

State, Forest, and Community: Power Reconfigurations and Challenges for the Decentralization of Forest Administration in Guatemala

Silvel Elías¹ and Hannah Wittman²

Abstract

The recent political decentralization of forest administration in Guatemala is a complex process involving a diverse set of actors and management practices. Communal and regional forest lands have been historically considered as ‘open access’ by a state which has systematically ignored ancestral rights and destroyed local communities. However, decentralized forest management has been effectively practiced since the colonial period as rural communities across the country and especially in Guatemala’s Western Highlands have struggled to maintain access and control over their lands and natural resources despite ongoing pressure from dominant social actors. Community groups and social networks have collectively defended local institutions including communal property, a system of traditional knowledges and customary rights, and local government systems in Totonicapán, San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Jalapa, Jutiapa and other regions where forests form part of Guatemala’s collective patrimony.

These historical relations of contention over forests are now confronted by government initiatives in the last decade that promote the deconcentration of forest regulation to the municipal level. At the same time, growing collective action within local communities demands the recognition and restitution of ancestral rights over land and natural resources, including national, communal, and municipal forests. Community forestry in Guatemala confronts many challenges, especially in the areas of social inequality and democratization. Experiences discussed here from several communities in the Western Highlands illustrate the local preoccupations, knowledges, strengths and local institutional capacities facing the current process of decentralization. For decentralization of the forest sector to fulfill its objectives to control deforestation and environmental degradation, it is necessary to establish a better balance of power between the State and a diverse set of stakeholders, empowering local organizations and increasing capacity for local management regimes in communities and municipalities.

¹ Profesor, Facultad de Agronomía, Universidad de San Carlos, Guatemala y Doctorante, Universidad de Toulouse, Francia. Email : silvelias@yahoo.com

² PhD Candidate, Department of Development Sociology, Cornell University. Email: hkw2@cornell.edu

Introduction

In Guatemala, recent laws passed in favor of decentralizing forest administration seek to streamline natural resource use and conservation while increasing the participation of civil society in decision making around forests. This process has emerged from an imposed structural adjustment program combined with the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords that placed a formal end to 36 years of civil war. The Peace Accords included provisions for recognizing the historical claims of local communities over land and natural resources. In spite of recent advances in these areas, progress has been slowed by a lack of dialogue between local stakeholders and government agencies and by the maintenance of powerful interests that have dominated national history. In practice, decentralization of forest management in Guatemala has taken the form of “municipalization”, or deconcentration, as a highly centralized forest regulatory system has been delegated to municipalities.

The principle challenge for decentralization in Guatemala is not only to transfer new responsibilities and administrative functions to local levels, but also to fundamentally transform historical power relations that have long excluded local villages and communities from participation. In the forest sector, this challenge proves to be doubly problematic as land, forests and other natural resources have historically been principle sites of social contention between local communities and government institutions, especially municipalities.

This chapter analyses the situation of local institutions for forest management with emphasis on Guatemala’s Western Highlands. In this area, rural communities have preserved important mechanisms that have served to protect the few remaining forest areas in the Western Highlands since ancestral times, despite adverse conditions of social exclusion, extreme poverty, high population density and extreme land concentration. In this chapter, we describe the historical diversity and complexity of forest management systems in the Western highlands, and evaluate the recent decentralization initiatives, asking the following questions: In what ways does the Guatemalan process of decentralization via municipalization of forest regulation take into account the effectiveness of local institutions. How can rural communities overcome historical situations of exclusion vis-à-vis municipalities to become important allies in the efforts to democratize forest management?

The Struggle for Control of Land and Forests

Guatemala’s Western Highlands comprise one of the poorest areas in Latin America, where the poverty rates exceed 93 percent among indigenous populations and population density is the highest in the country outside of Guatemala City. Over 95 percent of farms in the region suffer from poor soils and are of sub-subsistence size. Highland forests are important not only because they produce benefits for local populations, but also for their contribution to global systems including protection of water sources and conservation of endemic species (Elías Gramajo 1997).

The source of present-day deforestation and conflict over the Western Highlands’ remaining forests can be located in the agrarian policies imposed since the colonial period that have defined mechanisms of access, property rights, and land use. The confrontation between indigenous populations that sought to defend their patrimonial rights and governmental insistence on creating municipal jurisdiction for social control of these populations (Tiu and

García 2002) generated a chaos expressed in agrarian conflicts that have continued to the present day. During the colonial period, the Spanish Crown appropriated all land, subsequently granting “royal titles” to select indigenous communities. During the Liberal period at the end of the nineteenth century, state pressure was exerted on these communities to sell, rent, or divide their lands. Despite the existence of the “royal titles,” land rights were lost or ceded to municipalities, which in turn passed use rights or titles to large coffee producers. Legal battles over these land rights continue to the present day. Despite provisions in the 1996 Peace Accords, which commit the state to recognition of traditional and communal land rights for indigenous communities, almost no such recognition has yet been achieved. Today, 70 percent of land is concentrated in just 7.9 percent of rural properties (INE 2004).

