



Community Forestry and REDD+ in Latin America: Lessons Learned and Ways Forward Issues Brief



Introduction

Given concerns about deforestation and hopes that efforts to better manage forests can contribute to climate change mitigation, what can we learn from experience with community forestry? With considerable effort now being devoted to Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+)¹, it is timely to assess key lessons from decades of community forestry. REDD+ proponents do not need to “start from zero,” and “reinvent the wheel,” but can build on valuable experience and existing systems.

REDD+ will be more successful if built on the shoulders of lessons learned from community forestry – how these systems tick, what drives conservation and wise management, what interventions are likely to serve only as stopgap measures, what conflicts can undermine success, and what policy and practice barriers can be avoided or removed to ensure a smoother REDD+ road ahead.

The Forest Carbon, Markets and Communities (FCMC) Program commissioned a series of four reports – three regional and one global synthesis – on *Lessons Learned from Community Forestry and their Relevance for REDD+*. This Issues Brief summarizes key points from the report on Latin America.

Latin America is arguably the world leader in community forestry success. Community forestry is based on the recognition of the rights of communities to establish and enforce rules governing the access and use of forests. Large areas are under indigenous and community tenure² – a key base for community forestry and REDD+ success. Policy trends that have affected community forestry in Latin America include decentralization and neoliberal economic reform trends, see-sawing back and forth with

¹ REDD+ is being developed under the guidance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The “+” (**plus**) in REDD+ (or REDD-plus) refers to Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, plus conservation and sustainable management of forests and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks. Many also understand REDD+ to encompass more than just carbon sequestration benefits, but also other benefits (referred to as multiple benefits or co-benefits), including important social and environmental benefits.

² According to global forest tenure data, almost 40% percent of forests are owned by – or designated for use by – communities and indigenous peoples, whereas 36.1 percent of forests are administered by the government, and 24.6 percent are owned by individuals and firms (RRI 2012).

recentralization and socialism reform trends. Important conditions for success include empowerment of communities as decision-makers, strong community institutions, and good governance in relation to national institutions and agencies. Self-generated community institutions that fit both local cultural and ecological conditions and national jurisdictional frameworks have proven to be the most effective.

Latin America also boasts over half of the world's forest under existing and projected REDD+ private market projects in 2013, with 12.5 million hectares in Latin America compared to 3 million hectares in Africa and 7 million hectares in Asia. Virtually all Latin American countries are receiving donor support for REDD+ activities. Community forestry is, however, being challenged by the rapid expansion of agriculture, extractive industries and infrastructure in Latin America. As a result, Latin America now paradoxically produces 47% of global emissions from deforestation.

What is Community Forestry?

Community forestry systems may be initiated by the community or be developed as a result of outside intervention by governments or various development partners. Community forestry may include management of natural forests and woodlands, as well as plantations and woodlots.

In Latin America, the **types of community forestry** range widely, but can generally be categorized as "**discovered**" or "**designed**." Self-generated community forestry existed in Latin America prior to the arrival of Europeans. For millennia, Latin American communities have integrated shifting agriculture and forests into managed landscapes, consistent with local ecologies, even in Amazonia.

Community forestry was formally recognized as a form of forestry by national governments in Latin America beginning in the 1980s. However, **while discovered community forestry has prospered with appropriate support, designed community forestry tends to fail in Latin America**, due to factors ranging from disease in exotic plantations to external incentives that end when the project is finished, conflicts with other incentives, risks that were not foreseen, uncertainties that undermine motivation, lack of trust, lack of fit with local labor investment and culture, power issues, and opportunity costs.

Discovered vs. designed community forestry.

An analytical distinction proposed by Frances Seymour (1994): community forestry can be categorized as i) "discovered" by outsiders who study and intervene in community forestry that arose autonomously, or "self-generated" in response to internal and external conditions where communities assert tenurial rights; vs. ii) "designed" community forestry in which interventions are designed without engaging or acknowledging local self-generated systems that may exist.

The great diversity of community forest management practices in Latin America exists along a continuum among three types. The first type, **low-intensity forestry intervention (LIFI)**, is generally found in more remote situations where community forests are large, up to several million hectares, and population density is low. LIFI is almost exclusively operated by Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Afro-descendant communities in their respective territories and dominates in South America. Activities at the LIFI end of the range include forest conservation, defense from invasion, controlled logging for timber under agreements, harvesting non-timber forest products for sale and use, and rotational swidden-fallow agroforestry systems. LIFI is largely either "discovered" or invisible (i.e., self-organized but undiscovered). LIFI covers large blocks of forest that offer the highest value for REDD+ investment. At mid-range, **moderate-intensity forestry intervention (MIFI)** occurs in less remote situations where communities have less arable land and typically enrich their natural forests with high-value trees, such as coffee, chocolate, tropical fruits, and *algarrobo* (native carob). If they have market access and commercially-valuable timber in their forests, communities may form logging enterprises and log their

forests in accordance with forest management plans. The third type, **high-intensity forestry intervention** (HIFI), occurs in communities that live in higher population density areas (100+ persons/km²) and maintain 10-25 percent of their collective and individual lands in enriched or managed forests. HIFI communities often cut trees for local use only, incorporate commercially oriented agroforestry systems, and participate in reforestation efforts. HIFI is typically found in areas where limited community forestry has been incorporated during spontaneous and/or programmed colonization. These are areas where “the degree of deforestation which accompanies land settlement is in a certain sense a measure of the failure of government programs to adequately guarantee land title; farmers prefer to rely on usufruct rights rather than government programs to protect their new farms” (Jones 1990). In other situations, however, HIFI management practices result from self-generated community forestry management choices by communities with limited land base and more external labor opportunities.

