

Forest Governance and Biodiversity, Climate and Sustainable Development Goals in Mexico

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

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Scope

The present study has been commissioned by GLOBE International A.I.S.B.L. with the sponsorship of the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) with the support of the Japanese Biodiversity Fund (JBF), within the framework of the international project ***'Integrated Multipurpose Forest Governance for the national delivery of sustainable development, climate and biodiversity objectives'***.

The Japanese Biodiversity Fund was established by the Presidency of the [Tenth Conference of the Parties \(COP 10\)](#) to support the implementation of the Nagoya Biodiversity Outcomes. As such, one of its key objectives is to provide support to the Parties at regional and sub-regional level, so that they can translate the [Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020](#) into national priorities. The strengthening of forest governance promoted by this project can assist Parties in the implementation of Strategic Goal A to *'Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society'* and Aichi Biodiversity Targets 5, 7, 14 and 15, among others.

The Study seeks to identify the challenges and opportunities for Mexico integrating forest governance to meet biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development objectives. This is done in order to generate useful content for legislators and the Mexican government to serve as inputs in decision-making related to forest governance, and to document good practices that may be of interest to decision makers in other countries.

The preliminary results of the Study were presented to the Environment Committee of the Honorable Congress of the Union of Mexico on November 8, 2016 and discussed at a joint press conference of the Chairpersons of the Commissions on Environment, Agriculture, Water Resources, Water and Sanitation, and Fisheries with the Executive Secretary of the CBD, Dr. Bráulio Ferreira de Souza Dias on November 30, on the eve of the start of the COP13 of the CBD in Cancun. The preliminary results of the Study, as well as those of an analogous research carried out in Colombia under this project, were presented at the CBD COP13 Legislators Forum in Cancun on December 7, 2016 by a panel of Mexican and Colombian legislators, before a hearing of national and sub-national legislators from 30 countries. Finally, the Study was officially launched at the Forum *'Forest Governance and Biodiversity, Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Mexico'*, open to civil society, experts and representatives of the Mexican Federal Administration hosted by the Committee on the Environment of the Honorable Congress of the Union on March 22, 2017.

Since the late 1980s the concept of 'governance' has become a constant component of the international discourse on development and has permeated specific areas such as forestry, giving rise to the term 'forest governance'.

Although there is no consensus on the definition of this term, from a broad perspective forest governance includes the different laws, regulations, policies, actions and interactions with an incidence on forest ecosystems, from the local to the international. This implies the

active involvement in decision-making of society as a whole, including government institutions and agencies, as well as all stakeholders, formal and informal rules, power relations, decision-making practices and the decisions that are made.

Governance has become increasingly important over the past twenty years, as it is often viewed as the weak link to addressing unsustainable forest use. Technical knowledge alone is insufficient and no sustainable forest management project will succeed if resources are poorly governed.

At the international level, the forest governance framework is defined by a series of multilateral agreements addressing specific issues such as biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development, which have points of contact and result in forestry-related commitments. These include the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Strategic Biodiversity Program 2011-2020 and its Aichi Targets, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Non-legally-binding Instrument on All Types of Forests (NLBI).

At country level, Mexico's forest governance framework is extremely complex, as it is framed by various general laws, regulations, plans, programs and strategies, and its implementation corresponds to different dependencies and governmental institutions of both the executive and the legislative branches of government, while sub-national governments and other relevant actors, such as indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector and academia among others also play a key role.

The analysis and proposals formulated in this document are the result of a documentary review on the national framework of forest governance and of the systematization of interviews with representatives of different sectors.

The study identifies both strengths and weaknesses in the national context. One of the greatest strengths of the Mexican legal framework to guarantee the conservation and sustainable use of forest territories and biodiversity is in the Agrarian Law that recognizes the social ownership of land to *ejidos* and rural communities. In the Mexican system of government, an *ejido* is an area of communal land used for agriculture, on which community members individually farm designated parcels and collectively maintain communal holdings. This situation of recognition of collective rights, occurring in few countries, has allowed the development of local governance schemes which have dealt with the fragmentation of forests and their change of land use in much of the country.

The granting of ownership rights and use of the forest territories to *ejidos* and communities has resulted in the consolidation of a model of community forest management which has promoted the creation of areas of community conservation for the protection of biodiversity, of forest community corporations (*'empresas forestales comunitarias'* or EFCs)

which sustainably manage about one million hectares of internationally certified hectares, and the active conservation of ecosystems through other schemes such as Wildlife Management Units (*‘Unidades de Manejo para la Conservación de la Vida Silvestre’* or UMAs) which have tackled land use change processes.

