, Mam, Quiche, Chuj, Katchiquel, Pocomchi.

In this context of territorial ungovernability, Nicaragua was also going through one of the most transcendental moments in its recent political history with the signing of the Peace Accords in December 1996. Pressure for human rights contributed to the stipulations accepted by the Guatemalan government during the talks leading up to the Accords, and access to the use of natural resources became one of the government's commitments for their fulfillment. A deadline was set to grant natural resource management concessions by 1999 to small- and medium-size groups of organized peasants on 100,000 ha in multiple use areas for the purposes of sustainable forest management, protected areas, ecotourism and other activities compatible with the sustainable use of natural resources (MINUGUA, 2004a).

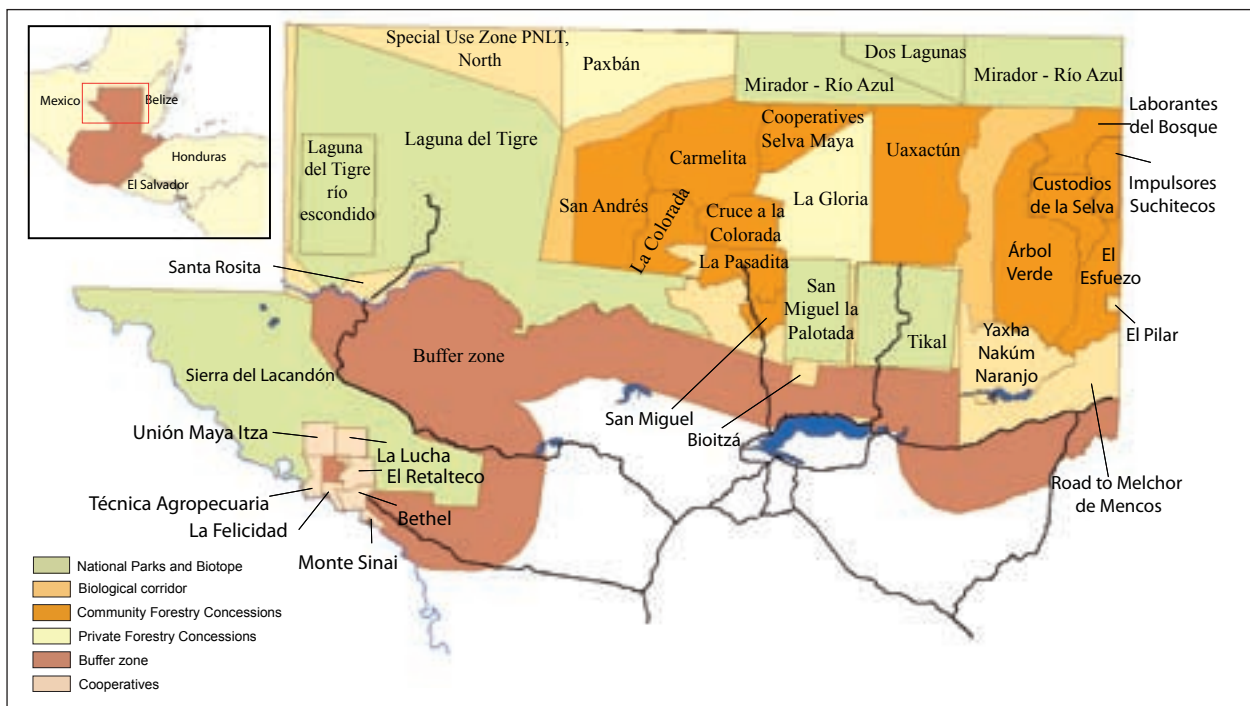
Furthermore, the government needed to create the necessary social conditions for the reintegration of people displaced by the war, in addition to ensuring a stable society as the guarantor of the development of an incipient democracy.

In terms of conservation interests, the MBR was a key component for securing the natural

parks model in the Central American region. However, land from the MUZ needed to be allocated, since the industrial sector would not stop pushing to obtain concessions. CONAP and its main partners (international conservation organizations and USAID) refused to give concessions to industrial loggers since there were indications that they would destroy the forest if they were granted access. This framed a rationale against loggers that was not necessarily pro-community. Granting concessions to communities was increasingly a "lesser evil" for conservation interests.

As will be seen further on, organized communities already existed during this time that were fighting for access to natural resources in the Multiple Use Zone areas, putting pressure on CONAP. CONAP eventually accepted the idea of community concessions, seeing them perhaps as the only alternative to industrial loggers. However, both the private sector and the government had serious doubts about the communities' ability to manage a forest, given that there had been no prior experience in Petén to demonstrate the viability of organized communities managing forests. Logging companies took advantage of this situation,

Map 3. Location of Community Concessions in the Multiple Use Zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve



Source: CEMEC-CONAP

discrediting community groups and proposing industrial concessions, which would exclude community groups, limiting them to providing a labor force for the industries.

Despite this resistance, CONAP established community concessions and by 2000 it had allocated a considerable percentage of the Multiple Use Zone as concessions to community organizations along with two industrial concessions (Map 3) (Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ, 2000).⁶ Concessions are granted for 25 years and contracts are renewable; they permit the rational use of timber, the extraction of non-timber products such as xate palm leaf and chicle, and the development of tourism. However, land remains property of the state.

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification was a requirement imposed by CONAP to retain the forest concession. CONAP supports forest certification because it ensures strict control over forest management, which is consistent with its conservation objectives. However, certification has not resolved market issues nor has it attracted higher prices for the higher value species (Nittler and Tschinkel, 2005).

ACOFOP: Origins and Evolution (1996-2004)

Community organization has been crucial to the process of negotiating access to concessions and the latter development of community forest management. Much of the organizational capacity displayed by ACOFOP has its origins in the Union of Chicle Tappers and Wood Workers (SUCHILMA). However, several of the most important community leaders are not linked to the trade union; instead they participated in community demonstrations demanding access to forest resources (timber, firewood and non-timber forest products). These protests took place mainly in communities that remained inside the protected zones once the MBR was established in 1990, and responded to the threat that the government might grant concessions to the private sector.

In 1995, some community leaders who had been participating in the negotiations over the zoning of the MBR proposed forming a united front

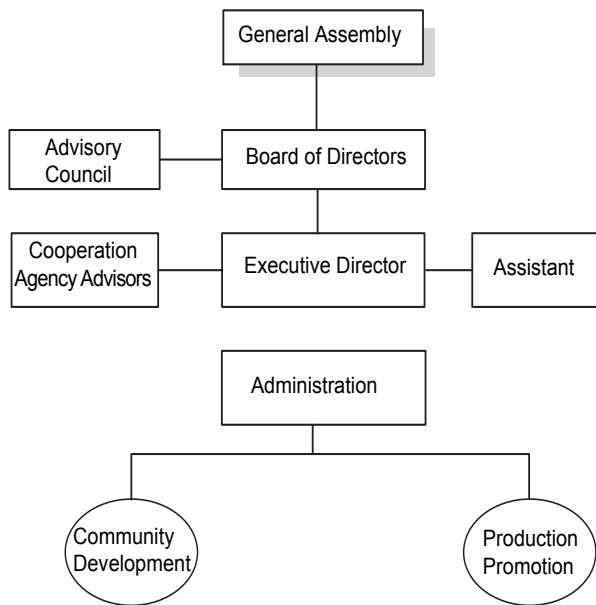
to defend their rights as potential beneficiaries of the forest concessions. They formed the Consultative Council of Forest Communities of Petén (CONCOFOP⁷), which was supported by SUCHILMA. Even though it did not have legal status, CONCOFOP became the coordinator of community organizations demanding access to concessions. When it became a legally recognized association, the name was changed to the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP).

ACOFOP began as a not-for-profit second-level organization, formed originally by 22 organizations from 30 communities located in the Multiple Use Zone and the Buffer Zone. Its organizational structure consists of a General Assembly as the highest authority, formed by active associates; a nine-member Board of Directors made up of the legal representatives of the community organizations and led by a President, who is also ACOFOP's legal representative; and the Executive Director, responsible for administration and management (Cortave, 2003) (see Figure 1). The organization's primary strategic goal is to promote the socioeconomic development of forest communities through the sustainable use of the forest. This objective is carried out through the organization's two main divisions: Community Development, which attends to strengthening social and human capital and advocacy work; and Production Promotion, in charge of the work related to forest management and biodiversity.

One of ACOFOP's characteristics has been its capacity to be involved in national networks and Central American organizations. ACOFOP participated in the formation and development of the Central American Indigenous and Peasant Coordinator of Communal Agroforestry (ACICAFOC) (Cortave, 2003), a community-based organization that brings together different kinds of small and medium-size agroforestry,

⁶ The only industrial concessions that stayed were the BAREM and Comercial GIBOR companies.

⁷ Formed with representatives from the communities of Uaxactun, Carmelita, Bethel, a group of extractivists from the neighborhood Suchitan from Melchor de Menchos and nine communities from the Flores municipality.

Figure 1. ACOFOP Organizational Chart

indigenous and peasant farmer producer groups from Central America that are working for natural resource access, use and management (ACICAFOC, 2005).

Negotiating the Concessions

Community access to forest concessions involved a long process in which ACOFOP needed ample bargaining power when dealing with the government, environmental organizations and industrialists. Despite the commitments established in the Peace Accords, the government was highly skeptical of community organizations. Furthermore, the timber industry argued that communities did not have technical, administrative and business capacities nor were they sufficiently organized for managing the concessions.

Legally, the existing regulatory framework for adjudicating forest concessions limited the community organizations' expectations for access. Facing this adverse scenario, ACOFOP centered the debate around community rights to forest resource access and management, proposing community forest concessions as an alternative to the logging industry's extraction model.

This debate has brought out the different existing perspectives on natural resource access and management. On one hand, the strict conservation perspective sought to displace population groups settled in the reserve, which was seen as serving scientific conservation objectives. On the other, lumbermen wanted access to resources to continue large-scale logging. Finally, communities wanted to ensure their access to land and to the forest to secure their livelihoods.

ACOFOP successfully swayed the decisions made by CONAP, which developed a model that is more accessible to communities and that takes into consideration the commitments made by the central government. A consultation process was held that led to a new regulation: "Policies on granting concessions for the use and management of renewable natural resources in the multiple use zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve." This regulation requires communities to have an NGO to provide them with technical assistance and to ensure proper use of the resources. It also needs to consider the integrated management of the concession areas so that the communities can utilize the resources in accordance with their management plans. Conversely, industrial concessions are limited to being strictly forest-related (Cortave, 2003). Finally, after 10 years, ACOFOP won the adjudication of 12 community concessions.

During the negotiations, many ACOFOP organizations still did not have the legal status that would have enabled them to seek a concession. Therefore, another thing that ACOFOP did was to aid several of the organizations in legalizing their status, channeling technical, financial and human resources so that they could qualify to become legally constituted associations, civil societies or cooperatives.

ACOFOP Member Organizations

One of ACOFOP's greatest strengths is its ability to organize, lobby and represent the interests of community organizations. It should be kept in mind that these organizations have different backgrounds and livelihood strategies that are consistent with their settlement history. This history explains the way they manage resources, their degree of development and their relationship with outside actors (see Table 1).

