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Land, Livelihoods and Gender: Dynamics of Community Forestry in Petén, Guatemala

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Abstract

In the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Petén, Guatemala, about 350,000 ha of forest have been granted as community concessions since 1997. Each of these concessions is operated by a community forest enterprise (CFE) which is responsible for sustainably managing the forest and sharing the resulting benefits among members. In coming years, all currently nine active concessions will be considered for renewal contingent upon their environmental and socio-economic performance. In contribution to this assessment, this study provides scientific evidence on: 1) Socio-economic benefits, 2) Gendered access to resources, and 3) Opportunities for enhancing gender equity and, overall, viability of the concessions.

Adopting an asset-based approach, we initially studied the socio-economic performance of three concessions in 2014/15 using the 5Capitals methodology. In 2016/17, we expanded the study to three further concessions in which we tested a gender-responsive version of the methodology (5Capitals-G) to elucidate gender-based constraints and opportunities in the CFEs and the value chains they are linked to.

Concession benefits at enterprise and household levels were significant, but varied widely across CFEs (n=6) and households (n=170). At enterprise level, asset building was most pronounced as regards natural, social and physical capitals. Human capital was well developed for managing forests, but less so for processing wood and doing business. All enterprises were profitable, but their financial capital varied. Men dominate CFE governance, but women are increasingly shaping business decisions. At household level, forest income allowed CFE members to move above the (extreme) poverty line and to develop their physical and human capital. Labor was strongly divided by gender, with men primarily focused on timber and women on non-timber forest products. Women's influence on household decisions and control over resources varied widely. Most CFEs lack strategies to involve younger women and men in forest management and business administration. This threatens the long-term prospects of the CFEs, as do competing claims on the land by external stakeholders. We argue that the community concessions should be renewed as they contribute to both forest conservation and livelihoods development, and conclude with opportunities for enhancing this model and scaling it elsewhere in Latin America and beyond.

Keywords: Asset building, community forestry, forest enterprises, gender, Guatemala, livelihoods, Petén

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