While Mexico has a broad legal and institutional framework on forest governance and some success stories, our analysis has revealed an overall lack of focus and policy overlaps, while the institutional framework suffers from a lack of coordination to implement policies consistent with conservation and the sustainable use of the country's forest and biological resources. In addition, greater financial resources are required to implement the different national and international commitments.

In addition, Mexico faces many challenges related to forest governance, as deforestation persists, the loss of biodiversity is extremely rapid, the more than 11 million Mexicans living in forest ecosystems suffer high levels of marginalization and poverty, and a large number of obstacles have been identified to boost the productivity of the sector. For these reasons, a number of stakeholders in the government sector and in other sectors have been working for some years to propose reforms to forest governance laws, particularly the General Law on Sustainable Forest Development (*‘Ley General de Desarrollo Forestal Sustentable’* or LGDFS) in force since 2003.

At the moment Mexico has the opportunity to address challenges related to forest governance, as the hosting of the Thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the CBD (COP13) in Cancun in December 2016, allowed the issue to become relevant on the domestic political agenda. Indeed, COP13 coincided with the tabling of a series of legislative reform initiatives closely related to forest governance.

These include an initiative that proposes a comprehensive reform to the General Law of Sustainable Forest Development, and another one for a General Law on Biodiversity. Also, an initiative is being discussed that seeks to update the administrative procedure of environmental inspection, and work is being advanced on an initiative - which has not yet been published – for a new General Water Law.

These initiatives are extremely relevant for the purposes of forest governance, insofar as they generate direct impacts on forests, and at the same time they are closely related, in that forests are the habitat of biodiversity and in that the availability of water - both in terms of quality and of quantity - depends on them.

This opens up opportunities for the federal legislature to strengthen governance, ensuring that the reform building processes are participatory and promoting that the reforms generate social and environmental benefits favoring mainly the indigenous and local peoples and communities, which are responsible for conserving and managing up to 60 percent of forest ecosystems in Mexico.

In sum, Mexico has made and is making significant efforts to strengthen the legal and institutional framework that underpins forest governance and integrate it with the objectives of biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development – which would contribute to the delivery of the related international commitments. However, a number of pending challenges need to be addressed in order to achieve substantial progress and to promote fundamental changes generating benefits that will permeate the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources and the development of indigenous peoples and local communities that inhabit forest ecosystems.

The specific proposals and recommendations to strengthen forest governance in Mexico address the following areas: legal framework, government actors, legislative power, sub-national governments, non-governmental actors, community forestry, national biodiversity policy and climate change, REDD + and opportunities for legislative reform.

Proposals and Recommendations

Durante el desarrollo de este estudio como resultado de las entrevistas realizadas y de la revisión de fuentes documentales confiables y actualizadas, fue posible identificar diversas recomendaciones para fortalecer la gobernanza forestal en México.

Esta sección se divide en temas, seleccionados conforme a la estructura del estudio, introduciendo de manera breve su importancia y puntualizando posteriormente las recomendaciones específicas para cada uno de ellos.

During the development of this Study it was possible to identify several recommendations to strengthen forest governance in Mexico on the basis of the findings from the interviews conducted and the review of reliable and updated documentary sources.

This section is divided into topics, selected according to the structure of the Study, which start with a brief description of their relevance and present each of the topic-specific recommendations.

Forest Governance and Legal Framework: Although Mexico has a broad legal framework, it has been observed that there are conflicting regulations and cases of overregulation in some aspects. This creates uncertainty and a level of legal complexity that can become a barrier to the effective implementation of forest policy. The recommendations in this regard are as follows:

- To carry out legal studies to map out contradictions and overregulation in the legal framework related to forest governance (both in the environmental and other productive and extractive sectors), and to promote the harmonization of the legal framework both at

federal and sub-national level, seeking that the specific objectives of the various legal systems are complementary.

- To promote greater integration, coordination and continuity of laws related to forest governance and their implementation. It is important to take advantage of the National Forestry Council (*'Consejo Nacional Forestal'* or CONAF) as an advisory body with a plural membership base, which, among other things, is responsible for assessing and monitoring the implementation of forestry policy and forestry policy instruments laid down in the General Law of Sustainable Forest Development (LGDFS). CONAF can also discuss, analyze and propose legal reforms to strengthen the forestry sector.
- To promote that the goals established in the plans and programs have continuity, since in practice many cease to operate at the end of the term of the administration by which they were created. The Secretariat for the Environment and Natural Resources (*'Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales'* or SEMARNAT) and the National Forestry Commission (*'Comisión Nacional Forestal'* or CONAFOR) must guarantee this continuity as the main institutions responsible for forest policy by promoting the construction of a long-term vision that promotes the conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems.