The link between poverty and environmental degradation has been well-recognized in the literature (see esp. Blaikie and Brookfield 1987). This link holds true in privately owned areas in Guatemala, which are almost completely deforested. However, aggregate forest cover in the Western Highlands has been retained at a higher rate than other areas in Guatemala over time. Various studies have attributed this conservation to greater community participation in the preservation of communal forest areas administered by a social collective, i.e., a village community or municipality (Veblen 1978; Utting 1993; Elías Gramajo 1995; Katz 1995; Elías Gramajo 1997; Secaira 2000; Wittman forthcoming). Villages, in particular, continue to exert historically continuous control over these areas based on internal norms, customs, and regulations that are periodically renegotiated and reinforced to fortify customary law, physical boundaries, and local social relationships. For example, local forest guards and village leaders (honorary, rotating positions) police forest areas for infractions, oversee communal plantings, regulate harvests, and maintain common lands for multiple community uses. Until the present day, management and administration have been differentiated between community and municipal entities depending on local history, customary rights, and circumstances. These mechanisms constitute the basis for the design of locally sustainable management institutions that have made possible the conservation of resources worldwide, but which often have lacked adequate recognition in the design of national and international policies (McKean and Ostrom 1995; Ostrom 2000).

The Forest Sector and the Crossroads of Institutional Scale

State initiatives to regulate land and forest use during the last 30 years have been based on three principal laws and a variety of administrative agencies. At least four levels of decision-making for forest management exist, overlapping at different moments during any given decision process. First (going from above to below in accordance with their relative influence), the international level is comprised of international agencies and NGOs that place pressure on the Guatemalan government to adopt policies, agreements, and global discourses (structural adjustment, free trade, global climate change, biodiversity, sustainability). The influence of these international actors has been especially pronounced in the creation of parks and protected areas, which tend only to take into account the protection of environmental services (biodiversity, carbon sequestration) while failing to recognize the forest goods and services utilized by local populations.

A second level is represented by the group of governmental agencies that are linked to land and forests (National Forest Institute (INAB); National Council for Protected Areas (CONAP); Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARN); and the Land Fund) and also to a series of projects, networks, commissions, coordinating councils and

technical assistance offices, rapidly diversifying and with policies changing according to the reigning government's orientations. At a third level, "intermediary institutions" including municipal governments and a variety of NGOs act as extensions of the state or are used by the state to extend its influence or control towards civil society.

Finally, a fourth level includes grassroots organizations with varying foci and levels of integration. Most related to forest initiatives are: the Indigenous Community,³ *Parcialidades*,⁴ Local Associations, Indigenous Mayoralties, Auxiliary Mayoralties, Local Development Committees, Communal Assemblies, and other organizational forms. Of these, only the first three have legal status while the others operate based on customary and consuetudinary rights. The lack of legal representation is often utilized by the state to delegitimize the validity of these organizations, even though diverse experiences and studies in the Western Highlands have shown their effectiveness and contributions to sustainable forest management practices.

These four institutional levels, all of which participate in the current process of decentralization of the forest sector, are linked and result in a complex dynamic of scales, encounters, contradictions, and cooperation related to forest management. In Guatemala, the decentralization process currently underway follows a top-down model, a process that tends to "increase the power of the state at local levels, creating new organizational structures to control local populations" (Ferguson 1994); in addition to the fact that invariably institutional levels are cross-referenced by ever more powerful and diverse market pressures for forest goods and services.

Rights and Responsibilities: Where Is Forest Decentralization Going?

What is the true direction of the decentralization process in Guatemala, given the complex framework of forest management institutions and the current emphasis on deconcentrating authority for forest management to municipalities? Is it enough to strengthen the technical and administrative capacity of municipal agencies? What is the space or role assigned to community organizations?

Faced with the failure and high costs of governmental forest management (PAF-G 2000), the state is currently attempting a decentralization policy that is justified based on the need to organize and ensure a better use of forest goods and services. The recent rapid changes in and implementation of policy imply that no final evaluation can yet be made regarding the direction or impact of the evolution of the forest sector and community forest management institution. However, considering the historical relations of power surrounding forest access and management, the complexity of the related institutional sectors, and above all the concrete experiences of the communities that currently manage communal forests, several observations can be made to help understand and reorient the current process of decentralization.

