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Identification of Gaps in the Community Forestry within the REDD+ Project in the Peruvian Amazon

Jeisson Rodriguez Valenzuela[1], Sven Wagner[2], Manh Hung Bui[3], Nicolas Jose Mesia Rojas[1], Sergio Parra Gonzalez[4], Jeimy Katherin Feo Mahecha[5]

1. Technische Universität Dresden, Institute of International Forestry and Forest Products, Germany
2. Technische Universität Dresden, Institute of Silviculture and Forest Protection, Germany
3. Vietnam National University of Forestry, Forest Inventory and Planning Department, Vietnam
4. University of the Llanos, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Soil, Colombia
5. Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas y Ambientales U.D.C.A, Colombia

Abstract

Conservation concessions (CC) within the REDD+ project have been promoted as mechanisms to protect the primary forest from anthropogenic disturbances in the Peruvian Amazon. However, economic activities by human settlements located in buffer zones of those concessions, have affected the common forest resources given to these groups. Therefore, with a view to determining the effects of the forest utilization on the communal land governed by the indigenous community of Gran Pajaten located in the buffer zone of the CC Montecristo (San Martin, Peru), different workshops (Focus group approach) were implemented with members of this community and environmental authorities. Outcomes highlighted two components that were discussed: 1) a social component, concerning general information about economic activities of the people living in the buffer zone; 2) a forest component, related to forest management in the communal land. Results obtained confirmed that management plans implemented in the communal forest are based only on selective logging through inaccurate practices of motor-manual operations. However, they admitted that when the forest is logged, most of the time they do not care about the understory, focusing only on harvesting targeted timber species which can be cut, according to the agreement with the community. This agreement states: "It can be harvested up to two trees per person and can only be done with the purpose of self-consumption, for instance, fuelwood, construction of their houses, or improvements in their farms". Nevertheless, they cannot control activities by illegal loggers who extract the wood anonymously, which is a complex situation because those practices are carried out in remote areas, and perhaps it could be made by people of the same community or neighboring communities. Furthermore, the information collected with these meetings and workshops showed that although they promote some species through tree nurseries in their farms, they concentrate on a set of timber species with more economic interest or those that can represent some benefit to their agroforestry systems (AFS) with cocoa crops. Thus, the findings from this case study have confirmed poor practical knowledge by the community about sustainable forest management.

Keywords: Buffer zone, conservation concession, forest utilization, illegal logging, indigenous community, Peruvian Amazon, REDD+ project.

Introduction

According to SERNANP (2015) the REDD+ project (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) is promoted in national protected areas and their buffer zones, including San Martin department which is an active part of the Peruvian Amazon. Likewise, the Ministry of the Environment (MINAM), National Protected Natural Areas Service (SERNANP), the National Forestry and Wildlife Service (SERFOR), the Regional Environmental Authority (ARA), among other stakeholders have been developing strategies to conserve the forest resources in the department of San Martin (Kowler, 2016).

Initiatives such as the project "Biocorredor Martin Sagrado" in San Martin department which is promoted by international cooperation, environmental authorities, local NGOs, and agroforestry cooperatives/associations is conducted to preserve three conservation concessions (CC Martin Sagrado, CC El Breo, and CC Monte Cristo) with an entire area about 300,000 ha (Cahuata & Angerand, 2014 p.11). The aim of this scheme is to monitor, protect, and preserve such areas as well as to encourage the local communities in their buffer zones through environmental education, technology transfer and capacity building towards reforestation, forest conservation, sustainable cocoa production under agroforestry systems, and promotion of non-timber forest products (ECOCERT, 2016; PUR, 2012; Cahuata & Angerand, 2014). However, it is undeniable that human settlements and their economic activities are active in the buffer zones, consequently, they have caused pressure on forest resources.

Thus, this study aimed to assess the effects on the forest utilization of the communal land governed by the community of Gran Pajaten in the Montecristo conservation concession.

Material and Methods

The study area is located in the buffer zone of the CC Montecristo (81,055 ha), in the western side of San Martín department, Mariscal Caceres province in the Peruvian Amazon. This buffer zone shares areas that belong to the National Park Río Abiseo. This case study was concentrated on the Gran Pajaten agroforestry community (indigenous origin) which is a human settlement in the buffer zone of this conservation concession, (PUR, 2012; ECOCERT, 2016).

To understand issues related to forest utilization and some implications behind the current forest conditions in the communal land (an unofficial estimate of around 200 ha, regardless of their farms' area) managed by the community of Gran Pajaten, the method of "Focus group approach" was followed. Knodel (1995) described this "approach" as a mechanism to collect information through discussions with respect to the topic of interest for the researcher with small groups of people organized with the help of one moderator following dynamics and techniques to encourage participation, brainstorming, sharing different opinions and points of view with respect to certain circumstances or situations. Therefore, two workshops (Focus group approach) were implemented with members of the community of Gran Pajaten and environmental authorities.

Data collection was carried out through technics such as audio recording, engagement in conversational spaces and development of social cartography, to identify decision making in the community forestry, as well as a social assessment and forest utilization within its communal land.

Results and Discussion

Decision making in this community as well as most of the rural communities in Peru, is made through a group consisting of leaders of the same communities that are called Peasant Patrols (or Ronda Campesinas *in Spanish*). This communal group represents the rural community at the local, regional and national levels, and not only has the responsibility to support the physical, moral, and social integrity of the community members, but also this group has rights, duties, and they contribute to conflict resolution. Besides, Peasant Patrols support the decision making of environmental, productive, and social issues in the community "Article N° 12 of the Regulation of the Law of Peasant Patrols" (Congreso de la República del Perú, 2002). For this study, decision making in the communal forest is made through the agreement of the Peasant Patrol which allows the community to harvest certain trees when is demanded. This agreement states: "It can be harvested up to two trees per person or per farm within the community and can only be done with the purpose of self-consumption, for instance, fuelwood, construction of their houses, or farm improvements ". The frequency of logging was not specified in the information collected.

