



For more information, please contact Coimbra Sirica, csirica@burnesscommunications.com, or +1 631 757 4027

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 GMT, WEDNESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER (LOCAL TIME IN MEXICO CITY: 18:01, TUESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER) OR FOR PUBLICATION IN MORNING NEWSPAPERS ON WEDNESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER

Editor's Note: For full text of report, summary and background information, please visit: www.ccmss.org.mx and http://www.rightsandresources.org/documents/quarantined/forestry_management.php (Login: rri Password: rights1)

New Study: Mexico's Forest Communities Excel in Good Management, Outperform Other Strategies for Capturing Carbon to Slow Climate Change

Review of 10 Years of Research Suggests Lessons for COP16 Negotiators in Cancún: Community Forest Owners Can Reduce Illegal Logging, Forest Fires, CO2 Emissions, Poverty

Mexico City (23 November 2010) – A study released today amid debate over how to reduce the loss and degradation of the world's most vulnerable forests suggests that negotiators at the upcoming UN climate change conference in Cancun should look to Mexico's forest communities for a solution.

When allowed to benefit economically from their forests, forest communities in Mexico—made up of indigenous peoples and formerly landless laborers—are able to capture carbon more effectively than any other public or private group working to slow deforestation, according to a comprehensive review by researchers with the Consejo Civil Mexicano de Silvicultura Sostenible (CCMSS, www.ccmss.org.mx) and the Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI, www.rightsandresources.org), a US-based international coalition.

“This study demonstrates that community forest management has become a powerful instrument for achieving forest conservation while reducing poverty in some of our poorest communities,” said CCMSS President Sergio Madrid, a co-author of the report. “The findings also suggest that community-based forestry, when supported by clear and legal rights to timber and other forest resources, is the best strategy for reducing carbon emissions, conserving biodiversity, and lifting earning power.”

The authors reviewed 10 years of research looking at the economic and environmental impact of “community forest management” and compared the results of this approach to that of initiatives that use reforestation, protected areas, and industry plantations to limit the destruction and degradation of forests. This is highly relevant to the debates on options for CO2 mitigation in Mexico, where more than 70 percent of the forests are owned or managed by local communities. Hundreds of local communities control approximately 40 million hectares of land in parcels spread across the country.

Forests Central to Climate Change Negotiations in Cancún

Earlier this month, negotiators at environment talks in Japan agreed to reduce the global rate of deforestation by at least half by 2020. Next week, representatives of 198 nations will gather in Cancún in an effort to draw up the details of an agreement with implications for forests and forest communities worldwide.

An agreement to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation, known by its acronym REDD, would reward poorer nations for setting aside, managing, and restoring forests in ways that lock away carbon.

Global trade in forest carbon offsets could be worth up to US\$30 billion a year, according to the United Nations, and a portion of the money would go to local forest communities. But investors are concerned about possible corruption and a lack of resources to implement the agreement on a local level. RRI's Deborah Barry, a co-author of the report, argues that forest communities worldwide have shown themselves to be skilled managers of the forests, in part because they live in them and depend on their continued good health for their own survival.

"Community foresters are on the lookout for things like tree robbers, fires and pests," said Barry. "Think of a forest as if it were a government parking lot full of valuable antique cars in the middle of a distant city. Would the best caretakers be a local community's history buffs, or bureaucrats on the other side of the country?"

According to studies carried out by RRI, national governments have recognized community rights to more than 25 percent of the developing world's forests and resources, including timber in some cases. "This means that Mexico's experiences with community forest management will become more and more relevant," said CCMSS's Madrid.

Mexico's deforestation rate has declined dramatically in the last five years, but reducing it further will require the expansion of its successful community forest management system, according to the new study. Forests are responsible for more than 12 percent of annual carbon emissions in Mexico, more than that of the gas and oil sectors combined. And though there are at least 2,300 community forest enterprises that produce timber under government-approved management plans in Mexico's forests, not all the forests are managed in a way that benefits the people or the environment.

"Internationally, Mexico's image communicates an odd dichotomy," Barry said. "Though renowned for its highly respected system of community forestry, it continues to struggle with an unacceptably high rate of deforestation."

