



# Community Forestry Organisations and Equitable Resource Management in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, Guatemala

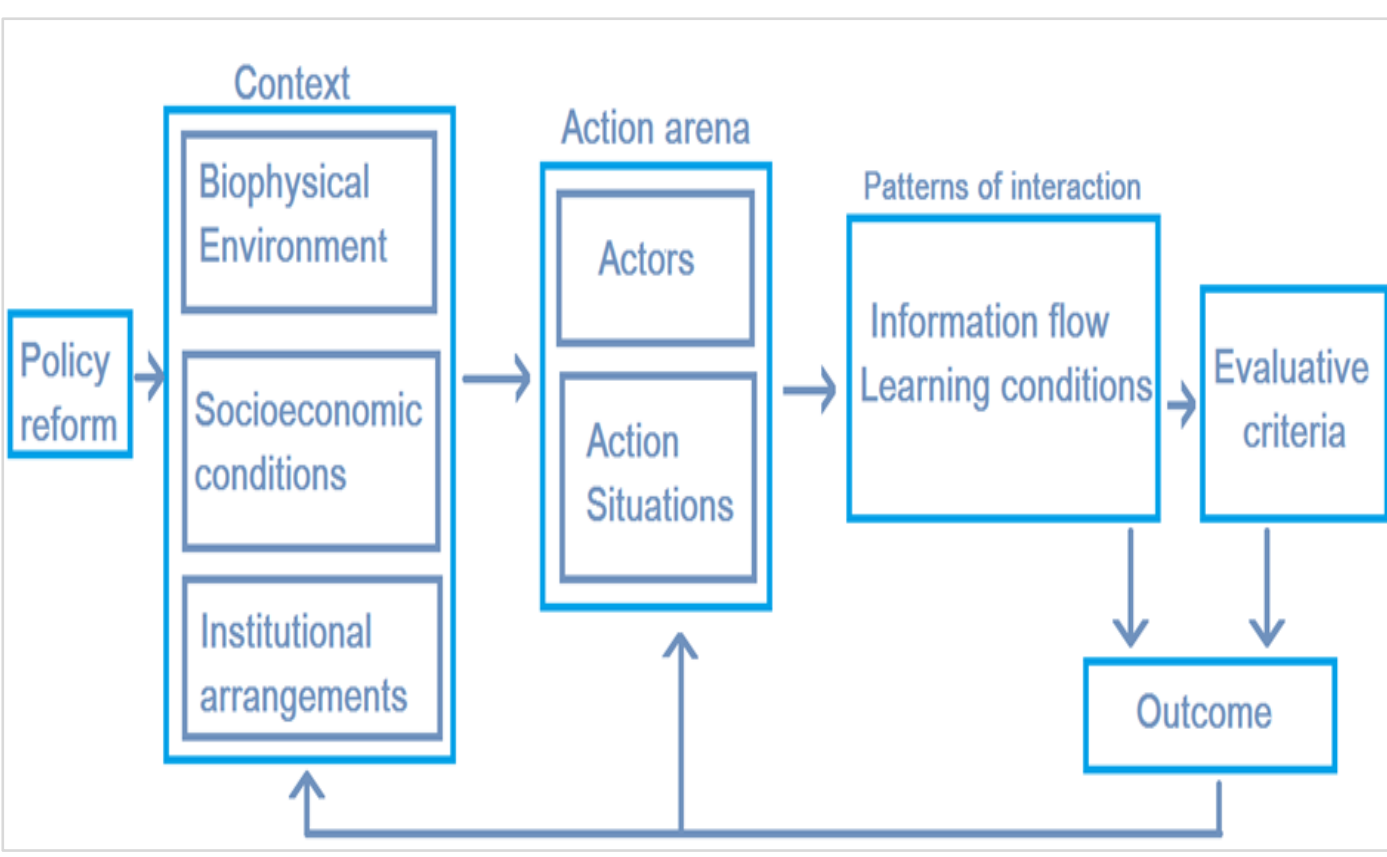
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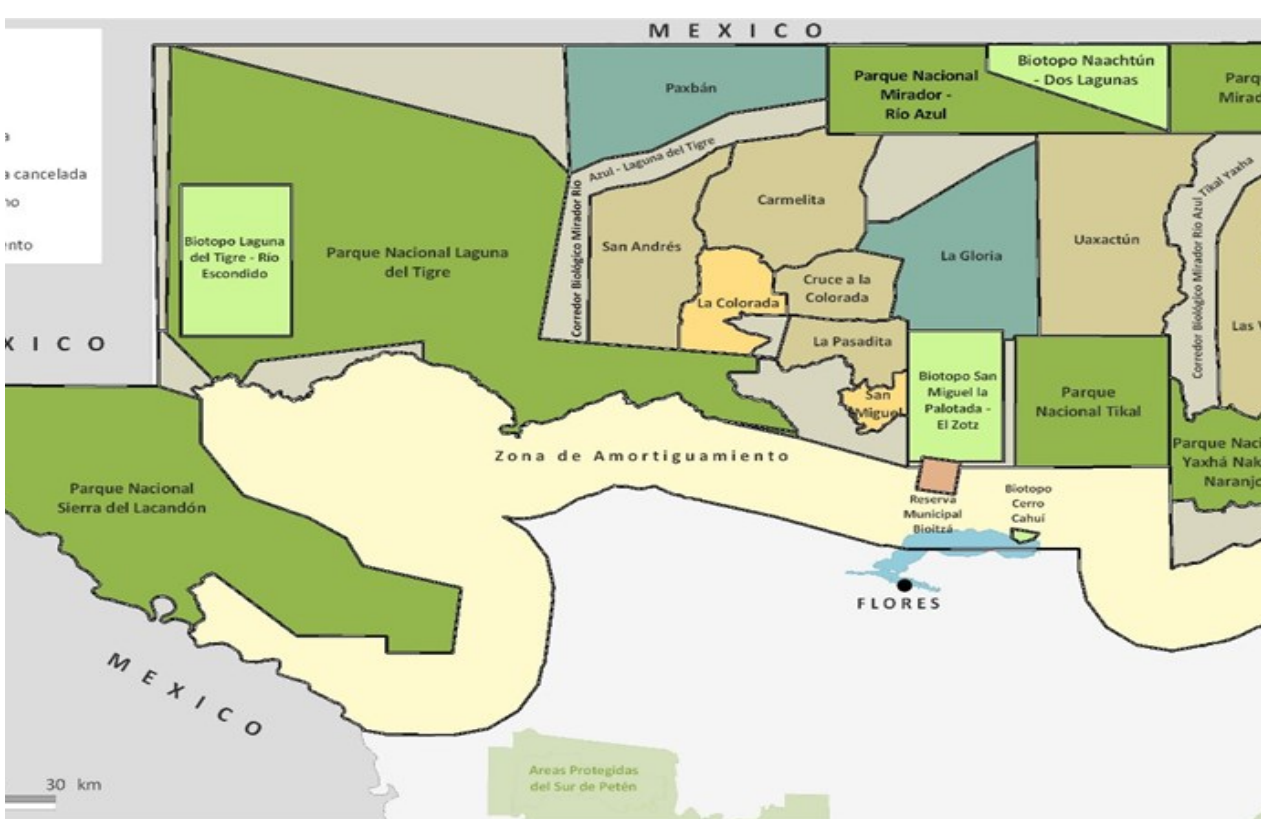
## Introduction

