

# The Puembo process: strengthening the dialogue on forests in Latin America and the Caribbean

*W. Thies, J. Rodríguez and E. von Pfeil*

*A regional initiative to strengthen national forest programmes and regional organizations as a bridge between the national and international levels.*

Protecting and managing forests today is no longer so much a technical issue (most countries now having the necessary technical expertise), but a policy and governance issue, necessitating civil society participation in decision-making, adequate legislation and law enforcement. National forest programmes (NFPs) provide a means to address the political dimension of sustainable forest management by involving all stakeholders in a country that have an interest in forests.

However, in a globalizing world, forest protection and management have increasingly become a matter of dialogue among countries, both because the world is realizing that forest services provide global benefits (such as stabilizing the climate) and because countries recognize that many forest problems go beyond national borders. NFPs are therefore also a reference point for policy dialogue at the regional level.

The importance of countries acting together when formulating forest policies has been widely recognized in Latin America and the Caribbean. National forest policies are increasingly influenced by international agreements on forests. However, although several Latin American countries have formulated NFPs, there has been little interaction among countries or between the international level where forest-related negotiations take place and the national level where internationally agreed actions should be implemented.

The Puembo process was created to provide countries in Latin America a platform for dialogue:

- to explore how to develop and use NFPs as participatory, multisectoral stakeholder processes that take

*Protecting and managing Latin America's forests has increasingly become a matter of dialogue among countries*

**Wibke Thies** is Project Officer, and **Evy von Pfeil** is Project Leader, in the International Forest Policy project, Executive Secretariat of the Puembo II Initiative, German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Eschborn, Germany.

**Jorge Rodríguez** is Vice Minister for Environment and Energy, Costa Rica.



into account the various functions of forests and are well integrated in national development plans;

- to discuss shared agendas for development and action in the countries and among them;
- to explore how NFPs can be used in implementation of international forest-related agreements.

Through discussion of common issues, identification of topics that could benefit from joint action, work on transboundary solutions, and exchange of information on best practices, the process aims to strengthen NFP processes as well as regional organizations as a bridge between the national and international levels. The idea is to improve the information and knowledge flow among countries and the coordination of action between the countries and the various regional and international processes. The objective is to increase political attention to forests, especially regarding their contribution to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals 1 (“Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”) and 7 (“Ensure environmental sustainability”).

#### THE PROCESS

The Puenbo process began from a workshop held in Puenbo, Ecuador in 2002, called by the Ministry for Environment of Ecuador and supported by the Netherlands and Germany, on Implementation of International Forest-Related Agreements through National Forest Programmes in Latin America. The nine Latin American countries that participated – Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru – formulated a commitment to joint action to support NFP processes.

Participants noted that to strengthen the NFP processes in the countries, there was a need to advance on issues such as dialogue with other sectors, capacity development for stakeholders in decentralized organizations, better participation of civil society, integration of the

*Members of the Puenbo II Initiative*



forest sector in national development and poverty reduction strategies, development of innovative financing strategies for sustainable forest management, and coordination between actions at the national level and decisions taken in international and regional fora.

After presentation of the workshop results in numerous international fora (the Latin American Forestry Congress, the sixth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity [CBD], FAO’s Latin America and Caribbean Forestry Commission [LACFC] and the fourth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests [UNFF]), participating countries and regional organizations requested a continuation of the Puenbo process.

In November 2005, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO), the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD), the Southern Cone Subregional Group of LACFC, the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs (DGIS) and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Devel-

opment (BMZ) launched the Puenbo II Initiative to strengthen the dialogue on forests within and among countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. They proposed including more countries in the process and broadening the scope to include biodiversity issues, intersectoral approaches and overall poverty reduction goals. Subsequently almost all Latin American countries joined the Puenbo II Initiative (see Map).

Four themes were identified as crucial for sustainable forest management and necessary to take up in Puenbo II:

- governance and institutional capacity (legal issues, decentralization, participation, transparency, stakeholders);
- forest valuation and financing mechanisms for sustainable forest management;
- impact of other sectors (e.g. finance, agriculture, mining, tourism) on forests and vice versa;
- the international forest arrangement (e.g. UNFF) and national implementation.



*Working groups of NFP focal points and others during Southern Cone subregional workshop in Santiago, Chile exchanging lessons learned from national studies and identifying common issues*

Although regional cooperation in Latin American forestry is not new, what is new about the Puenbo approach is that it does not only work with regional organizations or countries, but links both to the international dialogue on forests – by linking the countries' development of NFPs with the implementation of regional and international commitments, and by contributing to the regional agendas on forest development of ACTO, CCAD and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). The Puenbo process also seeks to improve coordination among these existing regional processes.

#### COORDINATION AND ACTIVITIES

The three founding regional organizations, ACTO, CCAD and FAO (through LACFC), guide the initiative and define priorities for its topics and projects. These organizations strengthen the forest networks in the region, improve relations among the national, regional and international levels, and strengthen the political dialogue between member countries and the different sectors that impact on forests. They receive support from FAO, the National Forest Programme Facility, Germany and the Netherlands.

The initiative is politically guided by a Steering Committee which consists of representatives of ACTO, CCAD, LACFC, DGIS and BMZ. The Steering Committee is assisted by a Tech-

nical Support Group which includes representatives of the National Forest Programme Facility, FAO, ACTO, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Netherlands. The Technical Support Group is responsible for the coordination and facilitation of the initiative, together with the Executive Secretariat which is managed by GTZ.