Strong Tenure Rights Vital to Success of Forest Communities

Mexico's experience shows that in regions where the system of community forest management is strong, mature, and supported by local government policies, forests are intact. It is in the nation's tropical forests, where tenure rights are less clear, that rates of deforestation are highest.

Barry and her co-authors report that forests under community management capture carbon at higher rates than under other forestry regimes because of practices that conserve forest cover. Community management systems generate incentives for communities to sustainably manage the forests, carefully harvesting some trees while leaving the young ones to grow, providing permanent control of pests and forest fires and capturing carbon by storing it in products made of timber.

"When you take care of the forests and use some of the older trees to make furniture, doors, frames and houses, you prevent fires while storing the carbon in a long-term form," said Madrid. "This also combines all the right components for protecting biodiversity and promoting economic health."

Making Hard Choices for Common Good in Quintana Roo

In the tropical state of Quintana Roo, for example, a coalition of stakeholders created technical teams almost 25 years ago that worked closely with communities to build community forest enterprises. Long-standing logging concessions had ended, opening up an opportunity for the groups, which were allowed considerable autonomy.

"This may have been the first time in the history of tropical America that communities acted to reverse degraded land use on their territory," Madrid said. "They used a traditional governance system as a starting point and figured out how to make it work. A turning point was the decision to reduce and stabilize the amount of mahogany and cedar they harvested, something a private logging company working on public lands would never have done."

Although the communities depended on logging as a source of income, they gradually reduced their logging volumes, showing great environmental responsibility in assuming control of forests that had been severely depleted by years of overharvesting. In doing so, they also conserved carbon stocks.

In their review of published literature, the authors note that efforts to set aside protected lands and implement campaigns to stop illegal logging have been successful at times, but often have excluded forest inhabitants from lands that had been in the hands of their families for generations. Conversely, forest communities throughout the developing world, when provided with the right to manage their own forests and given support to develop their enterprises, have demonstrated improvements in forest conservation, carbon stocking, and higher local standards of living.

“The evidence in Mexico and elsewhere is sufficient to argue for the expansion of this model to smaller and more degraded forest areas,” said CCMSS’s Iván Zuñiga. “It offers significant new opportunities for the capture of carbon, both in Mexico and beyond.”

Zuñiga says the new study suggests that expanding the pool of forest dwellers who practice community-based forestry could play a significant role in conserving the nation’s forests.

“About 21 million hectares of degraded forests and jungles in Mexico have shown a total loss estimated at 2.7 Gigatons in carbon,” Zuñiga said. “The same territory, using community forest management strategies, could capture up to 46 million tons of carbon per year over the next 25 years, with additional benefits for forest owners and the strengthening of social capital as a basis for sustainability.”

###

El Consejo Civil Mexicano para la Silvicultura Sostenible, A.C. (the Mexican Civil Council for Sustainable Forestry, known as CCMSS) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that encourages and promotes conservation of forest ecosystems that are managed by the forest communities themselves. Known as Manejo Forestal Comunitario, or MFC, this system is supported by CCMSS members, who work in collaboration with communities and ejidos to put in place sustainable practices in forest management and improve the development, conservation, industrialization and commercialization of lands under the management of forest communities. In this way, the CCMSS seeks to promote local processes aimed at strengthening the local economy, community forest management and the development capabilities of forest peoples and their communities. <http://www.ccmss.org.mx/index.php>

The Rights and Resources Initiative (RRI) is a coalition of organisations dedicated to raising global awareness of the critical need for forest tenure, policy and market reforms, in order to achieve global goals of poverty alleviation, biodiversity conservation and forest-based economic growth. Partners currently include ACICAFOC (Coordinating Association of Indigenous and Agroforestry Communities of Central America), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Civic Response, the Foundation for People and Community Development (FPCD), Forest Peoples Programme, Forest Trends, the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), Intercooperation, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Federation of Community Forest Organisations of Nepal (FECOFUN), and the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific (RECOFTC). For further information, visit the Web site at: www.rightsandresources.org.