



Deutscher Tropentag, October 8-10, 2003, Göttingen

“Technological and Institutional Innovations  
for Sustainable Rural Development”

## The Effect of Recent Institutional Innovations on Rural Communities in Bolivia’s Amazon Region

SERGIO RUIZ, CARMEN GOTTWALD, MICHEL BECKER

*Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Institute of Forest Policy, Market and Marketing Section, Germany*

### Abstract

Between 1996 and 2000, the legal foundations of rural communities in northern Bolivia have changed substantially. In the departments of the Bolivian Amazon, where more than 90% of land area is natural forest, this has an effect primarily on the use of forest resources by indigenous and peasant communities: Formally acknowledged communities (according to the ‘Ley de Participación Popular’) are allowed in the areas assigned to them as community land (according to the Laws of Agrarian Land Reform) to commercially use timber and non-timber forest products on the basis of forest management plans approved and supervised by the forest administration (according to the ‘Ley Forestal’).

The new legal framework has raised high expectations in the roughly 300 rural communities existing in this region, especially concerning the commercial use of tropical timber. Actually, land allocation towards rural communities is making progress, so that increasingly a basis for communal forest management is emerging. However, field research shows that the establishment of sustainable forest management through the communities is hampered by serious internal and external difficulties:

- The weakly equipped local administrations are not prepared to appropriately cope with the new requirements.
- Limited access to information and external support makes it difficult for most of the communities to prepare and undertake the necessary steps to acquire the new property rights.
- An effective functioning of the communities is also hampered by the fact that their self-administration is of recent development and that conflicts arise from opposing interests of community members.
- The communities lack experience with “sustainable forestry”, as well as with adapted models for their internal organization of community forestry. Empirical evidence suggests that more and more communities will make themselves dependent from regional logging entrepreneurs, which may put at stake the official goal of introducing sustainable forestry on a community basis in this region.

Our research is presently oriented towards identifying approaches to overcome institutional problems that present the successful implementation of communal land use.

**Keywords:** Bolivian Amazon, community forestry, land use reform