Changing Paradigms in the Forestry Sector of Latin America

Coordinating convening lead author: Glenn Galloway
Convening lead authors: Sebastião Kengen, Bastiaan Louman and Dietmar Stoian
Contributing authors: Fernando Carrera, Luis González and Jorge Trevin

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Forest cover in Latin America

Forest cover %
(number of countries)

- 75 - 100 (4)
- 55 - 74 (5)
- 45 - 54 (6)
- 35 - 44 (5)
- 25 - 34 (5)
- 14 - 24 (7)
- 3 - 13 (6)
Diverse forest resources

- Latin America: home to world’s largest continuous tropical forest (Amazon basin) and one of the most threatened tropical forest biomes.
- Diverse forest types cover about 960 mill. ha, or 46.9% of its surface area.
  - However, forest area per capita is less than 1 ha in all Central American countries except Belize (4.9 ha/capita) and about 1 ha in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Colombia and Ecuador. In the Amazonian region, forest area per capita is much greater.
- In Central America and in some South American countries, forest plantations, agroforestry and silvopastoral systems have a growing importance in wood production.
Planted forests (1)

- Plantations cover over 11 mill. ha, or less than 1.2% of the forested area, but supply 27% of industrial roundwood (in Chile 85%).

- The contribution of plantations to the forestry sector development varies greatly across the region.

- The largest plantation areas are in Brazil (4.9 mill. ha), Chile (2.0 mill. ha), Venezuela (0.8 mill. ha) and Argentina (0.9 mill. ha).
Planted forests (2)

• In Central America, planted forest cover some 400,000 ha.

• Fast growing *Pinus* and *Eucalyptus* are the most planted species both in industrial and non-industrial plantations.

• Teak and Gmelina have emerged as important alternative plantation species in Central America.
Problems in forestry (1)

Critical problems facing the forestry sector include deforestation and forest degradation.

- The deforestation rate in Central America between 1990 and 2000 was 1.9% and in South America 0.4%.
- Forest conversion to agricultural uses, urbanization, colonization programmes and infrastructure development, contribute to the rapid decrease of forest cover.
- Agricultural products, including meat, are important export commodities for all Latin American countries. Expansion of agricultural activities, including pasture continue to put pressure on forest resources.
Problems in forestry (2)

Secondary and fragmented forests are rapidly expanding.

• National efforts have mainly concentrated on the management and conservation of primary and degraded forests. Secondary forests are often seen as a land reserve for agricultural expansion.
Main societal issues behind forest loss and degradation

Forestry problems are tied to diverse factors:

- widespread problems of poverty and population growth
- marginalisation of those living in or near the forests
- high opportunity costs to maintain forest cover close to urban centers
- policies favouring or encouraging the conversion of forests to other land uses
- dispersed, restrictive, unstable and/or unclear policy framework
- limited government capacity to control forest use, corruption and illegal logging
- lack of secure land tenure and territorial disputes
- violence and insecurity in remote forested regions
- adverse public opinion about the use of exotic species.
Changing paradigms aim for sustainable development

- Awareness of the complex nature of the relationship between society, forests and the environment, and limited success of initiatives to date, have given rise to changing paradigms related to forest use and conservation.

- Expanding forest fragmentation and areas without continuous forest, have created the need for new approaches to conserve forest functions, services and economic benefits.

- Changing paradigms seek to increase the contribution of forest resources to sustainable development and poverty reduction, in other words, strike a balance between these interrelated, long-term goals.
Growing emphasis on governance reform

A transition towards greater decentralization and local participation in forest management and control:

- A growing proportion of forest sector development responsibilities are delegated to local governments and/or communities. However, they often lack resources, expertise, authority, and in some cases, interest to take on their expanded mandate.
- The participation of rural communities and indigenous groups in the public debate on forestry sector development is increasing.
- An increasing number of community forestry initiatives and community-based forest enterprises are adding value to forest products.
- Stable, clear rules are essential for the success of community-based forest enterprises.
Emphasis on empowerment and increasing competitiveness

- **Efforts to empower peasant and indigenous groups include:**
  - recognition of their rights to have a voice in themes that affect their lives
  - granting or clarification of land tenure in forested areas and provision of long-term use rights
  - a growing role of organisations representing indigenous groups in governance and policy issues.

- **Emphasis on the competitiveness of forest enterprises rather than focussing on the technical dimensions of forest management:**
  - emphasis is increasingly being placed on strengthening business management and marketing of forest products produced by community organisations and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as well as on forging strategic and equitable alliances between communities and other participants in supply and/or value chains.
Paradigm changes in forest management

Emphasis in forest management is shifting:

- from management of primary forests to management of forest fragments, degraded and secondary forest
- from technical forest management planning to adaptive management based on continuous monitoring.
  - Conditions and eventual impacts of forest operations are not fully known at the time of planning, and they evolve over time.
  - In order to make informed adjustments in management prescriptions over time, monitoring must include critical aspects of both natural and social environment.
Changing paradigms related to plantations

New tendencies are emerging related to plantation forests:

– growing importance of non-industrial plantations
– increasing interest in native species and in the impacts of plantations
– growing interest in high value hardwood species, especially teak in Central America
– discontinuation of government financed incentive programmes leading to innovative partnerships between industry and farmers in some countries
– certification of plantations is increasing, especially related to the production of pulp and paper
– growing public sentiment against plantations of exotic species, e.g. in Brazil, some states have increased bureaucratic hurdles for parties interested in establishing exotic species plantations.
Changing paradigms related to markets

- Focus has shifted from a few high value species for export markets, to increasing sales of diverse natural and plantation species.

- The importance of payment mechanisms for forest environmental services is growing, though supply greatly outweighs demand.

- Certification has emerged as a link between buyers and sellers of timber from well managed sources, but the gap between industrial and community forest operations is widening, as the latter often lack funds for certification when NGO or project subsidies are not available.
Challenges in achieving a sustainable forestry sector (1)

Challenges include how to:

• achieve a better balance between production, protection and conversion forests while recognising societal demands for diverse goods and services from them

• increase agricultural productivity in order to decrease the demand for new lands for the expansion of agricultural activities

• slow down the expansion of agricultural areas and migration into some forested areas and improve land-use planning in others, so that areas converted to agriculture are capable of sustaining long-term agricultural production
Challenges in achieving a sustainable forestry sector (2)

...how to

• control illegal logging

• adequately consider the social and cultural context in forest sector development

• achieve inter-sectoral planning required for forest values to be integrated into extra-sectoral decisions

• better articulate technical, business development and financial services to strengthen managerial and entrepreneurial capabilities of community groups and SMEs
Challenges in achieving a sustainable forestry sector (3)

...how to

- develop effective management and conservation practices for high-value tree species
- conserve and enhance the ecological functions of fragmented forests at the landscape level.
- create a policy environment which encourages entrepreneurs and landowners, including peasants to take part in forestry activities.
Sustainable forest management (SFM) is a multi-dimensional concept, and advancing it requires progress and acceptable conditions in social, cultural, biophysical, technical, ecological, institutional, political and commercial dimensions.
The way forward (2)

There is a need for flexibility and creativity in responding to the diverse conditions that characterize the forestry sector in Latin America.

- Multi-stakeholder platforms are important for strategic and operational planning and shared implementation of progressive initiatives.
- SFM can seldom be the sole answer to the economic needs of the indigenous and peasant communities, but it can complement to other livelihood activities and strategies.
- Progress in SFM requires serious commitment to create enabling environments that reward those who practice responsible stewardship and that facilitates forest management and related commercial and entrepreneurial activities.