Table 1. ACOFOP Community Forest Concessions: General Characteristics and Level of Development

| Organization | Size of Managed Forest (ha) | No. of Members | Ha per Member | Characteristics | |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|--|--|
| More Advanced Organizations | | | | | |
| Sociedad Civil Organización, Manejo y Conservación Uaxactún (OMYC) | 83,558 | 244 | 373 | <p>Area granted in concession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More land and biodiversity (77% of the ACOFOP community concession land). • In <i>La Técnica</i> and <i>UMI</i>, management areas are owned by the coop. <p>Institutional development and social capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater internal cohesion, trade association activity and presence in ACOFOP. • Greater political advocacy capacity. • Institutional trend toward rotating leadership. • Recent specialization of functions and differentiation between trade association and entrepreneurial roles. <p>Human capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher human capital level (80% of members are literate). <p>Livelihood strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversification of livelihood strategies: forest management is the principal strategy (70%), in combination with agricultural and livestock activities and management of non wood products. • Initial steps toward community enterprise management. | |
| Sociedad Civil Árbol Verde | 64,973 | 364 | 178.49 | | |
| Cooperativa Carmelita | 53,797 | 122 | 440.95 | | |
| Asociación Forestal Integral San Andrés (AFISAP) | 51,939.84 | 174 | 298.504 | | |
| Sociedad Civil El Esfuerzo | 25,386.48 | 39 | 650.94 | | |
| Sociedad Civil Custodios de la Selva (CUSTOSEL) | 21,176.74 | 96 | 220.59 | | |
| Sociedad Civil Laborantes del Bosque | 19,390 | 78 | 248.59 | | |
| Sociedad Civil Impulsores Suchitecos | 12,117 | 27 | 448.77 | | |
| Cooperativa Unión Maya Itzá (UMI) | 5,923 | 138 | 42.92 | | |
| Cooperativa La Técnica | 4,607 | 43 | 107.14 | | |
| Sub-total in hectares | 342,865.06 ha (77%) | | | | |
| Less Developed Organizations | | | | | |
| Asociación Forestal La Colorada | 27,067 | 39 | 694.02 | <p>Area granted in concession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 23% of ACOFOP community concession land. <p>Institutional development and social capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdown of the group, conflicts, cronyism, favoritism. • Centralization of leadership. • No differentiation between trade association and entrepreneurial roles. • Little presence in ACOFOP. <p>Human capital</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low human capital levels (over 40% of members illiterate). <p>Livelihood strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater dependence on agriculture and livestock (80%). • Low level of forest management knowledge. • Low enterprise management capacity. | |
| Sociedad Civil Selva Maya del Norte | 24,708 | 102 | 242.24 | | |
| Asociación Forestal Cruce a la Colorada | 20,469 | 65 | 313.90 | | |
| Asociación de Productores La Pasadita | 18,817 | 110 | 171.06 | | |
| Asociación Forestal San Miguel La Palotada | 7,039 | 30 | 243.63 | | |
| Cooperativa La Lucha | 3,931 | 52 | 75.60 | | |
| Cooperativa Los Laureles | 2,970 | 57 | 52.1 | | |
| Cooperativa La Felicidad | 1,341 | 20 | 67.05 | | |
| Cooperativa Monte Sinaí | 1,048 | 22 | 47.63 | | |
| Asociación Civil del Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (ACIMARNAL) | 358 | 428 | 0.83 | | |
| Cooperativa Nuevos Horizontes | 900 | 107 | 8.41 | | |
| Red de Difusores Agroforestales | Private Parcels | 10 | N/A | | |
| Sub-total in hectares | 108,684 (23%) | | | | |
| OTHER: Sociedad Civil Amigos del Bosque | To be determined | | N/A | | Community Forest Concession in process of adjudication |

Source: Prepared by author; based on ACOFOP, 2003 updated by ACOFOP, 2005.

“Petenero” Communities

The oldest communities which originated as settlements along the routes for extracting chicle, timber, allspice and xate palm, are located in the municipalities of San Andrés and Melchor

de Mencos and Uaxactún in the municipality of Flores. These communities identify themselves as “Peteneros,” given their longer residence in the region.

The community of Carmelita, in the municipality of San Andrés, was founded in 1925 as a storage center from which chicle was flown to Port Barrios. Between 1976 and 1978, industrial logging operations began and in the 1980s, xate palm leaf collection started increasing (SmartWood Program 2003d). Cooperativa Carmelita and Sociedad Civil Selva Maya del Norte are located in this area.

During the 1940s, what is now known as the town of Melchor de Mencos was still a chicle settlement with a large Mexican population. There were no overland routes to the rest of Guatemala, nor control over cross-border traffic with Belize, which aided the illegal trade in wood, non-wood species and other products.

Forest utilization in this area began in the late 19th century with English companies logging primarily mahogany and cedar. From the 1960s to the 1980s, logging was done by local companies. By the 1990s, due to the country's ungovernability, illicit logging by Belizean and Mexican companies got out of control. Many of the residents of Melchor participated in these activities, which paradoxically gave them a good knowledge of the forest and its resources. These people created the following organizations: Impulsores Suchitecos, Laborantes del Bosque, El Esfuerzo and Custodios de la Selva.

The community of Uaxactún, in the municipality of Flores, is located in the Classic Maya city of the same name between the great Maya cities of Tikal and Calakmul. Originally the community relied on the sale of chicle but inhabitants collect now allspice and xate palm.

Uaxactún has become a chicle community that has maintained a harmonious relationship with nature and a certain degree of independence from regional society. Because the community was highly identified with the forest, it was difficult to adopt forest management since this meant adhering to greater control and accepting timber extraction, which they considered a threat to the use of non-timber products. However, timber extraction was accepted as a strategy to deal with the growing depletion of non-timber forest products and is done in only a part of the concession area (Smart Wood Program, 2003b).

Its location in an area of great archeological importance has also led to its involvement in archeological and tourism activities. The Uaxactún Conservation and Management Organization (OMYC), which continues to be involved in these activities, recognizes that the community has still not developed a logging culture (ACICAFOC *et al.*, 2004).

From Colonization to Peasant Land Communities

The potential for extractive activities combined with the rural colonization policy led communities to form along the road to Carmelita - San Andrés, Cruce a Dos Aguadas, La Pasadita and San Miguel La Palotada - communities whose livelihoods are based on the extraction of non-timber forest products such as xate⁸ chicle and allspice combined with subsistence agriculture and small-scale cattle ranching. This is the setting for the formation of the following forest associations: La Colorada, Cruce a la Colorada, La Pasadita, San Andrés and San Miguel La Palotada.

A similar history gave rise to nine communities in the municipality of Flores, which belong to the Sociedad Civil Árbol Verde.⁹ Started 50 years ago as chicle camps, they were later inhabited by peasants who migrated from around the country. The residents have different occupations; primarily they are farmers and small-scale cattle ranchers, carpenters, wood artisans and public employees (SmartWood Program, 2003c).

In the last four years, after obtaining the concession, Árbol Verde has developed impressively in its forest management, commercialization and the development of a forest culture integrated into traditional livelihoods.

Several cooperatives were formed in the municipality of La Libertad: La Técnica, Monte Sinaí, La Felicidad, Los Laureles and La

⁸ In the zone there are five different species of palm. Currently 4,000 families in the Peten benefit from this activity and the work takes place throughout the year. A *chatero* harvests on average 650 *gruesas* per month (a *gruesa* is equal to 90 palm leaves). The harvest of *xate* is regulated by CONAP. www.acicafoc.net/pymescomunitarias/arbolverde.php

⁹ Ixlú, El Remate, Macanche, El Zapote, Las Viñas, El Naranjo, El Caoba, El Porvenir y El Zocotzal.

Lucha. Their members were originally landless indigenous people and mestizos from the country's highlands, south and east. The Petén was valued by them for its good land for farming and cattle raising. In addition, the founding of some of these communities was encouraged by the government's strategy to colonize the banks of the Usumacinta River and counteract Mexican attempts to install hydroelectric plants that threatened to flood Guatemala.

In the 1970s, serious conflicts with other settlers arose over access to land. When the war escalated, many peasants' names were turned in to the army accusing them of being agitators and guerrillas. The inhabitants of cooperatives such as La Técnica and Bethel suffered grave human rights violations, including the massacres in Dos Erres and Los Josefinos in the 1980s (MINUGUA, 2004). Entire families, including children and elderly, fled from the cooperatives into the forest, eventually ending up in Mexico where they lived as refugees for 10 years.

Communities Resulting from War and Displacement

The war's end led to new types of settlements and access to land, including groups of repatriated refugees and settlements started by demobilized combatants.

The Unión Maya-Itzá (UMI) is a farming cooperative originating with the repatriation of ethnic groups displaced by the conflict that had spent over a decade in refugee camps in southern Mexico. In 1995, the government, through the National Fund for Peace (FONAPAZ), granted La Quetzal farm to 225 families from different ethnic groups, natives of Huehuetenango, Alta and Baja Verapaz, Quiché and Petén. The settlement, located southeast of the Sierra del Lacandón National Park, was founded in a forest area with no overland access or infrastructure.

The UMI is a Private Management Unit where families have developed a strong sense of community life, achieving notable improvements in the community, including transportation services and small community stores. When they first arrived, they were not familiar with the forest or its production potential. The Peteneros showed them how to extract xate,

which is currently one of their main sources of income (SmartWood Program, 2003a; Aldana and Matías, 2004).

Finally, the community of demobilized ex-combatants in the Cooperativa Nuevo Horizonte, in the municipality of Santa Ana, is made up of 107 families and has made significant strides in organizing and developing the cooperative for traditional crop farming, cattle raising and crop diversification. This cooperative functions as a Private Management Unit and is one of the ACOFOP organizations (MINUGUA, 2004b).

The origin of communities is important for understanding how they have evolved in managing their concessions and in their relationships with conservation NGOs that have been in the forefront of the establishment and management of the MBR. According to Sundberg (2003), conservation NGOs have considered Peteneros as a group that makes appropriate use of the forest. Thus their conservationist discourses position them as models for sustainable practices, which other migrants do not use. This is highly questionable, since Peteneros and recent migrants share many forest management and farming practices as a result of exchanges on their experiences and resource management practices.

Furthermore, their origins and livelihood strategies affected how the communities responded to the formation of concessions. For the Melchor de Mencos groups - Impulsores Suchitecos, Laborantes del Bosque, Custodios de la Selva and El Esfuerzo - the concession enabled them to legalize their logging operations, something they were already proficient at (Reyna *et al.*, 1999). The oldest extractive communities, such as Uaxactún and Carmelita, had long experience in the region and were very familiar with the territory and the plant and animal species that live there. Although this does not necessarily translate into "better" forest management, it does signify valuable information for developing the management plans. Still, in the beginning, forest management was so new and unknown that it generated distrust among the population.

Conversely, for the communities arising out of rural colonization dynamics, forest management

activities were not linked to their livelihood strategies, which were more related to agriculture or the extraction of non-timber products. In general, it has been more difficult for these groups to adapt to the scope and implications of forest management. Additionally, the new settlements formed by repatriates were essentially counting on their organizational capacity to recreate their community life in an unknown, rustic setting.

These differences were not taken into account when deciding upon the characteristics of the management plans and types of accompaniment needed. The technical support package was essentially homogenous for all the concession-holding groups.¹⁰ Likewise, the territories in the concessions were just as diverse in terms of the characteristics of the forest, the quality of the species and the size of the concessions. However, even using this homogeneous model, the overall management of the concessions has had considerable social and environmental success, which will be discussed below.