The new decentralization model was initiated in 1996, in an attempt to leave behind the image of bureaucracy and corruption inherited from previous government forest agencies. At the same time, the state sought new mechanisms to organize social relations around forests,

³ The Indigenous Community is a legal entity operating mainly in Eastern Guatemala, adopted by local organizations to ensure autonomy over local territorial issues.

⁴ *Parcialidades* are communal and kin-based organizations mainly oriented around community forest management in the Western Highlands.

and to delegate specific responsibilities to municipalities, who were guaranteed a position on the Director's Council of INAB, the newly created National Forest Institute. A sub-agency (BOSCOM) was created to deal specifically with community groups, but since 1996 has developed relationships with just five communities, instead focusing more on working with municipalities, especially in the creation of Municipal Forest Units (UFM). Why has BOSCOM reoriented its objective and in what way has this affected community forest management?

INAB has focused on strengthening municipal capacity, to the degree that these function as extensions of the central government. Conversely, communal forests have been a "headache" for the government institutions. As these forests represent practically the only remaining forest cover in the Western Highlands, both government and NGOs are interested in their preservation. However, community organizations continue to have little confidence or credibility in government institutions, as historically relations with these entities have placed communal patrimony at risk. Skepticism and resistance to government initiatives remains high. For example, at the end of the 1970s, the USAID Project *Bosques Comunales* (exercised through the now extinct government forest agency INAFOR) pressured various communities of the Western Highlands to implement forest management activities based on timber extraction, arguing that such management would improve forest benefits and forest health. Communities saw the initiative as a means for external actors to appropriate local timber and other forest resources. As a result, the community of San Francisco el Alto in Totonicapán made the decision to prohibit the municipality to enter into agreement with any external entity (governmental or non-governmental) related to the question of communal forest administration and resistance to government initiatives in the region has continued. Nonetheless, the communities continued with their own programs of forest administration including the development of tree nurseries and seedling production, reforestation, forest monitoring, and harvest regulation, resulting in a maintenance of forest cover to the present day.

Conflict, Adaptation, and Resistance: Decentralization and Community Forest Administration in the Guatemalan Highlands

The Western Highlands represent a rich diversity of community and traditional management experiences. Guatemala's 23 ethnic and linguistic indigenous groups comprise over 65 percent of the country's population, and each community has developed a set of relations and experiences over time based on local conditions, resources, and history. Power relations and dynamics within communities are as diverse as the communities themselves. The traditional cargo system of communal governance historically has had little formal participation by women and the poorest sectors of society. However, in practice women and poor people have traditionally maintained their access to fuelwood and forest products, while men have the right to harvest timber. Women also have important roles in seedling production, reforestation, and maintenance of communal areas for grazing. Issues of gender equity are at the forefront of discussion in several indigenous organizations in Guatemala, and continue to be an issue of negotiation.

Guatemala's recent policies for deconcentration and decentralization of forest administration and management do little to recognize the diversity of local systems that are adapted to the history and local conditions of each community. Instead of integrating a process of strengthening local capacity and increasing participation for all sectors of society (women, poor, etc.) in forest administration, the policies have resulted in creating yet another layer of

exclusion in which municipal governments and external organizations have assumed the right to regulate forest use and management.

a. Negotiations between local and municipal actors

One positive experience illustrates the potential of municipal-communal negotiations over forest access and administration. Recognizing the importance of local actors in forest administration, the municipalities of San Juan Ostuncalco and Concepción Chiquirichapa in Quetzaltenango have used their capacities, newly awarded through the forest decentralization initiatives, to pursue collaboration agreements and reaffirm links to community groups. Here, local capacity is not only recognized by the municipal government but efforts are also made to strengthen it. In San Juan Ostuncalco, a municipal office has been created to coordinate and support capacity-building activities with local groups, while in Concepción Chiquirichapa the municipality has signed an agreement with local farmers to regulate the harvest of forest litter, traditionally used as the principal organic fertilizer in potato cultivation.

However, this type of positive collaboration has not been the norm throughout the Western Highlands. In Quetzaltenango, the historical relationship between municipal and village level authorities has been characterized as much more horizontal and balanced when compared to other municipalities in the region (Grandin 2000). The main contradiction expressed in Guatemala's Western Highlands is that despite the growing recognition of local contributions and capacity for forest protection, state policies and actions have not always respected or strengthened these initiatives. Instead, local experiences abound in which the state has destroyed, annulled, failed to recognize or co-opted local institutions. Instead of recognizing and legitimizing local and community-level capacity for forest management and protection, the Guatemalan decentralization process in general seeks administrative efficiency through the imposition of top-down models of forest control operationalized through municipal forest offices.