What contributes to the success of Latin American Community Forestry?

The **state plays key roles in the success of community forestry**, including defining forest tenure. The tenure rights of IPs granted by national governments are stronger in Latin America than in other regions of the world. The International Labour Organization Convention 169 (ILO 169), which supports indigenous and tribal peoples’ rights, has been incorporated into most Latin American countries’ Constitutions. IPs’ forest rights have been supported by the Inter-American Human Rights Court, which has awarded reparations to indigenous and Afro-descendent communities when their forest rights were not upheld by national governments.

Mexico’s community forestry program (PROCYMAF), initiated with World Bank funding in 1997, enabled government forest agencies to transition from their earlier role as enforcers to a role of providing technical forestry assistance to communities to enhance the productivity and sustainability of community forestry.

The state plays four other key roles in community forestry in Latin America. First, by recognizing community governance and rights of representation and designating fora and resources for this purpose, the state enables communities to engage directly as stakeholders rather than be represented by NGOs. The state also provides technical advice and assistance upon request. Second, the state exerts control over community forestry through licensing and monitoring. Third, the state is responsible for honest enforcement of good policies to control illegal activities and finally, for defining macroeconomic policies that do not threaten forests. The problems caused by illegal logging in Latin America are severe, and macroeconomic development policies are threatening community forestry.

What Have We Learned from Community Forestry in Latin America?

Regional Characteristics: Latin America has 40 percent of the world’s biodiversity and 25 percent of the world’s forests. Latin America also has the largest area under community forestry management, with diverse forms of self-generated community forestry enjoying broad legal recognition across large geographic areas. Community forestry in Mexico and Central America differ significantly from community forestry in the Amazon Basin. South America has over 90 percent of Latin American forests. Only 1.4 percent of forests in Latin America are plantations; over 98 percent are natural forests. Community forestry is broadly effective in maintaining forests.

Empowerment of Communities: Community forestry is based on the recognition of the rights of communities to establish and enforce rules governing the access and use of forests. Tenurial rights of communities are relatively strong in most of Latin America. Clear legal frameworks for community

forestry have been critical to success. Self-generated community forestry has prospered in frontier areas where there are no clear legal frameworks, but these systems are now under increasing threat.

Community Forestry: Institutional Linkages and Using Proceeds for Community Enterprise Development.

Strong institutional connections between the community’s collective timber enterprise, the Council of Elders and the community Assembly were key to success in San Juan Nuevo, Michoacan, Mexico. Over time, the community Assembly used capital generated by harvesting their pine forests to seed new community enterprises that generate more income than the forest, including bottling spring water for sale and offering telecommunications services.

Governance and Stakeholder Engagement:

Effective community-level institutions are capable of establishing and enforcing rules governing access and use of forests and of equitably sharing the costs and benefits of community forestry. Self-generated community institutions that fit both local cultural and ecological conditions and national jurisdictional frameworks are generally the most effective.

Benefits and Incentives: Major financial, livelihood and environmental benefits often accrue directly to communities in Latin America. REDD+ can learn from analyzing lessons of the many payments for environmental service (PES) systems that have been applied in Latin American community forests. A meta-analysis of 301 studies of forty PES schemes for watersheds in Latin America found that the mean value of payments for sellers is 60 percent higher than the payment for buyers – i.e., PES is generally subsidized. The study also points to a potential REDD+ issue: the high transaction cost of promoting and administering payment schemes through intermediaries. Mexico is the leader in community forest management plans that generate significant income from sustainable logging, and in integrating PES and REDD+ into existing community forest management.

Capacity building: Community managers are more effective when they have capacities for good governance and skills, or access to people with skills, such as forest management, enterprise development, planning and bookkeeping. Government foresters and other officers are more effective when they have the skills to support community engagement.

Scaling up: Scaling up works best by following the rule that “one size does not fit all.” Higher-scale systems can nurture local systems to leverage benefits and sustainable forests. Social movements have generated the best scaled-up systems in Latin America, as well as contributed to appropriate adjustments.

Sustainability: The critical factors determining sustainability are social and economic. Important conditions include empowerment of community managers as decision-makers, strong community institutions capable of developing and enforcing rules, titled collective tenurial rights, and good governance in relation to national institutions and agencies.

Title for Indigenous Territory.