Types of Organizations that compose ACOFOP

ACOFOP has very strong organizing and lobbying capabilities and ably represents the interests of community organizations. It also works on strengthening community management through training sessions, exchange visits, legal aid, production training, product commercialization, technical assistance and certification (Kurzel and Müller, 2004). However, despite the general success of the experience, organizations still display different levels of development.

In addition to differences in community origin, there are other factors that explain the varying degrees of progress made in community management of the forest. Even though this classification may change as the organizations evolve, there is a group of organizations that are more advanced and a group that exhibits a series of weaknesses and needs to strengthen its institutional framework. The following classification is the result of self-evaluations done by ACOFOP and is based on a combination of these variables: a) size of the concessions b) level of social capital and institutional development, c) degree of human capital, and d) relationship

of communities to forest management as a livelihood strategy (see Table 1).

More Advanced Groups

Generally, these organizations hold the largest concessions with the greatest biodiversity; they manage approximately 70 per cent of the community concession area and engage in livelihood strategies closely related to forest management. These include most of the Petenero communities, which have a longer relationship with the forest, and also the Sociedad Civil Árbol Verde, founded by highly-organized migrant peasant-farming communities.

Certainly, social capital is a critical element for the success of community forest management and provides the foundation on which the organizations and ACOFOP develop as institutions. For example, in the case of the Unión Maya Itzá, despite having a small tract of forest, they maintain strong social cohesion, which contributes significantly to strengthening community management and residents' social welfare.

Furthermore, these groups actively participate in ACOFOP and have made significant achievements in developing their institutional arrangements and managing their production. They have invested in raising their members' level of human capital and, in terms of their organizational development, have greater internal cohesion and rotation of leadership. With these elements in their favor, they have begun a process of specializing functions and differentiating trade association and business roles.

Less Developed Groups

In other organizations, members need to adapt better to community forest management and improve their level of institutional development. They currently show little knowledge of forest management and their livelihood strategies still depend, for the most part, on subsistence agriculture. These concessions are formed by

¹⁰ There are three different types of community organizations: cooperatives, civil societies and producer associations. The NGOs in charge of accompanying the communities, as well as their organizational and historical characteristics, greatly influenced the type of organization that was established.

migrant peasant communities and settlements and include groups with the fewest hectares of forest.

Although these factors are relevant, they do not appear to be determinants of their weaknesses. Several of these groups have concessions similar in size to the successful groups and the case of *Árbol Verde* shows that peasant migrants can successfully tackle the challenge of forest management.

In addition to internalizing and accepting forest management, another critical element is the need to strengthen social and human capital. Infighting, leadership through cronyism and a low level of participation in ACOFOP is common among these groups. Members continue to have low social capital and as a consequence they have difficulties in their organizational arrangements, which have not managed to differentiate between trade association and business roles.

Funding and Assistance for Community Forest Concessions



International Funding and Influence in the Petén

Donor and international assistance agencies have had a strong influence over conservation and development processes in the Petén and the creation of the MBR. Donor community strategies and input have been varied and have evolved over time. In this section we present information about main donor organizations, the type of activities they fund and their evolution in the recent history of Petén. Further on, we specifically discuss the role of funding of the different models for technical and institutional assistance. It should be noted that this analysis is limited to the case of Petén, and cannot be generalized to other sites. However, it does provide information about assistance agencies that could be useful for other studies.

Based on different sources, we estimate that between 1989 and 2003 direct investment amounted to US\$92 million for projects in the MBR zone from USAID, the IDB, the KFW of Germany and matching funds from the government of Guatemala (CCAD-RUTA, 2000; Klein, 2000 and Chemonics-BIOFOR, 2003). Furthermore, the Ford Foundation invested a total of US\$470,000 between 1999 and 2004 (Barry, 2004) and the

Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation of Holland (ICCO) contributed US\$600,000 between 2000 and 2005. In both cases, this aid went directly to ACOFOP. However, these figures are incomplete and underestimate the amount of total investment in the region, since we know that other donors and foundations have funded projects in the region have funded projects there. However, reliable documentation has not been found on the amounts invested by these other organizations (see Table 2).

Table 2. Principal Assistance Projects in the MBR and Forest Concessions

| Project | Agency | Years | Amount |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Principal Projects from Official Cooperation Agencies | | | |
| Maya Biosphere Project | USAID/ PARTNER AGENCIES | 1990-2002 | US\$45 million |
| Sustainable Development Project | IDB | 1998-2002 | US\$22 million |
| PROSELVA | KFW | 1998-2000 | US\$30.8 million |
| CENTRO MAYA | USAID | 1998 | US\$135,000 |
| CATIE/CONAP | USAID | 1998 | US\$1 million |
| OLAFO (End Phase) | Scandinavian Countries | 1999 | US\$82,000 |
| BIOFOR | USAID | 2002-2004 | US\$8.9 million |
| Main Agreements with ACOFOP for Community Development | | | |
| N/A | FORD FOUNDATION | 1999-2004 | US\$470,000 |
| N/A | ICCO | 2000-2005 | US\$600,000 |

Source: Prepared by author, based on CCAD-RUTA, with Ford Foundation and ACOFOP data.

USAID and its Role in Petén's Conservation and Development¹¹

USAID has been one of the most important actors involved in funding projects and activities in Petén. USAID support in the Petén began when FYDEP was being formed in the mid-1950s (Elías *et al.*, 1997). At that time, financial assistance was directed toward setting up the Petén's first institutional structure intended to open the territory for peasant colonists and increase basic grain production.

In the late 1980's, the focus of the Guatemalan government and international assistance agencies shifted toward natural resource conservation. This is when the concept of the MBR began to take shape. Since then, USAID has become the main partner of international conservation agencies, such as CI, TNC and WWF, for designing and implementing the MBR. With USAID funding and the conservation agencies' approach, CONAP was formed and other key partners were recruited, such as CATIE, for managing the forest reserve. USAID's investment for this purpose totaled US\$31.2 million between 1990 and 2001 (Klein, 2000). The initial contribution made by USAID and its partners was focused on conservation technical assistance. CONAP and national and international conservation NGOs received funding directly for working with community based organizations. The funding was not aimed at developing or providing training in financial and administrative management for the communities or for ACOFOP.

In 2002, USAID financial aid shifted once again towards the direct development of community forest concessions. This was done through the Biodiversity and Sustainable Forestry Project (BIOFOR), which focused on strengthening the administrative and financial capacity of the concessions through the creation of the "Community Forestry Concessions Enterprise" (FORESCOM), for which USAID contributed US\$8.9 million in the 2002-2004 period (Chemonics-BIOFOR, 2003). Even though the idea for FORESCOM came from ACOFOP and

it was developed under their organizational, it was administered by BIOFOR project staff and designed to operate with considerable resources.

Although it should be acknowledged that this shift in USAID investment meant that funding became more oriented toward community-building and self-management, this project also had its limitations. In the project's final phase, in early 2004, ACOFOP was facing the challenge of having to assume the high costs of a FORESCOM that had developed with substantial financial resources. Community-based organizations realized they could not cover the costs of an arrangement of this magnitude and they had to restructure it to make it economically viable given their conditions.

In total, USAID invested at least US\$40 million in Petén between 1990 and 2004. From ACOFOP's point of view, this funding allowed the concessionaires to acquire technical knowledge and strengthen their community-based enterprise. However, the majority of these funds were not assigned directly to community-based organizations or to ACOFOP, but to national and international NGOs. Therefore, the impact of USAID's investment on community-building and self-management processes has been modest in relation to its total investment in the MBR and Petén.

Support from Other International Organizations

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) financed the Sustainable Development Program for Petén (SDP) between 1998 and 2002, through a US\$22 million loan to the Guatemalan government (CCAD-RUTA, 2000). This was executed by the Tropical Agricultural Center for Research and Higher Education (CATIE), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAGA), CONAP and other Guatemalan organizations.

¹¹ USAID data is more detailed than that of other donors because it was available from Chemonics reports, the main executing agency for USAID funding in the Petén. Also quite useful was the "Inventory of Environmental Projects in Central America - National Report for Guatemala," produced by CCAD and RUTA (CCAD-RUTA, 2000).

The SDP sought to regularize land tenure in the MBR buffer zone, contribute to the sustainable management and conservation of natural resources and the preservation of archeological sites, and to the institutional strengthening of government bodies and municipalities. This project was executed through governmental and international institutions. As was the case with earlier USAID projects, it contributed indirectly to community-based processes. The focus on the municipalities was extremely important to tenuous local-level governance in Petén. However, we were not able to find specific information about the project's achievements in this area.

Another large project, carried out between 1998 and 2000, was the Conservation of the Petén Tropical Forest Program (PROSELVA). The activity had a total cost of US\$30.8 million and was funded by KFW (US\$14.8 million) and the government of Guatemala (US\$16 million) (CCAD-RUTA, 2000). PROSELVA was executed by Guatemalan governmental institutions, including CONAP, the National Forestry Institute (INAB), the Institute for Agrarian Transformation (INTA), and the Secretariat for Economic Planning (SEGEPLAN). Its principal objectives were the integrated development of the protected zones in southern Petén and the promotion of development projects to improve the quality of life for the region's population (CCAD-RUTA, 2000).

Other small-scale investment during this period were the Centro Maya projects (USAID - US\$135,000), the CATIE/CONAP Project (USAID - US\$1 million), and the final phase of the OLAFO project (Scandinavian countries - US\$82,000) (CCAD-RUTA, 2000).

Assistance from International Foundations

Several international foundations have provided direct funding for the community concession process and for ACOFOP. These include the Ford Foundation, ICCO and Helvetas (the Swiss Cooperation Agency). The main difference between this type of assistance and that discussed in the preceding section is that these donors decided that their investment

would go directly to incipient community-based institutions. Therefore, although the amounts have been smaller, this contribution has significantly strengthened the institutional framework of the concessions, and in particular, ACOFOP. For example, the Ford Foundation contribution (US\$470,000) over four years was invested entirely in directly strengthening ACOFOP as an institution and developing its capacity (Barry, 2004).

Synthesis

The information presented on donors and funding shows that international assistance agencies made substantial investments in the Petén during the past decade. Furthermore, these funds were primarily channeled through governmental and international institutions, as well as national conservation NGOs. A modest portion of the funding went directly into the hands of the concession-holding communities and their organizations. With the exception of the aid from international foundations, this input did not have a sizeable impact on concession-holding community processes for institutional strengthening and self-management. The investments by large donors (USAID, KFW and the IDB) do appear to have strengthened the governmental institutions and conservation organizations in Petén. At the same time, these donations led to the development of significant knowledge and technical capacity around forest management that were adopted by both community-based organizations and governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Assistance Models for Community Forest Concessions

The regulations established by CONAP¹² for granting forest concessions required a series of steps that included the concession-holding community entering into an agreement to work with an NGO that would provide technical

¹² "Policies on granting concessions for the use and management of renewable natural resources in the Multiple Use Zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Resolution of the Executive Secretariat of the National Council on Protected Areas" (CONAP, 1998).

assistance, along with the preparation of a number of technical instruments on forest management.¹³

These requirements set the standards for an official assistance model based on NGO technical capacities to ensure observance of forest management regulations. The inexperience of the concessionaires would be addressed under this model by having an NGO capable of dealing with these regulations. Certainly, the communities were unskilled at the technical level, but they were sufficiently organized to assume the challenge of forest management. The official model took this into account very late in the process. At the same time, ACOFOP's organizing capacity and ties to national and international networks made it possible for them to obtain cooperation aid aimed at developing their institutional capacities as the representative of the community-based forest organizations.