The focus group results (Table 1) highlighted two components that were discussed with the community: 1. The social component, with respect to general information about the economic activities of residents in the buffer zone. 2. Forest component, related to the forest management in the communal land or disturbed forest.

Table 1. Forest utilization information

Social component		
Population of Gran Pajaten	Approximately 300 people	
Property right of land	Without property title	
Main economic activities	Legal	Illegal
		
	About 80% of the population rely on agriculture as their primary economic activity, mainly cocoa, fruits, and other crops.	
Forest component		
Forest utilization based on community forestry	Selective logging based on an internal agreement only for self-consumption up to two trees per farm.	
Forest requirements to be harvested	Trees >50 cm dbh and good quality of timber	
Tools, materials, and mechanisms for harvesting		
wood extraction and transport	Mainly transported manually. When illegally harvested, transported through rivers	

Although members of the community recognize that illegal logging and hunting activities have diminished because of the interventions by different state and private institutions and organizations to conserve the forest resources in such areas, sometimes those practices emerge at a small scale

which puts pressure and harms their forests and biodiversity. Regarding the details of harvesting, sometimes they cut lianas only when it is necessary, in other words, when lianas are an obstacle to harvest the targeted trees.

Information reported by the community says that they occasionally take care of natural regeneration in the understory at the time of felling, nevertheless, the information about this process does not specify how they do it. Likewise, they admit not knowing about thinning operations, practices under sustainable forest management, or forest certifications such as FSC.

Some members of the community used their farms to promote certain timber species and non-timber forest products that are compatible with their cocoa agroforestry systems, other crops, or those that can provide certain ecosystem services or benefits. The species that a few farmers promote through tree nurseries in their farms are the most commercial timber species such as *Swietenia Macrophylla*, *Guazuma Crinita*, *Amburana cearensis*, *Cedrelinga catenaeformis*, *Calycophyllum Spruceanum*, *Cedrella odorata*, and *Cedrella sp*, and the seeds and seedlings come from the same forest. However, they do not promote the complete list of trees recognized by them as valuable timber species (Figure 1).

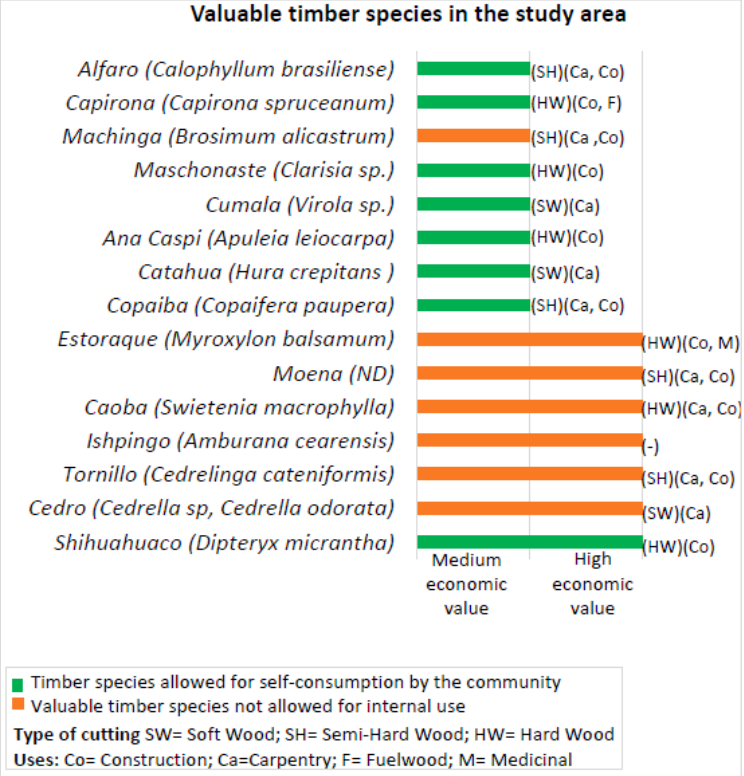

Figure 1. Recognition of timber species used by the community

Additional data obtained showed that the community participates actively in projects related to the conservation of the environment, rural development, good agricultural practices about cocoa and other crops. These projects are organized by different state and private institutions that promote those initiatives, and projects related to climate change and REDD+. Some members of the community help the forestry rangers with the monitoring of areas adjacent to the Monte Cristo conservation concession, but unfortunately, not all members are committed to the conservation of

their forest, and reforestation of degraded areas, because their main interest is related to cocoa production.

Despite the significant decrease of illegal activities in the study area due to the intervention by the environmental authorities, this community cannot control illegal loggers who extract the wood anonymously, which is a complex situation because those practices are carried out in remote areas.

Conclusions and Outlook

Although the community of Gran Pajaten showed commitment and participation in projects related to conservation and agroforestry practices promoted by different actors, forest management plans are based only on selective logging through inaccurate practices of motor-manual operations which reflects poor practical knowledge regarding sustainable forest management.

It is undeniable the great effort and actions given by different state institutions, private organizations, agroforestry cooperative/associations, international cooperation, NGOs among other stakeholders, who constantly seek improvement, development, and preservation of such areas. Nevertheless, there are still many gaps and necessities to be covered. Thus, this study should be considered as a diagnostic tool that can guide decision making in the implementation of alternatives and strategies which can improve the forest management of the buffer zone of this conservation concession in the Peruvian Amazon.

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