Governmental policy and INAB regulations now require communal forests to be submitted to licensed technical "management" practices, which clash with local perspectives. Community members associate "management" with timber harvest practices and clear-cutting, based on what they see occurring on private and government-managed forest areas. Communal forests, on the other hand, are conserved for fuelwood extraction (usually deadwood) and harvest of forest litter and other non-timber forest products. In addition, these forests serve as sources for local water supplies (perhaps the most valuable benefit of Western Highland forests) and as sites for sacred or religious activities. Government insistence on a specific kind of externally approved and licensed "management" ignores local practices, knowledge, norms, rights, local governments and local arrangements or "institutionalities" that have persisted for many generations and have sustained local forest management practices.

b. Adapting local administration models and relations with external entities

Due to communication difficulties and lack of legal recognition, many local communities have resorted to creating or transforming themselves into legally constituted entities in order to better negotiate with municipal and state entities. The results of these "new" organizations have been diverse, as some were created as a strategy to represent the entire social collective/members while others were created to represent special interest groups or small groups of power-holders (Elías Gramajo and Reyna Contreras 1999). For example, the

Parcialidad de Vicentes was formed just 15 years ago (in comparison to all the other *parcialidades* in Totonicapán which date back more than half a century) as a local defense strategy to reaffirm territorial rights following a conflict with the state. Currently, this group continues to administer the forest with strong coordination with the traditional local governments, the *Alcaldía Auxiliar* and the *Asamblea Comunal*.

After many years of autonomous management, the *Parcialidad Baquix* in the municipality of Totonicapán established links to BOSCOM to implement a forest management plan in the area. This *parcialidad*, like all others in Totonicapán, existed for the purpose of forest administration, had legal standing, statutes, and even a registered land title for the communal forest holdings. To facilitate its work with the *parcialidad*, BOSCOM required the creation of a Forest Committee with higher standing and authority rights than the original leadership. This Forest Committee became an intermediary between the original Director's council and Assembly and the government agency. The internal Forest Committee emitted even more rigid regulations for access and forest extraction in order to comply with the BOSCOM Forest Management Plan. These new regulations principally affected the poorest members of the *parcialidad* and members of the neighboring village that even without formal membership in the *parcialidad* had traditionally been allowed to harvest forest products.

In similar cases in the area, grassroots organizations resisted compliance with rules imposed by outsiders. Realizing that they were putting their control over local processes at risk, the local organizations chose to continue operation based on their own collective initiatives (ADEGO et al. 2002).

Implementation of New Entities and Rules

a. New models and regulations

As part of their alliances with state agencies and environment-development organizations, several municipalities have adopted new forest administration models that have in common a total centralization of decisions at the municipal level, in addition to the creation of new administrative entities. For example, in the municipalities of Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, Zunil and San Martín Sacatepequez, the ProBosques project has stimulated the creation of Protected Areas Departments (DAPs) to facilitate implementation of new rules and regulations, in which local management is formally and completely suspended in favor of municipal administration.

b. Reduction of benefits, criminalization of local practices, and reduced environmental protection

In the municipalities of Sibinal, Tacaná, Ixchigúan and San José Ojetenam in the department of San Marcos, communal forests are administered by community groups that have continued to struggle for recognition of their ancestral rights to these forests. Informal agreements had long existed between municipal and village level governments regarding use rights over municipal forest resources. Here, local control has historically resided not in the municipalities, but in community organizations that have been linked to the resources and have effectively protected the resource and limited access and use to local needs including fuelwood, water protection, local construction, and space for religious activities (Wittman 2001; Reyna 2002). With the recent creation of Municipal Forest Offices as part of the decentralization process, decisions and licenses for forest activities are now generated from

these offices. This measure has increased municipal power over the forest areas within municipal territorial boundaries, but has in turn severely weakened the capacity of local groups who historically have protected the forests, putting forest stability at risk in addition to limiting forest access for traditional users.

With the installation of Municipal Forest Offices, municipalities have effectively increased administrative capacity and have obtained access to resources from licensing fees authorized within their jurisdiction. However, these funds are rarely reinvested or shared with the communities that live in and near the forests under question. For example, in the municipality of Ixchiguán in the department of San Marcos, each communal forest is linked to a specific local community group charged with control and administration. The establishment of a Municipal Forest Office in Ixchiguán has given fuel to municipal elites that seek to remove control over the remaining timber in the municipality from the hands of the traditional village groups.