In this section, we discuss the evolution of the official assistance model and present an assessment of another type of assistance that is more focused on strengthening the community-based institutional framework. The confluence of both models has been fundamental to the development of the community forest management experience.

The Official Assistance Model

Since the creation of the MBR, USAID has been CONAP's main partner, playing a strategic role in financial support and in the institutional design for the management of the MBR. In the case of community forest concessions, the official assistance model responded to CONAP regulations, under which communities need to be linked to an NGO that would provide technical assistance and ensure proper use of the resources. A technical assistance model was designed in which international NGOs and their national counterparts appear as the guarantors of the conservation and management of the forest granted in concession to the forest communities.

The official assistance model went through two distinct phases between 1992 and 2004:

- During the first phase (1993-2000), the region was managed through the intervention of international conservation-NGOs working with local NGOs that had been created specifically for the purpose of carrying out the management projects;
- In the second phase (2001-2004), the model shifted and USAID began channeling aid through the BIOFOR project, executed by Chemonics International.

The rationale for the design of this assistance model is based on the idea of building a technically-competent institutional framework that is heavily involved in forest management and, consequently, in the cycle of forest use. It was felt that communities were made up of unskilled people with little capacity for taking an active role in forest management. From this viewpoint, NGOs would ensure observance of technical regulations.

In general, the most significant advances made with this model were in technical training, which included forest management and commercialization. Although these accomplishments were positive, knowledge transfer under this model was extremely top-down. The approach and relations between NGOs and local populations have been strongly criticized for being paternalistic and not allowing communities to develop and use skills for integrated forest management, administration and enterprise management (Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ, 2000).

The NGOs assumed a leadership role in the process and instead of becoming accompanists or facilitators, they turned into service providing firms. Furthermore, the relationship between communities and NGOs was unbalanced from the start, since NGOs handled and administered funds without promoting community-based

¹³To obtain authorization for resource management, concessions must have a General Management Plan, an Environmental Impact Assessment, Socio-Economic Assessments, Annual Operating Plans and certification of good management by an international agency accredited by the Forest Stewardship Council. Currently, this task is done by SmartWood (Cortave, 2004).

institution-building and self-management. Cuellar (2004) and Chemonics-BIOFOR (2000) refer to the paternalistic and subsidy-based nature of the relationship between NGOs and communities, because NGOs were encouraging dependency of the communities to justify their existence and continue to receive donor funding.

According to Cortave (2004), the case of San Miguel La Palotada, the first community concession granted in 1994, shows the limitations of this initial perspective on community management. On 7,039 ha of forest, CATIE implemented a forest management plan that was meant to be a pilot project from which other communities could learn. Although it paved the way for the granting of other concessions, it was done through a highly subsidized model and in a small territory with low forestry potential.

With a huge injection of financial and technical resources in a small area with low timber production, the result has been a model that is unsustainable in the long run. Furthermore, during 11 years, feedback was insufficient for supporting the development of local capacities. Therefore, Cortave (2004) considers this to be the least successful of all community forest concessions.

This model enabled NGOs to supplant communities in decision-making venues, competing with community boards of directors and limiting access to key information. By controlling decision-making, NGOs also controlled the commercialization of the wood, turning into intermediaries for the commercialization and sale of services. Thus, the communities did not develop commercial capacities in due time, since they were not actively involved in negotiating the sale price for their wood. This situation generated conflict among NGOs, communities and ACOFOP. The excessive power acquired by the NGOs came to a head when they started pressuring community based groups to grant them exclusive rights over the management and commercialization of the wood as a condition for maintaining the concession and technical support.

In some cases, community organizations felt pressured by their accompanying NGOs because they had to sign exclusivity agreements for technical assistance as part of the assistance approach, which far from facilitating community capacity-building was instead aimed at making them heavily dependent on the NGOs. This situation logically led to rejection and confrontation between community groups and NGOs.

ACOFOP denounced this problem at the international level, arguing that it is ineffective to have a model in which NGOs have access to financial resources and in exchange provide only minimal services and information that does not respond to community needs (Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ, 2000). The pressure exerted by ACOFOP, which included international campaigns in the internet, managed to get the concession regulations changed so that communities could operate without this style of accompaniment.

Despite these deficiencies, the communities value the technical training on forest management they have received, through which they have developed and internalized the knowledge needed for preparing and implementing the management and annual operating plans required by CONAP. This also involved community-based groups adapting to ecological perspectives and discourses. In addition, the model encouraged community members to form their own organization, a requirement for obtaining a concession at a time when many of the communities had no prior experience nor had they created the synergies necessary for forming an organization on their own initiative.

In 2001, the model was changed and USAID began channeling assistance to community forest concessions through the BIOFOR Project, executed by Chemonics International. At this point, a strategy was devised for the 2001-2004 period that targeted activities towards the sustainability of concessions, based on strengthening their business capacity. Its objectives were: to reduce subsidies, to strengthen business management and to reduce

the number of accompanying institutions, leaving only the Asociación Centro Maya in charge of forest stewardship, and ACOFOP (Chemonics-BIOFOR, 2003).

At present, a considerable number of national NGOs (Centro Maya, ProPetén, Naturaleza para la Vida, etc.) that were formed through the USAID-funded MBR project (Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ, 2000), as well as international organizations (e.g. Just World Partners) and cooperation projects such as BIOFOR are still working in the region.

Many of the NGOs formed through MBR cooperation assistance have turned into service provider firms for community and private forest concessions. This relationship can be satisfactory for both parties if there is transparency in the roles and responsibilities of each one. In practice, however, many of the relationships between community-based organizations and NGOs are tense, due to the friction that was created when community groups questioned and changed the accompaniment model.

Pro-Community Assistance

There was another type of assistance alongside the official assistance model centered on strengthening community capacities, contributing valuable input for the development of the institutional capacities of community groups and ACOFOP. In general, this model has involved a large number of actors in a complex and changing dynamic, which has certain important principles and characteristics. Some of the institutions and individuals that have been involved in this cooperation process are:

- **Donor Agencies:** According to ACOFOP (2002), donor agencies include the Agricultural Frontier Project, the Ford Foundation, the Romero Christian Initiative (CIR), the Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), the German Development Service (DED), and the Swiss Cooperation Agency (Helvetas). Funding from these organizations has been aimed at developing and strengthening

ACOFOP, supporting long-term self-management.

- **The Central American Indigenous and Peasant Coordinator of Community Agroforestry (ACICAFOC):** Although not an assistance agency, ACICAFOC has supported ACOFOP's institutional strengthening process and has helped with strategic networking nationally and internationally. At the same time, ACOFOP's experience has been used by ACICAFOC within Central America and beyond the region as a successful community forestry model, for the purpose of encouraging similar processes that promote the inclusion of peasant and indigenous communities in natural resource management.

Providing far less funding than official assistance organizations, these organizations became "accompanying organizations," adapting to the needs and evolution of community-based organizations. Although "accompaniment" is still a fairly new term used in diverse ways, in this particular case we define "accompaniment" as the process by which both, cooperation agencies and communities, walk side by side, promoting common ideas and challenges for the consolidation of community forest management. This type of assistance has enabled ACOFOP and its member organizations to develop their organizational abilities and capacity for political advocacy around Central America as well as internationally. It has also positioned ACOFOP as an interlocutor and a reference point in the Petén with the government of Guatemala.

The model is based on the ability to develop social relationships at the regional and international levels, which in turn allows building internal capacities while providing input and resources in terms of access to information, ties to relevant processes or events taking place around the world and financial aid. In this way, ACOFOP can disseminate its experience while continually seeking resources and assistance. The accompaniment model implies a more flexible type of cooperation, more horizontal and closer to populations and their social processes. Being not project-driven, it seeks to maintain a longer-

term commitment to community processes. Therefore, it has the advantage of forming more horizontal ties and building trusting relationships with ACOFOP.

Another characteristic of this type of assistance is that it is not interested in maintaining a permanent presence in the territory, but rather in the possibility of building relationships around strategic issues and channeling support that respond to specific periods in the evolution of the experience.

As opposed to conventional projects that tend to invest in and maintain their own permanent infrastructure and staff during the implementation of the intervention, this type of assistance uses key actors that often are located outside the territory, although they maintain close ties and participate constantly during crucial moments.¹⁴ Their absence in daily organizational management gives local actors more space and opportunity for self-learning. As a result, they have been crucial to ACOFOP's institutional development, and also supporting the organization's transition by increasing local capacity and self-management.

This type of assistance has always existed alongside the official model. Strengthening ACOFOP's institutional capacity has allowed it to become an active interlocutor with actors from the official model (CONAP, USAID, NGOs), questioning and reworking the conditions imposed by that model.

The principles of this community-building assistance model can be summarized as follows:

- It is committed to strengthening the political governance of its partners;
- It is centered on the institutional development of community organizations and on human capital formation, through the strengthening of local capacities (it only does what local actors are not able to do);
- It is committed to local actors learning, which is why it prefers that they take the lead in activities, even if they make mistakes;

- It avoids paternalism and creating dependence on the outside;
- It is long term;
- It is dynamic and uses a complex network of support and contacts;
- It focuses on self-management processes and not on short-term projects;
- It invests in trusting relationships with local actors.

Lessons for Strengthening Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Local Livelihoods

The two assistance models discussed in this chapter provide important lessons on how to undertake processes that can successfully combine rational natural resource management with the strengthening of community livelihoods and institutions. The contributions and limitations of each of these models are discussed below.

Official assistance has been effective in mobilizing a considerable amount of financial resources and in providing technical assistance on community management of forest concessions. However, this model had serious deficiencies – it created external dependence and appropriated management and administration processes that should have been handled by the communities themselves, not by assistance agencies or executing NGOs. This situation deteriorated to the point that the model generated conflict between communities and executing NGOs.

In contrast, pro community assistance was successful at improving democratic processes to develop effective community-based institutions. In addition, this model successfully assisted ACOFOP's national and international standing and management capacities. However, this type of assistance does not attempt to mobilize the

¹⁴ These include specialists in rural development, community forestry, participation and leadership.

magnitude of financial, political and technical resources characteristic of the official model. This mobilization of resources was essential, not only because it resulted in significant financial investment, but also because it attracted and recruited important institutions in the technical areas of ecology and natural resource management.

That being said, the analysis shows that the contributions of each type of assistance were crucial to the development process and the success of community concessions and ACOFOP. While the agencies using the official model invested in governmental institutions and technical NGOs, the “unofficial” ones did so in local organizations. The former focused on technical assistance and research, while the latter focused on local institution building.

The contributions of each model are very different, and therefore, also complementary.

The model geared towards community-building shows that it is possible to guide communities in a management process that can successfully negotiate with the official accompaniment model but on its own, lacks the necessary financial and technical resources for successfully mobilizing initiatives as important as the forest concessions.

The results of experiences based solely on the official model have been documented and heavily criticized because of their paternalistic nature and unsustainable outcomes.