Forest Governance and Government Stakeholders: There is a wide range of governmental stakeholders, both from the environmental sector and from other sectors, involved in forest governance. The strengthening of forest governance requires greater inter-institutional coordination, for which the following is proposed:

- To promote incentives to foster cooperation between different units of the federal administration. The leadership of SEMARNAT as an institution that defines environmental policy is key in this regard. It would also be important to involve the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB), which is responsible for guiding the national policy implemented by the executive and for promoting policy coordination at both federal and at state and municipality levels.
- To carry out the reforms needed to define clearly the attributions and competencies of each institution with the aim of avoiding duplication of efforts and the implementation of policies that are contrary to the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources. An example of this is the need to align agricultural policies implemented by the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (*'Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación'* or SAGARPA) with CONAFOR's forestry policies to promote sustainable rural development and strengthen the integrated management of the territory.
- To strengthen the technical, administrative, organizational and financial capacities of the institutions so that they can carry out their mandates effectively.
- To take advantage of the existence of entities that promote inter-institutional coordination, such as the Inter-Secretariat Commission on Climate Change (CICC) and the Inter-Secretariat Commission for Sustainable Rural Development (CIDRS), and promote their strengthening, guaranteeing aspects such as availability of resources and continuity of jobs.

Forest Governance and the Legislative Branch: The role of legislative branch of government in forest governance is key, as it discusses and proposes the creation of new laws or reforms and oversees the executive's work for implementation. To strengthen its action, the following is proposed:

- To promote the process of consultation and citizen participation in the discussion of legislative reforms related to forest governance, including all stakeholders, but especially the owners of the forest resources that in the case of Mexico are mostly indigenous peoples, local communities and forest *ejidos*.
- To strengthen the role of research centers related to forest governance by encouraging committees, parliamentary groups and even individual deputies to solicit their general opinion on reform initiatives in this field or to consult specific aspects of forest governance which may require deep-dive research.
- To strengthen the work of ordinary and special parliamentary Committees, since they carry out fundamental scrutiny and must generate certainty, so that when the initiatives reach the plenary vote stage they enjoy wide cross-party support. This can be done by establishing a professional career service for technical clerks, promoting their professionalization and continuity in the medium and long term.
- To encourage the legislative branch to follow up on the implementation of the forest policy established in the current legal framework, guaranteeing the allocation of resources needed when adopting budgets and reviewing the reports presented by the executive to identify potential reforms. The issue of resource availability is particularly important as the economic package approved by the Chamber of Deputies for 2017 contemplated a 62 percent cut in the sustainable forest development subsidy program - focused on strengthening capacities, infrastructure and financing for the establishment, management and development of Community Forestry Companies (EFC) -, putting at risk the fulfillment of CONAFOR's goals.

Forest Governance and Sub-National Governments: Despite the fact that in Mexico policies related to biodiversity conservation remain centralized, state and municipal entities have been having a greater participation in forest governance, which can be strengthened with the following recommendations:

- Carry out the reforms needed to clearly establish the competencies of each of the three levels of government related to forest governance in the legal framework and to promote vertical coordination.
- Incorporate States and municipalities in the planning of national policy to facilitate greater coherence between political development and local realities.
- Strengthen the capacities of sub-national governments, with a special emphasis on the capacities related to the generation of forest and biodiversity information since it needs to be current, truthful, accurate and reliable so that it can serve as a basis for generating differentiated policies according to the particular needs of local entities, and to update the National System of Environmental Indicators. Further human, administrative, technical and infrastructure capacity is also required.

Forest Governance and Non-Governmental Stakeholders: Non-governmental stakeholders - especially Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and indigenous peoples and forest communities and *ejidos* - have a leading role in the country's forest governance. However, it is necessary to strengthen formal mechanisms of participation to ensure their influence on decision-making processes. To achieve this the following recommendations are put forward:

- To create citizen advisory councils specialized in forest governance in the Congress of the Union to promote a greater incidence of civil society in the legislative and normative area.

It is suggested to pass legislation to regulate consultation or participation in environmental matters.

