



Introduction

Programmes to reduce emissions from deforestation and ecosystem degradation, such as REDD+ and other forestry incentive programmes, including Payment for Environmental Services (PES), could represent an opportunity to strengthen processes of conservation, sustainable usage and poverty reduction in the Mesoamerican region, particularly in indigenous territories and communities. Analysing the context of such initiatives and how they are interlinked is relevant to understanding how these multipurpose programmes can achieve their objectives in the light of recent developments in the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights over land tenure and natural resources in the region. Examining these contexts and their linkages in countries such as Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama, where there are considerable forest areas with significant indigenous populations, is the aim of this study.

From the south of Mexico to Panama, there is a mosaic of indigenous groups. They make up over 10 percent of the population in countries such as Belize, Guatemala, Mexico and Panama. As in the rest of Latin America, forest areas or ecosystems rich in biodiversity in Mesoamerica tends to coincide with the presence of indigenous peoples who, in general, carry out sustainable and integrated management of natural resources. Over the past 20 years, the land and territories occupied by these groups have been the subject of processes to recognize ancestral rights, recent colonizations, agrarian reforms and land tenure regularization programmes financed by governments and international cooperation. The forms of land tenure associated with these ethnic groups vary from country to country and also among the groups themselves. They have been shaped not only by ancestral forms of occupation but also by national public policies. Although the tenure of some indigenous groups in forested lands is individualized, most indigenous groups living in forests in Mesoamerica can be described as having communal and collective systems for the ownership and use of the natural resources belonging to them. These forms of tenure involve the exercise of local territorial governance practices that in some cases are highly relevant and effective for the sustainable management of natural resources.

Over the past 20 years, advances in recognizing the rights of tenure of indigenous peoples over forest territories have not been uniform across the Mesoamerican region. In Atlantic regions, the recognition of rights and the delimitation of territories have been carried out since the beginning of the century in Nicaragua and Honduras. In the previous century, there was a recognition of collective and communal rights in the forest lands of southern Mexico, the lands of indigenous reserves in Costa Rica and in the indigenous areas (*comarcas*) of Panama. Most Central American countries now have delimitation projects, including land administration, land registry and property register services, including actions in indigenous lands, that are carried out by national governments in conjunction with international agencies. Despite such progress, some countries face difficulties, such as problems in including the recognition of indigenous peoples' tenure rights in legislative frameworks, or closing the loopholes therein; problems in developing effective inter-institutional coordination mechanisms to operate related programmes; or the lack of an institutional framework that is specifically adapted to dealing with the issue of tenure in indigenous territories.

Incentive mechanisms for good forestry management are one of the contributions the Mesoamerican experience has made toward natural resource management. Since the 1980s, some Mesoamerican countries have been developing various community forestry experiments, PES schemes and other forestry incentive mechanisms. To date, the experience has been successful in some cases, such as PES in Costa Rica and community forestry in Mexico and Guatemala. Lessons learned from such experiences include the recognition that economic incentives for forestry activities and the services they generate promote the commitment of communities to regulation and the sustainable use of their forests. Furthermore, the use and conservation of communal forestry resources in the experiments analysed have significantly reduced poverty. Forestry income has a positive effect on the living conditions of families, and in some cases has facilitated the development of community services. In terms of the impact of organizational structures and local governance on the development of such forestry management experiences, experience shows that ethnic belonging may be conducive to creating the right conditions for developing and agreeing on rules for managing resources. This is not limited to the forestry sector, as peasant communities have also adopted their own effective forms



of self-regulation. Communities that have no ethnic ties but have experienced years of struggle and communal living, such those involved in as community forestry in Mexico presented in Chapter 4, have managed to maintain a shared vision and a basis for trust that has ensured the success of their undertakings in good forestry management. Lastly, these experiences have made it easier to link government programmes from various sectors to indigenous territories, and have laid the foundations of trust among the various stakeholders, particularly with the government sector. The lessons learned from Mesoamerican experiences in community forestry, PES and other forestry incentive mechanisms is a hugely valuable and useful asset for the implementation of the REDD+ initiative, both in Mesoamerica and the rest of Latin America. It should, however, be pointed out that the consolidation of such experiences will be largely dependent on the sustainability of funding mechanisms through PES schemes that must demonstrate their value, or through the marketing of products obtained from sustainable forestry management.