Developing strategies for cooperation that combine these two types of accompaniment and technical assistance could offer a successful option for supporting sustainable processes that link development and conservation. However, this would require that each assistance agency recognizes *a priori* its role and interests and actively seeks a complementary relationship with other donors.

Social and Environmental Impacts of Community Management on the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR)



This chapter analyzes the impact of natural resource management and conservation, changes in livelihood strategies and the strengthening of community organizations. It is important to critically evaluate how community concessions have managed the forest, since to a large extent the recognition and credibility of the pro-community model depends on it.

So far, the positive social and environmental effects from community management have been significant: a reduced impact from forest fires, the end of illegal logging and fewer new illegal settlements. In addition, community organization has provided access in the certified wood market as well as the reorganization and improvement of community livelihood strategies. Also, community members have started to view the “healthy,” well-managed forest as their main natural asset. However, it must still be demonstrated that this management is sustainable both in social and ecological terms, since it provides key basis for ensuring that concessions continue in community hands.

Natural Resource Conservation and Management

Thus far, three important indicators show that community concessions have been managing the forest well (Kurzle and Müller, 2004; Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ, 2000):

- The certification of 338,333 ha of sustainably managed forest under the Forest Stewardship Council’s SmartWood® Seal.¹⁵

- A considerable reduction in forest fires in community concessions compared with the buffer zone and some national parks (Laguna del Tigre and Sierra del Lacandón).
- The stabilization of the agricultural frontier.

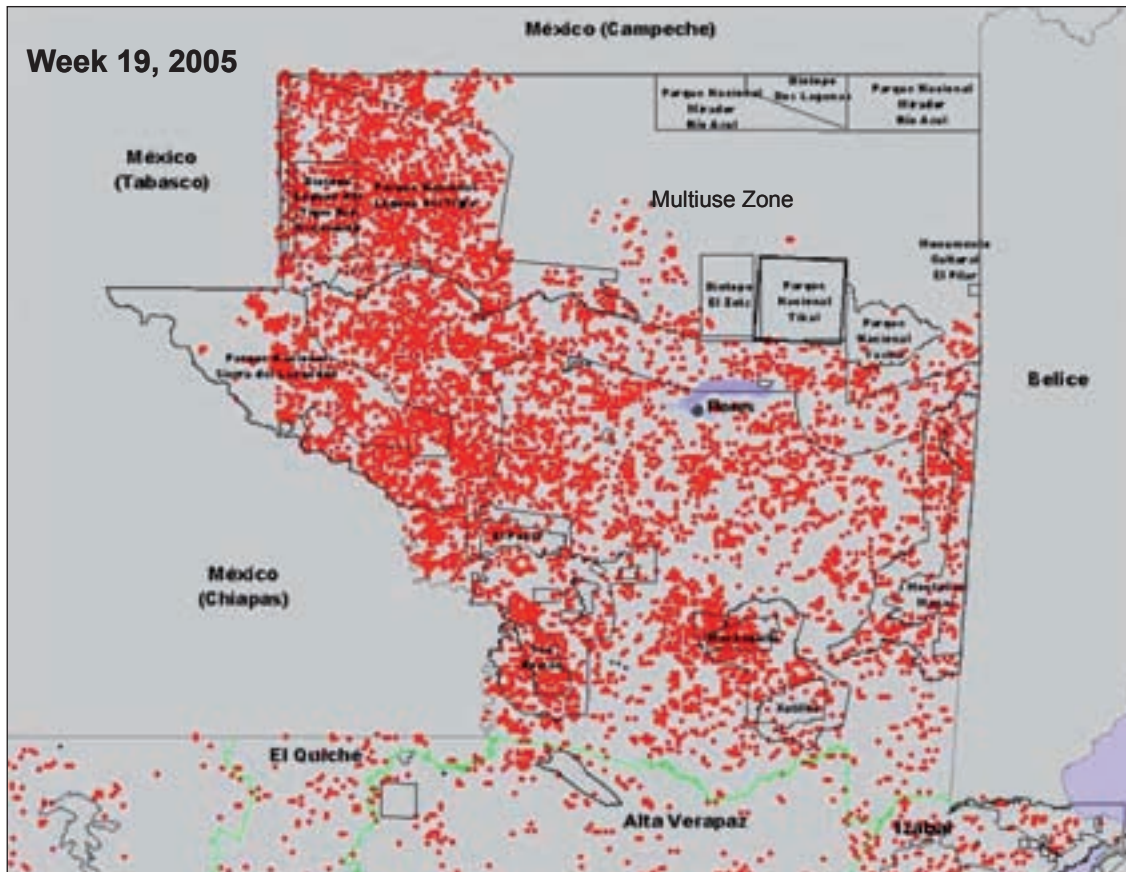
Timber is the most important forest product in the Petén. The Petén forests have ecological characteristics that are more favorable for harvesting timber than other forest ecosystems. The Petén forests are abundant in mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), in comparison to other tropical forests, such as the Amazon (Carrera and Pinelo, 1995). In fact, in 2004, mahogany was the most abundant species harvested and sold.¹⁶ This makes logging a very profitable business, even when low impact practices are used. However, it should be noted that Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ (2000) dispute this view stating that in the Petén forests “[t]he number of tree species of commercial value is low, and there are few individuals” (p. A-I-1). In addition, the moderate average rainfall in the Petén (approximately 2,000 mm per year) makes communication and transportation easier in the forest year round.

Under CONAP regulations, community concessionaires have responded well to the challenge of sustainable forest management.

¹⁵ Information as of July 2005.

¹⁶ According to Nittler and Tschinkel (2005), of a projected total harvest volume of 17,898 m³ for 2004, over half was mahogany, while “Santa María,” a semi-precious species, was the second most abundant species harvested with over 2,600 m³.

Map 4. Forest Fires in the Petén in 2005



Source: CONAP-CEMEC, 2005

When the concessions were established, many of the communities lacked the necessary knowledge for managing the forest according to these criteria. They needed the technical assistance of the accompanying NGOs to learn how to harvest, monitor and manage the forest (Cuellar, 2004).

This period of technical knowledge-building, together with the consolidation of the organizations' social capital,¹⁷ set the foundation for successful community forest management from a social and ecological perspective. In just a few years, communities have acquired the capacity to carry fieldwork, which has created a technical model for forest management that ensures the long-term sustainability and conservation of the forest (Nittler and Tschinkel, 2005). According to Cortave (2004), communities currently manage about 450,000 ha of natural forest, of which 338,333 are certified by the FSC. In order for their management to be successful, in addition to strengthening technical forest

management, the communities continue to invest heavily in protecting and guarding the managed areas, including firefighting. This protection strategy has stabilized the agricultural frontier, preventing, for the most part, the encroachment of people unrelated to the concessions, the looting of archeological sites, illegal logging, animal poaching and other destructive actions.¹⁸

Forest management has also had positive effects on conservation. Since the MBR was established, it has been under constant environmental monitoring. Satellite images show a lower incidence of forest fires and a lower reduction of forest cover in the concessions (Nittler

¹⁷ Social capital is understood as the organizational capacity in a location and the abilities of communities to safeguard resources (knowledge, collective action, and market access, etc.) as a result of its membership in social networks and structures. It plays a vital role in territorial management and favors collective action and access and control of natural resources.

¹⁸ The cost of protection is approximately US\$136,000 per year. In 2003, US\$140,000 was invested in preventing and fighting forest fires (Cortave, 2004).

and Tschinkel, 2005) (see Map 4). There are considerable differences between the national parks and the MUZ, which is where community concessions are located. While in the Laguna del Tigre and Sierra del Lacandón National Parks and in the Laguna del Tigre Biotope, deforestation rates increased considerably between 2003 and 2004,¹⁹ primarily due to illegal land invasions, in the MUZ, deforestation had fallen by 36 per cent during the same period (CEMEC/CONAP *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, recent biological studies show the low ecological impact of timber extraction on wildlife. Far from affecting its presence in the management areas, current logging practices have increased species richness by augmenting habitat heterogeneity, for example, in the case of birds, beetles and butterflies (Radachowsky *et al.*, 2004).

Changes in Livelihood Strategies

Forest management has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the conservation of the forest and its natural resources, but in the case of community concessions, it has also strengthened the existing livelihood strategies of the people living in and around the reserve, creating new opportunities for development through self-management. The communities in the MBR have a wide variety of livelihood strategies, ranging from agriculture to tourism. These livelihoods have been documented in studies on agricultural management (Shriar, 2001), ecotourism supported by NGOs (Langholz, 1999), management of non-timber forest products (Gould *et al.*, 1998), and low-intensity logging (Gretzinger, 1999; Castiglione *et al.*, 2000; Reyes, 2000; Nittler and Tschinkel, 2004).

NGOs created with MBR funding generated and disseminated sustainable agriculture, ecotourism and low-impact logging projects. The large number of organizations and the resources invested has led to changes in livelihood strategies, although these were not the results expected by supporting institutions. For example, Shriar (2001) observed that the intensification of agricultural practices²⁰ is related to variables such as the availability of jobs and markets, which in the case of the MBR, are gradually changing as a result of tourism.

For example, farmers living along the “Tikal Route,” are less interested in agriculture now because their income is more closely linked to non-farm employment in tourism around the Tikal National Park or to urban jobs in the city of Flores/Santa Elena. This population is close to both sites, allowing community members to commute easily. This dynamic contrasts with other research sites located farther away, where farmers have invested in different types of agricultural intensification.

In general, forest management in concessions, geared towards the harvest of woods such as mahogany and cedar, and on a smaller scale, of non-timber products like xate, chicle and allspice, has substantially changed livelihood strategies. Now the implementation of forest management plans has become the cornerstone of the economy and community life, and an effective strategy to fight poverty and the social marginalization of the territory. In turn, these achievements are contributing to the conservation and protection of the MBR’s natural resources.

Community concessions are also a source of secure employment for their members. It is estimated that some 100,000 jobs are created annually, with wages above the country’s average.²¹ However, the substantive changes in livelihood strategies go beyond a permanent provision of employment. Control of concessions by community organizations has strengthened human and social capital, invigorated the organization and considerably increased local capacity and know-how.

Community participation in forest management has led to the development of an entire new array of technical and specialized knowledge, ranging from the use of technical equipment and computers to business skills necessary

¹⁹ Between 2003 and 2004, both the Laguna del Tigre National Park and Biotope had record deforestation, with 5,537 ha and 901.6 ha respectively, the highest in the MBR with the exception of the Buffer Zone. The Sierra del Lacandón National Park continued to have increased deforestation rates, with 1,690 ha during the same period (CEMEC/CONAP *et al.*, 2004).

²⁰ Shriar defines agricultural intensification as those farming practices that result in “higher productivity per unit area, per unit time, of desired outputs” (Shriar, 2001:31).

²¹ Minimum wage in Guatemala is about US\$ 4.00 a day, while in communities it is between US\$ 7.00 y US\$ 10.00 (Cortave, 2004).

for negotiating purchase and sale contracts (Cortave, 2004). Furthermore, the acceptance of communal forest management has improved organizational capacities, developing new skills for decision-making, democratic participation, oversight and accountability.