- To review the functioning of formal participation mechanisms, taking into account the strengthening of aspects such as representativeness and gender equality; the creation of mechanisms that guarantee the continuity, monitoring and evaluation of their work, and the availability of resources for their operation
- To strengthen the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, especially the use and enjoyment of their natural resources, considering the different types of land ownership recognized in the Mexican legal framework. One option is to create a specific law on indigenous peoples and local communities that addresses issues such as the characterization of indigenous peoples and communities in the country, mechanisms to ensure their adequate participation in decision-making and the express recognition of their autonomy and self-determination. This law could provide a comprehensive framework for implementing REDD+ safeguards and international human rights treaties.
- To design and implement a mechanism for differentiated attention to indigenous peoples and local communities to facilitate their effective participation in decision making related to forest resources. This could be done by CONAFOR with the support of the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (*'Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas'* or CDI).

Forest Governance and Community Forest Management: The model of community forest management (*'Manejo Forestal Comunitario'* or MFC) is one of the greatest strengths of the forest governance framework in Mexico. In order to strengthen it it is necessary to make adjustments to the legal framework focused mainly on the recognition of the community rights and in the simplification of the regulatory framework to avoid that bureaucratic procedures affect the practices of community forest management. The main recommendations are as follows:

- To promote legality by promoting the co-responsibility of communities and authorities in monitoring, by simplifying administrative procedures to make the legal route more accessible and by creating incentives to make the domestic market more competitive in relation to the international markets that export forest products to Mexico. To strengthen this last point, one option is the creation of a differentiated fiscal system that recognizes and encourages national actions of sustainable forest production, conservation and restoration, promoting the certification of good forest management.
- To strengthen the recognition of the rights of communities in the legal framework, especially those that are not constituted as *ejidos*. One option is to update the Agrarian Law to include the rights of widows, day laborers and heirs without documentation.
- To develop and strengthen mechanisms for the participation of community forest owners in defining strategies for sustainable use and conservation of forest territories, with special emphasis on the participation of women and indigenous peoples.
- To replicate the good practices of community forest management in areas of the country with a forestry vocation and to widely disseminate the social, economic and environmental benefits it can generate.

- To promote the creation of Community Forestry Corporations (*'Empresas Forestales Comunitarias'* or EFCs) and foster greater coordination within government at all three levels and with CSOs to create more opportunities for technical, administrative and organizational support.
- To generate conditions to promote the access of EFCs to national markets by seeking the participation of the Mexican government, forestry CSOs and even international financiers (such as the KFW Development Bank, which has facilitated studies to identify investment opportunities in EFC-led sustainable forestry projects).

Forest Governance and National Biodiversity Policy: National biodiversity policy shows both strengths and weaknesses. In order to improve its integration with forest governance the recommendations below are put forward:

- To strengthen the figure of CONABIO, recognizing it at legal level, as is the case with the Inter-Ministerial Climate Change Committee (*'Comisión Intersecretarial de Cambio Climático'* or CICC is provided for in the General Climate Change Act (LGCC) and with the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms (CIBIOGEM), as provided for in the Law on Biosafety of Genetically Modified Organisms.
- To encourage the exchange of good practices developed by the National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (*'Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad'* or CONABIO) with other countries.
- To formalize the strategy for the integration of biodiversity in the forestry sector by including it in the National Forest Program (*'Programa Nacional Forestal'* or PRONAFOR) and in the National Development Plan (*'Plan Nacional de Desarrollo'* or PND) for the next six years.
- To strengthen the mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring the impacts of policies and programs implemented by CONAFOR.
- To establish concurrent strategies and programs between the forestry sector and other productive sectors to ensure the implementation of coordinated actions for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in forest landscapes.
- To provide training to government officials at the federal, State and municipal levels to gain a better understanding of the importance of biodiversity in the functioning of forest ecosystems.
- To recognize and replicate the results on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity achieved thanks to community forest management in regions with a forestry vocation.

Forest Governance and National Climate Change Policy: Forest ecosystems are important allies for mitigation and adaptation to climate change. Mexico has got a strong framework to address climate change, which recognizes the relevance of forests by incorporating them both to meet mitigation and adaptation goals. To strengthen this area our recommendations are as follows:

- To conduct a legal study to identify the adjustments required by the climate change legal framework in order to implement the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) related to the forestry sector (rate of deforestation and sustainable forest management) and the possibilities of harmonization with other relevant legal systems such as the General Law on Climate Change (LGCC).