Participation is not exclusive to countries that are members of the participating organizations. Other potential partners such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the World Bank are invited to contribute to the process. Future cooperation with MERCOSUR is planned (see below).

Key interventions to date have included the following:

- **National studies.** Based on the initiative's four key themes, the participating countries prepared analyses of their NFPs between March and October 2006, taking into account the opinions of all forest stakeholders.
- **Subregional workshops.** Between October and December 2006, two subregional workshops (one in Central America, the other in South America) were organized to exchange lessons learned from the national studies and discuss common topics in order to formulate approaches, proposals and recommendations for the national and regional levels. The Central American workshop successfully integrated

several regional and multilateral organizations such as the Coordinating Association of Indigenous and Rural People for Community Agro-forestry in Central America (ACICAFOC), IUCN Central America, the World Bank and FAO and created ownership for the process among participants. Participants identified common strengths and weaknesses in the forest dialogue at the national level (see Table) and agreed on continuing actions in their countries to address them with support from the Puenbo process.

In 2007 a region-wide conference will be organized to exchange lessons learned among the countries and subregions and to formulate messages and recommendations for development and implementation of NFPs in the countries and for the regional and international level. High-level decision-makers are expected to participate; thus the conference will focus on fostering political commitment, mainly in the framework of the first and seventh MDGs, and on increasing synergies with international processes such as UNFF and the international conventions on biodiversity, desertification and climate change. The outcomes will be presented in international processes and shared with UN organizations, NGOs, private sector-organizations and leaders from other regions and sectors, enabling integration of the outcomes into other policy processes.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Only half a year after the start of the Puenbo II Initiative, participating countries have stated that the Puenbo process has created a “common language” and a common understanding of forest issues among countries. They have begun to talk about the four Puenbo key themes and to identify topics within the themes that are relevant to them but also to the region.

The following needs have been identified by all countries:

- intensification of the forest dialogue, especially with sectors that are not directly related to the forest sector but have a clear interest in forests (such as tourism, agriculture, finance), through the creation of forest round tables which will also serve as a mechanism for preparing recommendations for the regional and international levels;
- decentralization of the dialogue to provincial and departmental levels;
- strengthening of institutions to guide such multi-actor, multisectoral dialogue.

The subjects of forest dialogue vary from country to country, but areas such as illegal logging and criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management were identified as relevant to most countries and relevant for discussion at the regional level.

Several regional and multilateral organizations (the National Forest Programme Facility, IUCN South, ACICAFOC, the Regional Alliance for Forest Biodiversity coordinated by the CBD Secretariat and the Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center [CATIE], the World Bank and the Central American Council for Agriculture) have already integrated or have shown interest in integrating their topics into the Puenbo process, indicating the need for such a regional platform for dialogue on forests and NFPs. LACFC has included support to the Puenbo process and its four key themes in its Biannual Mesoamerican Work Plan.

## Strengths and weaknesses of the national forest dialogue identified in the subregional workshop for Central America, October 2006

Strengths	Weaknesses
Progress in acknowledging multiple functions of forests (beyond timber production) in national forest development strategies	Continued inward-looking focus of the forest sector
More frequent inclusion of all forest-sector stakeholders in decision-making, establishing a basis for negotiations between civil society, the private sector and government	Absence of a common national vision for forests
	Lack of visibility of forests in national budgets
	Exclusion of other sectors such as economy, finance, agriculture, tourism, mining, etc. from the dialogue, reducing chances to promote forests as a crucial driver of social and economic development

The four Puenbo key themes and the results of the national studies prepared during the Puenbo II Initiative constitute a basis for the new Strategic Regional Forest Programme (Programa Estratégico Regional Forestal, PERFOR) presented for approval to the Central American Forest Committee of CCAD. PERFOR will be one of the programmes implementing the Environmental Plan of the Central American Region (Programa Ambiental para Centroamérica) under the Central American Forest Strategy (Estrategia Forestal Centroamericana). The World Bank, which will finance a regional initiative on forest law enforcement and governance under PERFOR, has consequently integrated the Puenbo objectives in its planning.

In the Southern Cone area, MERCOSUR, especially its Working Group on Environment, has shown interest in supporting the Puenbo process in its member countries. MERCOSUR, like CCAD and ACTO, could provide the networks necessary to strengthen the dialogue on forest issues among member countries.

## OUTLOOK

The Puenbo II Initiative has a duration of two years, until the end of 2007. To continue the momentum, efforts are under way to promote the ideas and objectives of the process among regional organizations, NGOs and other bi- and multilateral donors and to secure financing to continue activities after 2007. Early encouraging signs are the inter-

est that several regional organizations have shown in integrating their objectives with those of the Puenbo process. For example, the Puenbo process will serve as a platform for follow-up of the FAO Workshop on Intersectoral Planning of Forest-Related Policies in Central America, held in October 2006 in Costa Rica.

At the national level, the NFP focal points, with support from the Puenbo II Technical Support Group, will discuss the outcomes of the subregional workshops at national participatory workshops and define follow-up activities to be implemented before the regional Puenbo conference in 2007, such as integrating the results of the subregional workshop in Central America in national policies and identifying national topics that should be taken up and treated by regional organizations.

Further information about the Puenbo II Initiative can be found at: [www.puenbo.org](http://www.puenbo.org) ♦