This new social dynamic ensures a more sustainable use of natural resources. The valuable natural capital in the concessions is one of their primary assets and along these lines the human and social capacities invested in the concessions have significantly contributed to preserving this biodiversity. The increased appreciation of the forest has been possible because it has become an integral part of the livelihood strategies of these communities, not as resources controlled by others or off limits, but rather as part of their patrimony.

Strengthening Community Organization

Throughout these years, ACOFOP has developed a structure for second-level community representation that has taken different roles for the purpose of building and strengthening the pro-community model for forest resource management. In previous sections, we mentioned that during the first years of this experience, ACOFOP engaged in basic community development to strengthen local leadership, motivating communities to organize around the process of negotiating concessions. This required, in turn, lobbying local actors and the government. This is when ACOFOP became highly influential and recognized by the communities, and gained international visibility and credibility (Pasos, 2002).

ACOFOP's ability to enlist support has preserved forest cover and secured the concession process, by taking a critical attitude towards the role of NGOs. Many of these NGOs see ACOFOP as a competitor to their role as service providers and question the organization's capacity to provide technical assistance, strengthen business skills and coordinate product commercialization (Grant and Rodas, 2004; Romero, 2004).

Certainly, the demands of the process, the social needs of communities and the changing dynamic of the social and political contexts

have led ACOFOP to assume different roles. Originally a trade union, it has evolved and now centers its work in two main areas: 1) community development, which includes advocacy, training, gender, legal assistance and capacity-building training in production methods; and 2) the commercialization of products, technical assistance and certification (Kurznel and Müller, 2004).

The community institutional framework is quite new and needs constant and committed accompaniment. It was already mentioned that the official assistance model does not pay attention to internal training and seems incapable of promoting a stronger community institutional framework. Furthermore, the collapse of the official accompaniment model has given way to a new phase in which communities have to develop their production and commercialization capacities more autonomously. These two areas of action have been assumed by ACOFOP, making it the primary group accompanying its member organizations.

At this phase of the concession process, ACOFOP is a key actor in community natural resource management, which goes beyond ensuring productivity and technical efficiency in forest management. It also means becoming integrally involved in community life, as an active agent in the construction of the institutional framework around which community forest management operates.

To sum up, community management has had positive results: it has improved environmental conditions and livelihood strategies of the concessionaires. It has also allowed community organizations to win a number of prestigious international awards such as the President's Environmental Medal in Guatemala, the United Nations Equator Prize, and the Innovation Marketplace Award of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). However, as will be discussed in the following chapter, it is also necessary to document the achievements of forest management to make a strong case for its ecological viability. For that ACOFOP needs to expand its partnerships with researchers and assistance agencies that can help the organization gather the evidence needed to sustain these arguments.

Challenges to Community Forest Management



This section discusses the main challenges ACOFOP and community forest concessions are facing. First, we identify circumstances in the social, economic and political context that influence forest management and demand the adoption of a territorial perspective. Then, we discuss other challenges related to the evolution of the community institutional framework such as the first steps toward commercialization, a more strategic relationship with the municipalities and other local actors, and finally, rethinking the relationships with technical assistance organizations.

The Adoption of a Territorial Perspective

The methodology used for creating the MBR defined distinct management models for areas differentiated according to strict natural resource management criteria. Conservation was the overriding objective of land use planning, and as a result, different types of management are identified for natural areas, the MUZ where the forest concessions are located, and the buffer zone.

These divisions ignored the Petén's territorial complexity regarding the factors that have historically driven the territory and its cultural characteristics. In addition to its wealth in valuable natural and archeological resources, Petén has been the destination for landless peasants and indigenous peoples, at a high social and environmental cost. These circumstances were not taken into account when the MBR was

formed, which is why its institutional framework is unable to respond to growing social conflict caused by pressure on the land and more recent problems with trafficking of undocumented migrants, contraband and illegal drugs.

The different models used for the technical assistance provided to the concessions centered their activities on managing the forest to harvest its timber. As the process continues, this focus is showing great limitations as it confronts challenges that go beyond the concessions' territory and their management methods. ACOFOP has set its sights on the Petén as a territory ripe for political action because of the different economic integration and free trade proposals such as the Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP) (see Box 1) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA); the Interamerican Development Bank's Mundo Maya Sustainable Development Program, and the proposal to expand the Mirador Basin Park. At the same time, the institutional framework for community forest management needs to be refocused on its territorial role, and assume an ecosystem or environmental services perspective that recognizes the true ecological and social value of community concessions.

For ACOFOP, the idea of a territory is new, even though technical assistance models are beginning to include a territorial perspective in the Central American region. If we think of "the Petén region," its potential and what it means for the country's development, concessions play a key role, not only because they guarantee the sustainable use of the forest, but also

Box 1. The Puebla-Panama Plan

The Puebla-Panama Plan (PPP) is a regional development initiative involving all seven Central American countries (Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama) and nine states in southeastern Mexico (Campeche, Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Veracruz and Yucatan). Its goal is to strengthen the potential of the human and ecological resources in the Mesoamerican region to overcome the region's economic and social underdevelopment (BCIE, *et al.*, 2001).

The PPP's development strategy is based on using the Mesoamerican region's natural resources (water, minerals, hydroelectric power and biodiversity) and comparative advantages (geographic location and cheap labor) to remedy the infrastructure deficit and reduce high poverty rates and vulnerability to natural disasters. To reach these objectives, the PPP proposes an extremely ambitious public investment program, the most important components of which are a logistical corridor (US\$3.547 billion) and an electric interconnection (US\$337 million) (UNDP, 2003).

ACOFOP and other Guatemalan grassroots organizations frame the PPP in the context of neo-liberal policies, which assume that opening up the market and making multi-million dollar investments in macro-projects should stimulate the economy by intensively exploiting the region's natural resources. This could have a significant impact on protected ecosystems, natural resources and rural livelihoods. The promotion of extractive industries, such as petroleum, natural gas, minerals and timber; the development of logistical corridors and export assembly factories (*maquilas*); the promotion of mega tourism projects; and the construction of hydroelectric plants could lead to deforestation, contamination of the land and the loss of biodiversity. It could also have a negative impact on rural livelihoods and traditional cultures. The change in land use could cause an increase in land prices and speculation by large companies seeking profitable investments, displacing subsistence agriculture and even community forest production systems (Valenzuela, 2002a and 2002b).

because it gives communities the potential of more integrated management. An integrated approach should include tourism as well as the protection of archeological goods, which would facilitate the possibility of negotiating better proposals, as in the Mirador Basin case. This implies expanding the forest management approach to diversify livelihoods and include the recognition of environmental services.

We shall delve further into these elements in the following section.

Conservation, Culture and Community vs. the Mirador Basin Park Proposal

The Foundation for Anthropological Research and Environmental Studies (FARES), with support from the Global Heritage Fund (GHF), has developed a proposal for expanding the Mirador Basin Park. The principal proponent is Dr. Richard Hansen, an archeologist specialized on the early Maya and founder of FARES.

The proposal is a plan to protect 2,170 km², in a zone that includes part of the Mirador-Río Azul National Park and the Naachtún-Dos Lagunas Biotope, along with land from six community

forest concessions²² and part of the private concession in La Gloria. According to Dr. Hansen, the primary objective of the Mirador project is to protect the territory, which would involve halting forest management activities that are sustaining the livelihoods of community concessions.

The FARES-GHF partnership believes that the Mirador Basin is in urgent need of protection because illegal hunting, logging and looting of archeological sites are currently threatening to destroy the area's biodiversity and Mayan ruins. To offset the loss of the communities' primary economic activity, the Mirador project proposes involving the people living in the basin in private "sustainable eco-tourism" initiatives and monetary compensation to cease logging operations (FARES and GBH, 2004).

The justification for the project points to a critical scenario of illegal activities and looting

²² Affected community concessions are Cooperativa Selva Maya, Cooperativa Carmelita, Asociación Forestal Integral Cruce la Colorada, Sociedad Civil Uaxactún, Asociación de Productores La Pasadita, and Asociación Forestal Integral San Andrés, Petén.

of archeological sites, and proposes the total protection of the area and the establishment of a system for monitoring and enforcing the restrictions using park rangers and other security measures. Additionally, the Mirador Basin Project plans to invest a considerable amount of money in archeological and biological scientific research, together with a lesser amount to train local residents in tourism.

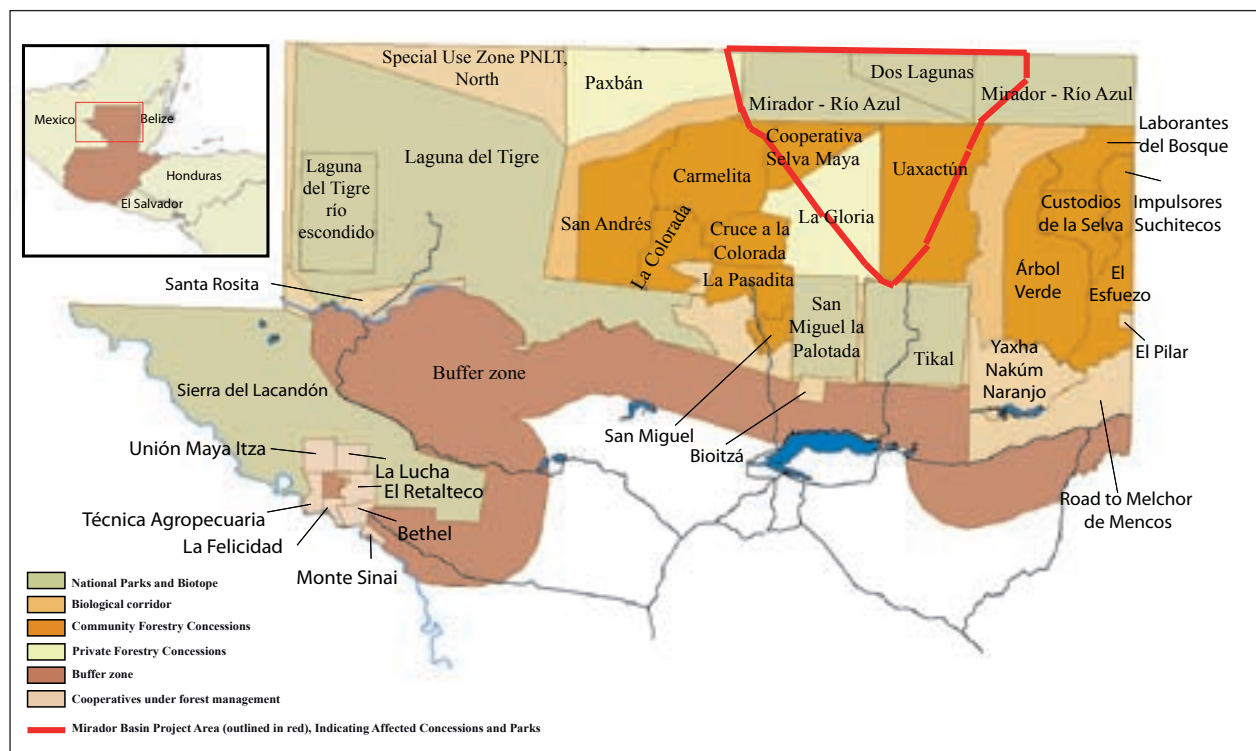
The Mirador Basin Project has substantial political and financial support. On the financial side, the project, together with GHF has established the Maya Biosphere Conservation Trust, which is expected to reach US\$10 million. In the political arena, it convinced then-President Portillo to sign governmental accord 129-2002, which declared the reserve as a *Special Archeological Zone* (see Map 5). In 2002, ACOFOP filed a complaint in court claiming that the community concessions' constitutional rights had been violated. In 2003, the Guatemalan Center for Environmental and Social Legal Action (CALAS) filed an appeal claiming that the governmental decree was unconstitutional and in support of the struggle of community-based groups. The result: President Oscar Berger

suspended the governmental accord. However, in addition to the legal strategies, ACOFOP used its negotiating skills with Guatemala's current administration, winning the repeal of governmental decree 129-2002 in May 2005.