- To build capacities in sub-national governments to support the implementation of the national climate change policy and especially the forestry objectives set out in the NDC.
- To encourage the broad participation of CSOs and other relevant actors in the implementation of the NDC in collaboration with the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (*Instituto Nacional de Ecología y Cambio Climático* or INECC).
- To incorporate community actions in the NDC to engage indigenous peoples and local communities as part of the answer to climate change.

Forest Governance and REDD+: The REDD+ mechanism is fundamental in order to strengthen forest governance as it creates incentives to achieve GHG emission reductions owing to deforestation and forest degradation and it contemplates measures aiming at conserving biodiversity as part of a package of social and environmental safeguards. To avoid the risks deriving from its implementation it is recommended that:

- Special attention is paid to addressing the issues pending for the implementation of REDD+, such as the benefit-sharing mechanism, and the consolidation of the monitoring, reporting and verification system (MRV). To this end it is important that the government takes into consideration the specialized research work developed by a number of knowledge partners.
- With regard to the MRV system, methodological frameworks and agreements ought to be established to standardize and consolidate reference levels at the federal, State and municipal levels, as well as a platform for the control, management and integration of available national data.
- It is ensured that natural forest conversion exceptions established by the Mexican legal framework are not applied to REDD+ projects and programs to avoid environmental risks.
- Compliance and implementation of the Cancun safeguards is promoted. One option is to create legal mechanisms that encourage compliance and monitoring. It is also necessary to harmonize Mexican legislation so that environmental safeguards are reflected.
- Ensuring that the General Law for Sustainable Forestry Development or LGDFS includes the minimum criteria that must be contained in prior, free and informed consent and promote that it be established in writing with clear conditions and in accordance with the traditions and customs of the indigenous peoples or local communities in question.
- Creating a single land management framework that establishes integrated planning for the use of natural resources to prevent forest loss and degradation driven to sectoral interests from continuing.

Forest Governance and Reform Opportunities: At present several reform initiatives are being discussed in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, which, if approved, will have a direct impact on forest governance. In order to promote good governance in the process of Committee reading and plenary vote on these initiatives, our recommendations are as follows:

- To carry out specialized legal studies to strengthen the initiatives presented taking into account the forest governance framework and the importance of integration with biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development objectives.
- To encourage the discussion of initiatives to open a participatory process in which different stakeholders can provide feedback to strengthen the initial drafts.

- To seek the harmonization of the different initiatives tabled at Committee scrutiny stage, since they are closely related and this could avoid later reforms. To this end, it is important to promote a close collaboration between the Congressional commissions that are carrying out the scrutiny and reading processes and encourage the participation of the various stakeholders. One option would be to carry out workshops with working groups that allow to outline specific proposals.
- To ensure that the proposed reforms will have the necessary budget so that the public policies that derive from them are implemented and have continuity. At this point the Treasury and Public Credit Secretariat (*'Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público'* or SHCP) plays a key role, since it maintains close communication with the Congress to verify budgetary issues and even has come to halt initiatives with a significant budgetary impact.

Conclusions

Mexico has made and is making significant efforts to strengthen the legal and institutional framework that underpins its forest governance and to integrate it with the objectives of biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development, which would contribute to compliance with applicable international commitments. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve substantial progress and promote fundamental changes capable of generating benefits that would permeate the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources and the development of communities.

The first is to integrate key aspects of forest governance such as law enforcement, institutional strengthening, stakeholder participation, transparency in decision-making and the strengthening of public policies in the environmental, economic and social sectors, seeking a balance between legal, institutional and political frameworks, as well as their alignment and coordination. This would strengthen the governance of forest ecosystems and improve the implementation of public policies and decision-making processes.

The second is to strengthen the integration of conservation and sustainable development objectives into different productive and social sectors whose policies generate impacts on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and especially on forest ecosystems. Although some efforts have been made so far, such as the construction of biodiversity integration strategies in four productive sectors (forestry, agriculture, fisheries and tourism), in the medium and long term it will be necessary to rely on sufficient political will and inter-institutional coordination to achieve its implementation, including the gradual integration of more relevant sectors such as transport, communications, energy and mining among others.

With regard to this point, it is vital to promote the harmonization of the legal framework, especially the laws on productive or extractive sectors which have provisions that are contrary to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Also, it is important that training is provided to the agencies involved, to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity and to promote a true appropriation of the criteria for conservation and sustainable use.

