

COMMUNITY FORESTRY CONCESSIONS IN THE MAYA BIOSPHERE RESERVE IN GUATEMALA

In the Department of Petén, in Guatemala, the *Community Forestry* innovative system is being implemented to promote biodiversity and forest conservation in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, contrasting massive deforestation due to heavy and increasing farming pressure, irrational exploitation of precious timbers, pillage of archaeological sites while, at the same time, strengthening socio-economic development of the local communities.



Created in the years '90s in the regional largest area of tropical forest that occupies about 2.1 million hectares, this innovative practice is developed by the State of Guatemala through the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) and by the [Association of Forest Communities of Petén \(ACOFOP\)](#).

Community Forest Concession (CFC) is the right that the State of Guatemala grants to legally organized communities, through a public tender, for the use and overall management of forest products. This is done under rules established by the State and for a clearly defined period of time (25 years). A CFC does not involve the transfer of land title, the forest remains public. Its granting is based on the power of the State to authorize Guatemalan individuals or legal entities to carry out forest exploitation on their own in State-owned forests, with agreed rights and obligations. (CONAP).



In particular, the actors involved in this co-management practice fulfil the following roles:

- The *State of Guatemala*, through CONAP, has recognized the concessions as explicit instrument of the national development policy, creating a technical and legal basis to regulate and guide the process of granting and managing them. CONAP supports the concessionaire when his right is threatened, diminished or distorted. To evaluate the management in the concessions it uses a standard (principles, criteria and indicators) that covers the ecological/forestry, social, economic and administrative components. Concessions are also granted to industrial concessionaires, exclusively for timber activities.
- *Concessionaires* ensure the management and use of the goods and services covered by the concession contract. Among their responsibilities, concessionaires should watch over the integrity of the management unit, ensuring control and vigilance to avoid the loss of forest cover, prevent and control fires, avoid illegal logging, depredation of archeological resources, and other illegal acts. The populations can carry out agricultural work, ecotourism, and others compatible with the objectives of the Maya Biosphere Reserve.
- *Non-Governmental Organizations* and the Association ACOFOP guarantee an adequate administration of the concessions, provide training, coaching and technical advice to the communities to strengthen their technical, administrative and self-managed productive organization capacities.



The Maya Biosphere Reserve, situated in the Department of Petén, was created in 1990 by the Government of Guatemala with the aim of protecting the tropical forest, within the framework of the 1989 Law of Protected Areas, which also established the creation of the [National Council of Protected Areas \(CONAP\)](#).

In the Reserve, however, all the peasants communities were managing traditional production systems based on agriculture and the extraction of forest products. The breakdown of the free access scheme to resources originated by the Law, generated a clash of interests and the conditions to conceive a solution like the *Community Forest Concessions*, an innovative mechanism of co-management established in 1994. In 1996, the *Peace Agreements* included the government's commitment to grant 100,000 hectares of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in forest concessions. The community movement to claim rights to use and access natural resources was consolidated in 1997 with the founding of the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP), as a representative body for the community organizations.

By granting the Concessions, CONAP converts the community inhabitants of the Maya Biosphere Reserve into allies for the conservation of protected areas, allowing them the exclusive use of resources, provided it is under a sustainable management scheme. Since the 1990s, more than 500,000 hectares (70% of MBR forests) have been granted to twelve organized community groups and two forestry industries, which have been operating and fulfilling the first contract established for 25 years.

The ACOFOP Association implements a model of sustainable management of forests allowing to preserve them and obtain various derivative products that are sold nationally and internationally. These products include certified wood and added-value byproducts such as xate palm, pepper, ramón seed, in addition to apiculture products. Communities can access financing through banks that accept the annual operating plan as a condition of guarantee. Taking advantage of the beauty and cultural richness of the Maya Reserve, community tourism services are also offered. The results achieved have created the conditions for the State of Guatemala to ensure the renewal of the Concessions and the permanence of the mechanism.

[The achievements of Community Forest Concessions are shown on the ACOFOP website](#) and in several studies of different international organizations. Some of these results show the great impact of the mechanism adopted for the Reserve and for the communities:

- Deforestation is less than 1%. Forest fires are almost never occurring due to the investments made by the concessionaires in activities of prevention and control. There is no illegal timber extraction and the communities have become guardians of the natural and cultural heritage of the granted areas. Five important timber species have been conserved in the areas.
- New permanent jobs have been created annually with great impact in empowerment of women and the economic income of communities has increased as a result of productive diversification. In the Concessions, *Community Forestry Companies* have been created, with their own sawmills and collection centres, generating production chains that add value to forest products and contribute to create qualified work for young people.
- The ACOFOP community management units are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and by the Rainforest Alliance. All certifications have been granted by the high environmental standards with which forests are managed.

Widely recognized by different international organizations, the practice of *Community Forestry Concessions* is also mentioned in the 2020 edition of the [State of the World's Forests published by FAO and UNEP](#) as a



successful model for sustainable forest management. This model has inspired the implementation of similar initiatives in Meso and South America, as documented by [the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests \(AMPB\)](#), and in other regions of Africa and Asia.

To know more

[ACOFOP website](#)

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[ACOFOP results](#)

[Concesiones Forestales Comunitarias ACOFOP 2019 – FAO](#)

[Video Bomberos Forestales Comunitarios](#)

[News in conap.gob.gt sitio web](#)

[Article in revistayuam.com](#)

[Document in revistayuam.com](#)

[Document ACOFOP in FAO website](#)

[State of the World's Forests published by FAO and UNEP](#)

[Concesiones Forestales Comunitarias in equatorinitiative.org website](#)

[Concesiones Forestales Documento in equatorinitiative.org](#)

[Article in tropenbos.org](#)

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