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## Governance Challenges of Community Forestry: The Perspective of Local Actors in Petén, Guatemala and the Miskito Territory, Nicaragua”

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### Abstract

Governance of community forestry spans from local to national levels and, in cross-border territories, beyond. This study adopted the perspective of local actors to determine enabling conditions that allow governmental entities to renovate and strengthen community forestry agreements in two community forestry concessions in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MRB), Guatemala and two Forest Management Units in the North Caribbean Coast in Nicaragua. We applied FAO’s Framework for Evaluation and Monitoring of Forest Governance to identify relevant aspects of community forestry governance across three reference frameworks: legal conditions of community forestry, principles, criteria & indicators of the Forest Stewardship Council, and the principles of active territorial governance. From each of these perspectives, community forestry groups have played a crucial role in advancing the sustainable use of the forests in the MBR, along with the social benefits accruing to their members. However, community forestry is threatened by the lack of political will to deal with the dynamics of opening the agricultural frontier, and the institutional and organisational weaknesses of the community groups, puts community forestry in a position of high vulnerability. In both countries, the principal impediment to community forestry is the governments’ limited capacity or will to effectively control the illegal usurpation of land earmarked for, or with high potential to initiate, community forestry. The resulting advance of the agricultural frontier by diverse stakeholders, ranging from marginalised, often landless people to powerful interest groups involved in both licit and illicit activities, leaves the communities with limited options to resolve conflicts over land and forest use rights. From a local actors’ perspective, an inclusive process of territorial planning appears a viable solution to resolve these conflicts over natural resource governance. We conclude with an outlook on how such an integrated management approach at landscape level could be implemented with high degrees of social legitimacy.

**Keywords:** Community forestry, governance, Guatemala, local actors, Nicaragua, perspective