A third challenge that could become a good opportunity would be to take advantage of the national and international context. The hosting of COP13 in Mexico represented an opportunity to give relevance to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the political agenda, as evidenced by the presentation of forest reform and biodiversity initiatives. In addition, the country invested financial and human resources in the elaboration of the different biodiversity integration strategies and other initiatives that were presented as the ENBioMex in the framework of the event. That is why it is very important that sufficient resources be allocated to implement the commitments signed in the framework of COP13 and to continue strengthening the legal and institutional framework on forest governance in the country.

Another key point as regards the international context is that Mexico ought to share with other countries, especially in Latin America, its good practices on the model of community

forest management that has been possible thanks to the titling of land rights in the name of *ejidos* and communities. As mentioned earlier, community forest management is one of the greatest strengths of forest governance in the country and sharing the Mexican experiences with decision makers in other countries can help replicate good practices and invest in the development of sustainable management schemes in community forest territories. Building good forest governance can attract international funding, which can strengthen compliance with national objectives on forests, biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. In relation to this point, it must be taken into account that the integration of these goals is an opportunity to make the allocation of resources more efficient since many programs can be complementary.

With regard to the national context, the initiatives tabled in the Chambers of Deputies and Senators constitute a starting point to strengthen the national legal framework that underpins forest governance and integrate it with biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. However, there is still a long way to go from the analysis, discussion and Committee adopting process to the plenary voting stage and, if approved, to their implementation.

In the short term, during the process of analysis, discussion and Committee voting, it will be necessary to promote the broad participation of diverse stakeholders to ensure that the proposed changes respond to the needs of those who will implement the public policies that may derive from the laws.

Also, in view of the close relationship between the bills currently under discussion in Congress, and in order to avoid overlaps and divergences resulting in the need for subsequent reforms, it will be essential to generate the conditions needed for a strong linkage and coordination between the Chambers of Deputies and Senators, the organs of the executive branch involved and the interested parties, with the aim of seeking harmonization during the Committee reading stage, which must start with the setting of definitions and permeate administrative and implementation mechanisms.

An essential issue is to strengthen the role of the legislature in building good forest governance. Legislators play a key role in governance as they are the democratically elected representatives of citizens and are responsible for developing the legal instruments from which forest policies are generated. It is fundamental to promote greater involvement and specialization of legislators in these issues.

Another important challenge to strengthen forest governance in the short, medium and long term is to promote sustainable forest management (SFM), seeking the active participation of all relevant stakeholders of the forestry sector in the implementation of the various regulations, programs, strategies and public policies, from the federal level down to the local, and paying special attention to the holders of forest resources who are mainly indigenous peoples and local communities. In this sense, one of the main tasks will be to conserve and increase the social, economic and environmental values of forests through the strengthening of community forest management and of government support for the creation of technical, administrative and organizational capacities.

Another important issue is to replicate the good practices in community forest management that have been documented in the country, since sustainable forestry is a great opportunity to boost the development of forest dwellers who generally have high levels of marginalization and poverty.

Another key issue is to boost the productivity of the sector, for which it is important to diversify the supply of forest resources including non-timber forest products, to make the transformation mechanisms more efficient, and to create public-private partnerships that strengthen the trade balance and to bring domestic products closer to competitive markets.

In addition, it is vital that Mexico builds a solid financing and investment structure for the forest sector which guarantees a steady flow of resources to support policies and programs to achieve forest governance in the medium and long term. Otherwise the commitments will remain on paper and will never be implemented. In this sense, achieving the construction of public policies that respond to a long-term vision will be another challenge, because in Mexico the lack of policy continuity due to the sexennial changes is frequent, and this affects especially the goals included in the plans and programs.

It is also necessary to design guidelines for differentiated attention to indigenous peoples and local communities that bring them closer to institutional support schemes so that they can benefit from the existing support mechanisms for sustainable forest management (SFM), as well as to advance dissemination efforts so that information can reach them in a timely manner. It is essential to promote full legal recognition of traditional knowledge so that it can be preserved and valued. It is also important to seek greater integration of gender equality in the national legal and programmatic framework. At present a very low percentage of women have rights or access to land, so it is important to work on this point and to promote a gradual empowerment allowing equal access.

In sum, the country's forestry sector is facing an interesting paradox, as each challenge can become a window of opportunity to strengthen forest governance and fulfill the objectives of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development. This will depend, to a large extent, on the creation of the necessary conditions to continue strengthening the political will to promote the fundamental changes that the sector requires, involving all relevant actors and sectors to implement them, and achieve a balance between legal and political frameworks, as well as their respective alignment and coordination.