Despite its initial political headway, the Mirador Basin Project seems to face serious limitations:

- It has been a top-down initiative; there has been no consultation with community concessionaires and other residents in the area or their organizations;
- Those who are promoting the project have ignored the great strides made by community concessions in conserving and guarding the forest, in stark contrast with conditions in the protected zones, such as Laguna del Tigre and Sierra del Lacandón parks;
- The Mirador Basin Project ignores the long history of failed conservation projects that use the "uninhabited protected areas" approach, and does not recognize the accumulated success of community forest management strategies around the world (Poffenberger and McGean, 1998; Bray *et al.*, 2003);

Map 5. Cuenca Mirador Project Zone (red outline on map), showing the existing concessions and parks that would be affected



Source: CEMEC-CONAP

Box 2. Conservation, Tourism and Archeological Research

Based on criticism of the impact that logging operations have on archeological sites within the concession areas, USAID commissioned an evaluation team to visit several of the concessions to observe how they were implementing measures designed to mitigate damage to the archeological sites. The summary of the mission’s evaluation reads partly as follows:

“The co-administration agreements between the community forest concessions of the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) and CONAP put equal weight on the sustainable management of natural and cultural resources. The way the system currently operates, much of the financial and technical aid is targeted at natural resource administration, with considerably less attention being paid to the administration of cultural resources. It was evident from our observations that the concessions are making good faith efforts to protect the archeological sites from damage resulting from logging operations and are attempting to adhere to the mitigation measures established in the planning and environmental impact documents, but their capacity is limited.

In order to improve the current structure, we recommend a system to administer cultural resource planning and monitoring comparable to the system for forest stewardship. Close coordination between professional administrators of natural or cultural resources and communities could provide a major opportunity for advancing the communities would provide a major opportunity for advancing in the protection of sites, development of tourism and archeological research.”

Taken from Kunen and Roney, 2004.

- Tourism as a strategy for socioeconomic development carries great risks with regard to whether the communities will truly benefit, especially the poorest ones.

It is important to stress that the communities have been the true guardians of the forest in the last decade, and that they have the right to participate on an equal footing in decisions that could lead to the implementation of a project of this magnitude. Up until now, the Mirador Basin Initiative has been operating in isolation and has not sought any contact with the affected concessions or ACOFOP.

Opportunities from the Mirador Basin Project

Despite its limitations, the Mirador Basin Project has shown new ways for integrating community concessions in a horizontal, transparent alliance that could strengthen environmental and cultural conservation efforts in the Maya forest. It is unrealistic to think of the area’s future without community-based management, given the progress made and consolidation of territorial control (Pasos, 2004). Accordingly, an initiative such as the Mirador Basin Project should be seen as an opportunity to develop a new proposal that would take into account community-based conservation and cultural resources to show that communities are not only capable of managing the forest, but they are also able to take on the

task of managing cultural resources, which in fact they are already protecting (see Box 2).

However, this would mean opening up discussions about this type of project to community concessionaires, with options that allow them to continue managing and protecting the forest while meeting the objective of protecting archeological resources. For example, they could further reduce forest activities where there are archeological sites with ecotourism potential. This way, projects can be developed that involve concessionaires from the outset in innovative forest management strategies.

Developing capacities for tourism and the management of cultural goods in concessions is of utmost importance. It would open up a new range of possibilities for diversifying livelihoods and for community organizations to finally take on protagonistic roles in a venture that so far has been controlled by private operators, leading to intense pressure to change how the land in the MBR is used.

It is difficult for a private venture to control a territory without the active participation of communities. Not only are conservation of natural resources and archeological heritage at stake in the Mirador case, but also the autonomy and development of the concessions. Therefore,

ACOFOP needs to develop an alternative proposal based on new partnerships, which could attract investments seeking to capitalize on the added value of forest management and community participation. This requires building new types of capacities as part of developing a more integrated management model that links forest management, conservation and the preservation of cultural goods.

There are already initiatives based on human ecosystems and community strategies; these have greater potential for being accepted by communities and for ensuring that benefits go primarily to them. This is the case of Mayan agroforestry in the MBR, which has integrated tourist activities through cultural and ecological attractions (Langholz, 1999). Several operators already advertise visits that include “Maya Agroforestry.”²³ This kind of tourism could serve as a counterproposal to private tourism initiatives like the Mirador Basin Project, in which private external companies design the tour packages and the communities participate in them.

The Diversification of Livelihoods

The diversification of livelihoods is another key element in creating a more integrated management model. Since the communities have been managing forest concessions, positive results have been achieved in the conservation of natural resources and in improving community living conditions. However, the most successful communities have been those that historically have been more involved in harvesting wood.

Concessions have great natural potential because of their scenic beauty and wildlife, since they are located within one of the most important tourist attractions along the Mayan Route. However, these elements have not been given the same weight as forest management. For example, the extraction of non-timber products and the production of handicrafts are still in an incipient stage and have not developed to the same extent as forest management has. Except for xate, non-timber products have failed to become part of more diversified livelihood strategies that could complement forest management. Furthermore, for some farming communities, forestry activities will continue to be unfamiliar or seen as worthless, unless they can be tied to their livelihoods.

Efforts to integrate conservation with the strengthening of livelihoods have advanced greatly in the last decade. Specifically, agroforestry systems in tropical areas have shown great potential for meeting conservation objectives along with the socioeconomic development of rural communities (Buck *et al.* 1999; Huxley, 1999; Schroth *et al.*, 2004). Because of their integrated objectives for environmental conservation and the socioeconomic well-being of their members, community concessions can take advantage of this accumulation of knowledge and experience to strengthen agroforestry strategies that benefit them. This could lead to advances in communities that have limited forest resources and less of a vocation for forest management.

In Petén, studies have been done that provide input for the further development of agroforestry systems in community concessions (Gillespie *et al.*, 1993; Shriar, 2001; Ferguson *et al.*, 2003). These productive, yet ecologically viable systems can also be integrated into other socioeconomic activities such as ecological and scientific tourism.

Ecosystem Services: The Missing Approach in the MBR

Despite being one of the world’s most well known areas for its natural and cultural wealth, the ecosystem services approach is missing in the primary strategies of the MBR. Because of its characteristics, the MBR represents an important site for the provision, conservation and possible compensation for ecosystem services.

According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, ecosystem services are “the benefits people obtain from ecosystems,” which include provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting services (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003). The environmental or ecosystem services approach has created high expectations among researchers, donors and development practitioners, which is opening up management opportunities for areas with characteristics like the Petén (Rosa *et al.*, 2003).

According to the framework for environmental services developed by Fundación PRISMA

²³ See for example: www.ecotourism-adventure.com/eco-projects/agroforestry.htm

(Rosa *et al.*, 2003), these types of activities could serve to give greater value and recognition to the ecological and social management actions of community concessions. For example, the role of concessions in biodiversity conservation has not been visible, even though it may have been documented already in some studies (see, for example, the CATIE collection on “Forest Management in the Maya Biosphere Reserve”). Likewise, landscapes for recreation, eco-tourism and carbon sequestration could be designated as environmental services.

ACOFOP is in a position to adopt an ecosystem or environmental services perspective, which would help gain recognition of the ecological and social value of community concessions. Integrating a broad perspective that values environmental services at the local, national and global level (Rosa *et al.*, 2003) can provide justification for defending community concessions from threats like the Mirador Basin Project. This perspective has not yet been adapted to ACOFOP’s experience and emphasis needs to be placed on the value of the services, such as biodiversity use and conservation, carbon sequestration and biogeochemical cycle regulation that result from community protection and management. This added value for local and global communities should be highlighted from a perspective that values the contribution of environmental services to human beings and to ecosystem conservation.

Redefining Community Institutional Frameworks

The intense momentum in ACOFOP led to a shift from its original role of community advocacy and political governance with local actors. The work strategy, the types of internal organization and mechanisms for forging ties with communities were not keeping pace with the new demands of the concession process and the territorial challenges already mentioned. Furthermore, national and international advocacy work demanded a huge investment of the leaders’ time. Although this work has led to ACOFOP’s credibility and recognition by heavyweights such as SICA-CCAD, the United Nations, the World Bank etc., communities do not have a clear idea of the importance of maintaining an

international presence, which has led to a great deal of distrust and the perception that their leaders are becoming disconnected from the most immediate problems.

At times, ACOFOP’s internal operating structure has lagged behind the evolving demands of its grassroots organizations. ACOFOP is assuming this challenge and has entered a new phase of defining its priorities for working for and with the communities, developing a model for systematic communication and contact that cuts across the different organizational levels. These include community level and first- and second-level member organizations. This way it can respond both to requests for training and technical accompaniment and to the need to have political representation. Another key element is promoting the consolidation of new leaderships within member organizations and at the general coordination level so that responsibilities for representing the organization do not always fall on the same leaders.

Recently, ACOFOP has been going through a transition, changing its strategy and internal structure to adapt to the new demands of the process. It is redefining its role in political representation as well as community building and technical training. Both dimensions require building new skills and leadership within the organization, as well as defining mechanisms for strengthening relations with community organizations and their members.

The Challenge of Community Commercialization

The formation of FORESCOM, supported since its creation by the BIOFOR project and other institutions, responds to a deeply felt need by communities to have greater control over commercialization of timber.

When the concession process began, one of the main challenges was the commercialization of forest products resulting from forest management. At that time, community organizations did not have the commercial experience necessary for selling their forest products and neither did the NGOs that were providing technical assistance. This meant that most community groups sold

the products from their first harvest at low prices, usually to intermediaries, with no added value whatsoever.

ACOFOP began taking steps to strengthen community-group capacity in the commercial area. In 2001, ACOFOP set up a Commercial Liaison Office for forest products in their headquarters to provide technical assistance to the communities for trading timber and other services. Thus, the conditions were being created for setting up a community forest enterprise, which would have the objectives of unifying communities for commercialization and assuming the responsibility for forest stewardship and certification, among other services.

Furthermore, CONAP promoted a self-sustaining strategy urged on by USAID, which had also developed its plan to phase out the technical assistance it had been providing to communities through NGOs. At this juncture, the conditions became ripe for the formation of FORESCOM as a means of ensuring implementation of the self-sufficiency strategy being promoted by CONAP and other technical assistance institutions, as well as by USAID's exit strategy.

In fact, one of BIOFOR main objectives was to build the organizations' business management abilities, seeking to reduce subsidies and to attain the economic sustainability of the community forest concessions. According to BIOFOR, their ability for long-term survival depends on three factors: 1) their organizational capacity, which includes separating the role of community leaders from the management of the business, creating mechanisms for conflict resolution, clearly setting rules and by-laws, transparency, and balancing a long-range perspective with the urgent need for immediate profits; 2) running the business in a way that facilitates making strategic decisions about production and investment; and 3) diversifying production, which should include the use and commercialization of non-timber species (Chemonics-BIOFOR, 2003).