Title awarded to the 77,454 hectare Ayoreo indigenous territory of Santa Teresita by the government of Bolivia in 1999. The title has been framed to protect it from damage or loss. The Ayoreo are an Indigenous People who live in Paraguay, Brasil and Bolivia. They are an Endangered People, with fewer than 3,500 people left in the 3 countries total. Some uncontacted Ayoreo groups live in Kaa Iya National Park, which borders this territory, and in Paraguay. Not all Ayoreo have their titles to their territories.



Recommendations to Support Community Forestry and REDD+

Essentially the same recommendations can be made for supporting community forestry and for supporting REDD+ to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits:

Sub-regional Strength Through Diversity: Build on a firm understanding of existing practices, rights, institutions, threats and opportunities in any given country. Build capacity for REDD+ by experiential learning and cross-site visits. Build cross-cultural communication and diversity appreciation within government agencies. Support diversity rather than aiming for standardization and homogeneity. Seek to build frameworks that nurture community forestry at sub-regional levels as part of nested REDD+.

Empowerment of Communities: Refocus on self-generated or "discovered" community forestry, taking "Ostrom's Law" as a guide – if it works in practice, it can work in theory and policy. Find out what works in practice. Use FPIC and Biocultural Protocols as appropriate in national contexts. Grant communities autonomy in defining forest management institutions.

Governance and Stakeholder Engagement: Collaborate with civil society movements, convening the range of stakeholders in fora that promote two-way communication with community forestry constituents. Improve enforcement against illegal logging, and prevent land-grabbing and illegal activities that threaten community security. Develop supportive agricultural, macroeconomic and other sectoral policies. Rely on nurturing emergent processes and existing organizations. Support development of rights-based approaches and recourse mechanisms. Support policy reforms that empower communities to make and enforce rules that regulate access and use of forests, integrating the interests of women, poor households and indigenous peoples. Identify the legal instruments for empowerment and build pressure for their application.



Community Management Response to Scaling Up Forest Enterprises.

A Guarani women's basket weaving cooperative, comprised of many communities within Itika Guasu indigenous territory, Bolivia, received USAID support for marketing their products. This resulted in increased harvest pressure on local, endemic palms as the market demand for their baskets grew. The Guarani women's cooperative sought technical assistance to collaborate with their communities to assess legal options for protecting the palms from outsiders, develop ways for women to systematically assess harvest impacts, and assess the forest regeneration support practices that were being piloted by individual women's own initiatives.

Benefits and Incentives: Strengthen community tenure and rights. Support standards of good governance so benefits reach the intended beneficiaries. Community benefits must be greater than the transaction, management and opportunity costs of community forestry and of REDD+. Empower communities to enforce local regulations and national laws, and extend local bylaws and regulations to neighboring forests to reduce leakage.

Capacity building: Strengthen community forestry leaders' participation in public fora regarding REDD+. Support the genesis of culturally appropriate accountability for REDD+ even when the cultural logic may not be understood by outsiders. Develop capacity of community members, government, and other partners in a mix of technical skills (forest management, utilization and planning), enterprise development skills (financial management and book-keeping) and governance capacities (accountability, communications and enforcement of rules governing access and use), to increase the likelihood of community forestry success.

Sustainability and Scaling Up: Facilitate formal processes for locally driven upscaling. Document the population in forests – including people currently invisible to the state because they are undocumented or because their communities are found in areas formally designated as state forests – by implementing population surveys and maps showing communities in areas that are formally designated as state forest reserves. Knowing the characteristics, distribution and size of those “invisible” populations provides essential, real information for REDD+ options, including long-term forest leasing or tenure recognition as opposed to logging concessions that disrupt existing forest populations and trigger new migrations into forest. Make a sustained effort to ensure that women and other vulnerable populations participate in debates so women and vulnerable populations are recognized for their roles as key forest stewards. Support the creation and implementation of locally generated development plans (*planes de vida, planes de gestión territorial, ordenamiento territorial*) that include community forestry and REDD+. Support community-based mapping, which offers an excellent entry point for helping communities assess their forests and plan their use for enhancing their livelihoods, and scenario construction and analysis, which can be useful for determining whether or not they wish to incorporate REDD+ into their local development plans. Build broad, urban public awareness of community forestry issues to build political will to address those issues.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the issues raised in this document, consult the full report:

Alcorn, Janis B. 2014. *Lessons Learned from Community Forestry in Latin America and their Relevance for REDD+*. Report prepared for USAID. Forest Carbon, Markets and Communities (FCMC) Program, Arlington, VA. Available at: www.fcmcglobal.org/resources.html.

All citations and an extensive list of references are found in the full report. All photos by Janis B. Alcorn.

This report is one of four reports on *Lessons Learned from Community Forestry and Their Relevance for REDD+*. The series comprises three regional reviews on this topic, prepared for Latin America (by Dr. Janis B. Alcorn), Africa (by Mr. Tom Blomley) and Asia (by Dr. Robert Fisher). The global synthesis of the three regional reviews was prepared by Mr. Roy Hagen. All four reports have been reviewed and edited by FCMC. Dr. Paula J. Williams has managed the reviews and served as overall editor.

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