More than 500,000 ha of tropical forests in the Maya Biosphere Reserve have been granted as concessions, 12 for community forestry. Under government guidelines, community forest enterprises extract timber and non-timber products to obtain benefits including employment and profits shared among community members. ACOFOP, the Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén, comprised of local people trained in forestry, was founded in the mid-1990s to support and coordinate these community concessions, evaluated as the world's only sustainably-managed mahogany forests. This study draws on participatory action research methods, interviews and literature to determine the institutional, social and political enabling factors that have contributed to ACOFOP's success, and to derive recommendations to support the ongoing work of ACOFOP and other second-tier organisations. A participative approach drew on Ostrom's principles for evaluating the management of common property resources (CPRs) – see **Figure 2**. These systemic perspectives emphasise that effective management comprises an interaction between characteristics of the resource and of the user group, and institutional arrangements.

**Figure 2: Institutional Analysis Framework (IAF)**  
Diagram developed by Elinor Ostrom. Available under commons license.



**Figure 3: A young carpentry apprentice in Carmelita, MBR** Photo credit: Naomi Millner



**Figure 1: Zones in the Maya Biosphere Reserve**

Results: Mapping ACOFOP's model		
Our analyses confirmed that ACOFOP behaves according to the <b>Accompaniment Model</b> , positioned alongside and within communities, not outside them. The table below identifies four key problem areas for community forestry (CF), identified in the literature, together with a schematic representation of ACOFOP's clarification of, and response to, these issues. <b>Box 1</b> , right, summarises eight principles for institutional accompaniment that derive from this model.		
ACOFOP's response to CF problems	ACOFOP model	Risk identified
<b>1. Participation (who will take part?)</b>  <i>Acompañamiento</i> [accompaniment]	Participation centres on the concept of 'accompaniment', whereby ACOFOP and other institutions provide a framework and build coherence around self-sustaining and self-governing communities.	<b>Decisions may be made by accompanying institutions, not by the communities.</b> <b>A lack of space for disagreement or coproduction.</b>
<b>2. Expertise (who holds it?)</b>  <i>Diálogo</i> [dialogue]	Communities <b>have expertise relevant to forest management</b> . Supporting / regulatory organisations need to understand it before proposing interventions. Forums are needed to integrate diverse kinds of expertise.	<b>Decision-making takes place far from the practice of forestry in the communities.</b> Different types and sources of expertise yield different 'solutions', which may be in opposition.
<b>3. Environmental justice (how do we address the politics of tenure?)</b>  <i>Incidencia política</i> [political advocacy]	Collective politics needs to be premised on demonstrating that <b>the MBR is not an empty space</b> . It is made up of species, management practices and cultural history.	<b>Governmental instability/ flux &amp; private interests (e.g. via investments in tourism) threaten the future of the concessions, whose 25 year lease is shortly up for renewal.</b>
<b>4. Political will (how do we ensure long-term viability?)</b>  <i>Sensibilizar</i> [raise awareness] and build alliances.	To ensure the sustainability of community forestry, long-term and collaborative strategies are needed, rather than projects operating in isolation.	<b>A history of NGOs working to their own aims has left a short-termist, project-oriented legacy and a 'dependency culture.'</b>

## Aims and approaches

**This study comprised two aspects:**

- A) Analysis of the history and practices of ACOFOP, to extract key social principles that might be adapted and applied by institutions in other contexts
- B) Analysis of differences in the way that ACOFOP's role and function is perceived by communities and local, national and regional non-governmental organizations, to derive recommendations for ACOFOP and related organisations and support ongoing institutional development.

## Methods

- Participative workshops in two communities on: evaluating the management of forest concessions; and co-creation of transformation pathways to desired outcomes and benefits;
- 44 informal interviews in communities and 27 formal interviews with ACOFOP and other local, regional and national institutions;
- Data was triangulated with academic studies and policy literatures specific and analysed using a 'Sociology of Knowledge' approach to discourse analysis (SKAD).



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## Box 1: Modelling accompaniment

**8 guiding principles:**

1. Use rights-based approaches
2. Create learning communities
3. Devise participative processes that nurture existing and emergent organisations
4. Support inter-organisational cooperation
5. Mobilise long-term perspectives and long-term horizons
6. Empower communities to apply and engage with regulations and rules
7. Address cultural and institutional forms of racism
8. Build on and expand ecological approaches.

## Conclusions

**Dialogue** between institutions; **political advocacy/impact** at multiple scales and time horizons; and **awareness raising** alongside **alliance-building** ensure that ACOFOP resists promoting a particular constituency or agenda.

These institutional arrangements are united through two key working principles:

- 1. (Forest) communities already have capacities to govern themselves and the expertise or the capacities to learn to manage the forest.**
- 2. Equitable and sustainable forest management needs to address the politics of land tenure as well as principles for effective management.** It is critical to document and communicate the effectiveness of existing management practices as well as to improve understanding of the ecology of forests.

**Two recommendations for further institutional development:**

- 1. Strengthen peer-to-peer learning:** Adults learn best through experiential learning and indigenous/youth leadership can be cultivated through this means. Learn from examples outside CF in the region.
- 2. Develop heterogenous learning groups** involving actors with diverse forms of expertise. In the MBR, certification could be a key topic.