To become self-sufficient in commercialization, CONAP, ACOFOP and assistance organizations promoted the idea of having community organizations assume the costs of both forest stewardship and of technical assistance in

general. These activities are being carried out to a large extent by FORESCOM, with support from ACOFOP, CONAP, the Rainforest Alliance and BIOFOR.

Although the steps taken have been significant, broader skills and a better understanding of market dynamics still need to be developed to improve commercialization. Each community enterprise also has to develop mechanisms for dealing with the inevitable tensions between social demands and the demands of the business world (Taylor, 2004).

So far, balancing investments between social and business needs has not encountered major contradictions, nor has it caused any serious conflicts between community-based organizations; but, as the process moves along, it can be expected that this dilemma will arise. When that moment does arrive, a solid institutional framework, participatory strategic plans and democratic leadership that includes different community sectors, especially women and young people, need to be in place. Thus, they need to develop a model for themselves that can meet the goals of both the enterprise and the community.

Towards Community Enterprise Management

ACOFOP is making the transition from its phase as a representative trade association to a more complex phase where it is assuming complete responsibility for strategic planning and accompaniment of the community management process, which involves strengthening its capacities for commercialization and developing its business role. This has required ACOFOP to continue developing new skills having to do with creating a community institutional framework that can assume coordination of the technical, production and commercialization areas.

As was already mentioned, ACOFOP had been developing its own organizational structure for the commercialization of timber, which culminated in the formation of FORESCOM. At the same time, some organizations in ACOFOP had been strengthening their commercialization capacity, diversifying products, improving processing and quality of the wood. Six communities were able to use the profits from the wood to invest in improvements in production

facilities. Thus, they went from selling standing timber to their own logging operation, setting up small sawmills to process the wood obtained in accordance with their operating plans. The communities have also made inroads into new lines of production, such as carpentry, hardwood processing and improving the appearance of their products. Better product quality, together with access to the certified-wood market, has enabled them to sell at a higher price and to export certified wood to the international market (Cortave, 2004). In addition, the profitability and stature of the concessions has qualified them to borrow from national (BANCAFE) and regional banks (Central American Bank for Economic Integration – BCIE/CABEI).

When FORESCOM was formed in 2003, it was part of the BIOFOR project and had a very costly institutional structure that was difficult to sustain once the project ended. Nonetheless, ACOFOP organizations took on FORESCOM as their business arm, reorganizing and adapting its original design to community processes and resources. Currently, FORESCOM is receiving German technical assistance and has submitted a proposal to capture additional funding from the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) (Nittler and Tschinkel, 2005). In FORESCOM,²⁴ community organizations have an agency of their own that enables them to benefit through joint management and shared efforts and costs. At present, FORESCOM is responsible for forest stewardship activities, seedling production, road maintenance and timber commercialization. Collective sales provide access to new markets and higher profits. Despite its short life, FORESCOM is in its final steps of becoming a “forest operator” and certifier; once accredited, the cost of certification will be reduced by 20 per cent (Nittler and Tschinkel, 2005).

ACOFOP could be the first case in Central America where a community organization controls everything from resource management to commercialization in international markets. For NGOs, which saw themselves assuming this role, ACOFOP does not have sufficient business sense to take on this responsibility. According to them, the communities’ way of making decisions, slower and more given to thought, and seeking agreement based on the consensus of diverse groups and leaders, is not

efficient enough for the business world, which requires quick decisions, information, contacts and highly developed technical skills (Grant and Rodas, 2004; Romero, 2004). According to this rationale, community groups would have to depend on external agents to commercialize their forest products.

For its part, ACOFOP is remaining firm in its stance of assuming the entire process. Even though the results from commercialization have been very limited, FORESCOM has had early successes in obtaining higher prices for mahogany and identifying buyers for other semiprecious wood in Europe (Nittler and Tschinkel, 2005). Their main challenges consist not only of finding better markets, adding value to their wood or becoming a wood-products business; they must also gain credibility with community concession-holders, build consensus and obtain support. Therefore, FORESCOM’s potential cannot be understood if it is seen solely as an agency that offers technical and financial products and services. It is also the institutional framework for organizing the running of a community enterprise, based on developing arrangements that, taking into account the organization’s identity, develop skills for responding to market demands. It also intends to become a training center for community organizations (Cortave, 2004).

The Social Role of Community Enterprise

One aspect of community enterprise is that it combines social/community and enterprise dimensions. The linkage between these two different dimensions is what characterizes this type of business, which is becoming an important actor for communities. This nascent community enterprise is a vehicle for development adapted to the pace of its actors and based on their values and principles.

This process requires capacity building to learn how to link with markets without losing sight of the community dimension. Some community businesses have made progress along these lines. A process of organizational strengthening

²⁴ As of November 2004, FORESCOM had 11 member organizations: Laborantes del Bosque, Custodios del la Selva, Árbol Verde, Uaxactún, Carmelita, San Miguel La Palotada, AFISAP, Cruce a la Colorada, La Colorada, Unión Maya Itzá and Cooperativa La Técnica.

has led to an institutional reorganization which has allowed them to more accurately define decision-making venues for communal and entrepreneurial topics.

Communities continue to be dedicated to discussing the enterprise's social role. Improving their business capacities, based on a more integrated control over the production cycle of forest products and a careful assessment of investment options, has a great influence over the business's success and for improving community livelihoods. This does not just mean the opportunity to create direct and indirect jobs, but also the opportunity to make the business into a means for improving the social and human capital of the communities and their families.

For several organizations, this involves a process of institutional reorganization, which has meant passing new by-laws and internal regulations, created autonomously. These changes have ensured transparency in the sale and purchase of wood and improved members' participation in decision-making. The board of directors is gaining greater credibility and acceptance because it has clearly defined its roles and ensured a stable membership to provide continuity in planned activities.

With these changes, they have improved the sale price of wood and have made new investments, such as the purchase of machinery, vehicles, land for sawmills, carpentry equipment and the construction of new offices.

One of the first organizations to make these institutional changes was the Sociedad Civil Árbol Verde. By the end of 2004, it had reorganized its institutional structure, separating the board of directors, community-trade association role from the business role. They hired a manager, who was given autonomy over decisions in the production and commercialization cycle. This division led to greater returns from commercialization, and in 2003, earnings were distributed to members for the first time.

In addition to trying to run a successful business, members have engaged in outreach activities aimed at building the capacity of young people and adults, seeking out new agroforestry projects, promoting social welfare and supporting community education. This implied

large investments in community improvements and in capital expenditures, including the purchase of a sawmill and the establishment of a carpentry shop. The shop allowed them to expand the transformation cycle by adding furniture making. Young community members were trained in the carpentry shop, with the idea that in the medium and long term this investment would result in better capacities and skills for managing the business, making it more self-sufficient and sustainable.

Integrating Local Actors into Community Forest Management

Integrated territorial management also requires active participation by different actors who influence and control the instruments and resources for territorial decision making. It is important to point out that local institutions, such as municipal governments or schools, have participated very little in the management of the MBR, compared to the leadership played by NGOs until 2001. Because of the model's design, the protected zones fall completely under the jurisdiction of CONAP, but this is not the case for the buffer and multiple use zones, where municipal governments retain their authority. According to Chemonics-BIOFOR and IRG-EPIQ (2000), the exclusion of these local actors has robbed the MBR of medium- and long-term political and social legitimacy. It has also meant losing the opportunity to strengthen municipalities with technical and financial resources from the MBR.

This is apparent from analysis of lost fiscal revenue for municipalities due to the establishment of the MBR. According to Chemonics-BIOFOR (2000), these include: 1) the loss of a portion of tax revenues in San José and Melchor de Mencos; 2) the transfer of 50 per cent of taxes on the extraction of timber and non-timber forest products to CONAP, under the forestry law; and 3) capital expenditures on infrastructure for communities that were relocated from the core zone to several municipalities.

Recently, municipal governments have acquired a more important role in community forest concessions. Some of the concessions visited reported the formation of alliances and better communication with municipal governments,

since a functioning government directly affects the lives of the families in the concessions. In comparison with external projects, community concessions are concerned with the day-to-day life of their members, which includes relating to the municipalities where they live. However, our perception was that municipal governments are still only marginally involved in decisions concerning the concessions.

Redefining the Relationship with Technical Assistance Organizations

The technical assistance role of NGOs continues to be important for community concessions, even though conflicts still arise. One serious conflict between ACOFOP and the NGO Alianza para un Mundo Justo (Just World Partners) originated over the offer to purchase a sawmill with European Union money, which was to be run by Mundo Justo, under the assumption that it would serve community concessions. Following a series of transactions, it seemed instead that Mundo Justo was going to become the owner of the sawmill and it would take the role of a remunerated service-providing business. There were many contradictions in the case, to the point where ACOFOP filed a complaint with international organizations, including the European Union. In turn, Mundo Justo threatened to sue an ACOFOP advisor for defamation (Cortave, 2004).

The perspective of Mundo Justo officials in Petén closely follows the lines of the official assistance model, which considers communities to be incapable of successfully implementing strategies and actions for processing and commercialization (Grant and Rodas, 2004).

This perspective concludes, therefore, that the accompanying NGO must assume this role to support community management. ACOFOP, on the other hand, wants to demonstrate that community organizations can develop well-run organizations with leaders who understand commercialization and processing as new challenges to master.

ACOFOP's justification for their position is evident. Taking on more stages in the chain of production, processing and commercialization gives community organizations the opportunity to increase their income and profits and also to strengthen their organizations. This particular case does not negate the important role that NGOs have in the Petén, since forest concessions still need a certain degree of accompaniment. However, this accompaniment should be focused on strengthening community institutions and capacities. In addition, the relationships between accompanying NGOs and community organizations should develop over the long term through commitments based on trusting, horizontal and transparent relationships grounded in democratic principles.

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In the Multiple Use Zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) in northern Guatemala, forest communities have gained valuable experience in territorial development while also meeting natural resource conservation objectives. In the Petén, community-based resource management has made significant environmental advances, including a reduction in forest fires and deforestation, the elimination of illegal logging and the stabilization of the agricultural frontier, slowing the pace of illegal settlements. Furthermore, the forest has become the communities' prime natural asset, breathing new life into their production activities; they have successfully entered the certified timber market and have started their own commercialization enterprise.

The member organizations of the Association Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) have been successful at community forest management because they have access to forests rich in precious woods, a high level of community social capital, well developed technical capacity and have integrated forest management into community livelihood strategies. This trend is in sharp contrast to the instability reigning in the MBR's national parks, which continue to suffer from rampant deforestation; strong pressure from "agarradas" or illegal land invasions; illegal trafficking in flora, fauna, undocumented migrants and illicit drugs; and looting of archaeological resources.

Despite the accomplishments of community forest management, it is still a work in progress, facing significant new challenges that could emerge from the economic integration of the Central American region or proposed macro-projects such as Mirador Basin Park. Given this scenario, the community-based model needs to consolidate its management and make it more integral by linking forest management, agroforestry, conservation and the preservation of cultural goods. This also involves promoting more inclusive management where territorial stakeholders are active participants in discussions about the future and where the true ecological and social value of the community concessions is recognized.

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