In this regional context, what are the potential opportunities and limitations regarding the development of REDD+ processes in indigenous territories of Mesoamerican countries? REDD+ includes several aspects that must be guaranteed as part of its implementation, including: minimum scale of forest territory to receive compensation; permanence of effects to mitigate climate change (which requires, *inter alia*, territorial land owners to have secure and legally recognized tenure rights); the implementation of social and environmental safeguards that require basic legal frameworks and processes for participation and consultation; implementation of monitoring, verification and reporting mechanisms; and the additionality of guaranteeing that compensation will generate additional impact compared with the incentive-free situation.

In relation to these requirements and the general operation of REDD+ in indigenous territories, the region's researchers and indigenous peoples' organizations have used various forums and publications to discuss concerns and risks associated with the possible operation of programmes such as REDD+ or PES. Specifically in terms of the preparation and implementation of REDD+ programmes, these groups have pointed out the lack of appropriate consultative bodies; the possible weakening of ancestral management and governance practices as a result of applying incentives for good forestry management; the halting of processes to recognize territorial rights; and the lack of clear regulations on payment of compensation, particularly at the local level.

With a view to addressing the risks identified by indigenous organizations in terms of the possible effects of REDD+ on their territories, the UN-REDD Programme and other international organizations are jointly proposing amendments to the approach to be used in Latin America. With this in mind, aspects of sustainable management, rather than simply conservation, have been included. In addition, to include free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) mechanisms in REDD+ processes, operational handbooks are being produced for the participation of indigenous peoples that include the FPIC principle, such as the *Joint Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement of the FCPF and UN-REDD Programme*.¹ Capacity-building programmes are also being developed for forest-dependent indigenous peoples. In addition, the aim of the REDD+ 'nested approach' is to facilitate the inclusion of subnational initiatives that enable countries to launch programmes with a local and less centralized focus, which can subsequently become a national approach; or the simultaneous recording and receipt of credit at the subnational and national levels. Lastly, it is worth mentioning the efforts of the various international agencies to achieve a common approach for ensuring social and environmental safeguards, without neglecting the need to adapt processes to national legal and institutional frameworks. All these initiatives form a solid base for strengthening trust among the various actors involved in preparing and implementing REDD+.

In the first chapter, this document formulates the conceptual framework for understanding the development of processes to recognize rights of tenure over land and natural resources of indigenous populations in Mesoamerica; the concepts and requirements of the REDD+ initiative in its national planning processes; and the concepts underlying the payment for environmental services experiments and other forestry incentives being developed in the region. Chapter two analyses the situations of existing forest mass, land tenure in indigenous and peasant communities, and the forms of community forest management and governance that may be relevant to REDD+ in six Mesoamerican nations: Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama. Chapter three examines the development of national and international legal frameworks, and the way in which existing governance systems can facilitate the implementation of REDD+ proposals in indigenous and peasant forest territories in Mesoamerica. Chapter four describes

¹ http://www.unredd.net/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=1467&Itemid=53



the most significant Mesoamerican initiatives that have tested economic instruments and systems of organization that contribute to the conservation and good management of forests, through community enterprises or PES systems, and have been promoted by indigenous and peasant communities with funding from international cooperation and national governments. Chapter five analyses the opportunities and limitations of REDD+ processes in indigenous forest territories in Mesoamerica, examining the risks and benefits of such processes for the work that national governments are carrying out with the support of UN-REDD to reduce the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions.