In this sense, the municipality-INAB agreement is mutually beneficial given that the former obtains income and increases their jurisdiction, and the latter is able to “delegate” the implementation of their politics and administrative instruments to the municipality. However, communities have been faced with increased responsibility (and accountability) for forest protection, while local benefits have been reduced as well as local administration and negotiation power. For example, where permission for fuelwood extraction had traditionally been granted at the local or community level, municipal licenses are now required even for subsistence use from communal forests, thus “centralizing” control over these resources. At the same time, failure to obtain a license for extraction thus criminalizes subsistence use of local resources. Local experience indicates that fewer than 10 percent of local residents are able to manage the bureaucratic obstacles and costs to obtain municipal licenses, which require travel to distant cities in addition to literacy and financial resources to pay the fees. Fearful of retribution for failing to obtain a license, many families either harvest fuelwood at night or send women and children to collect the wood, a task that traditionally had been carried out by men. Usurping the authority of local forest guards in favor of municipal forest guards has reduced forest monitoring overall and led to an increase in illegal logging by outsiders.

c. Creating and co-opting new local associations

An example from recent history illustrates some possible outcomes of new intermediate layers, where space is created for corruption and co-optation. In the 1980s, an epidemic infestation of pine beetle (*Dendroctonus sp*) and restrictions imposed by the armed forces during the civil war limited the capacity of local administration and led to an increase in illegal extraction of forest products by non-community members. Faced with rapid forest degradation, several external environmental organizations offered assistance, but found that local groups lacked legal standing. The environmental agencies promoted the constitution of a new umbrella organization Uleu Ché Já in the municipality of Totonicapán, meant to serve as a parallel institution to the traditional representatives of the *Asociación de las Alcaldes Auxiliares* and the *Comité de los 48 Cantones*. The new organization quickly became a point of reference for community forest management initiatives, but soon lost credibility, suspected of being controlled by the municipality, which for years had openly opposed the recognition of local and community management rights.

Some local community organizations in the Western Highlands have recuperated from this “state co-optation,” however, and traditional community groups have continued to function despite the political pressures and governmental intervention (Dary et al. 1998).

From Communal Forests to Protected Areas: Where Does Community Administration Fall?

Faced with the difficulty of implementing forest management plans and with the growing wave of conservationist discourse, the future of the Western Highland communal forests may be increasingly directed towards newly created Protected Areas, moving even further away from a decentralized or local communal forest management. Promotion of such areas dates back to the 1960s, when the National Park Maria Tecún was created to protect the communal forests of Totonicapán. The highlands’ many volcanoes were next declared as parks and more recently, protected areas were designed around Lake Atitlán, the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes and the Visis Cabá Biosphere. However, in almost all of these cases government implementation never left the planning stages.

Since 1997 several municipalities are converting communal and municipal forests within their jurisdiction into protected areas with the support of environmental NGOs, for example, in Tecpán Guatemala, Quetzaltenango, Zunil, Totonicapán y San Martín Sacatepequez, Cuilco and Tacaná. This tendency is linked to the growing interest of international organizations in Western Highland forests, including the World Bank with the Integrated Management of Natural Resources in the Western Highlands (MIRNA) project, the Inter-American Development Bank with the Prioritization of Strategic Areas in the Western Highlands (PARPA) project, projects under the Global Environmental Facility/United Nations Development Program, and other similar initiatives.

Government forest protection measures have had harmful results in certain cases. For example, in the 1980s, measures were taken to protect the pinabete tree (*Abies guatemalensis*), one of the Western Highlands’ endemic species that is severely threatened by commercialization as a “Christmas tree.” This measure was a typical example of responsibility transfer and reduction of local benefits, as the state totally restricted any local use of this traditional resource and in return required communities to participate in its protection, ignoring that in many cases community organizations had specific measures in place to control use of this species, used in certain instances as wood for construction. With the new legal measure many communities abandoned their protection systems as they no longer were allowed to use the resource, which brought as a consequence an increase in illegal harvest.

The intensification of these new proposals around communal and municipal forests of the Western Highlands have resulted in misgivings about the future role of rural communities as key actors in the local administration of their traditional natural resources, and the benefits that local communities will gain through the new initiatives.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

The new powers assigned to municipalities by the 1996 Forest law, the creation of Municipal Forest Units (UFMS) and access to forest incentives by municipalities and communities have been referenced by a recent CIFOR study as positive examples of the decentralization of the forest sector in Guatemala (Ferroukhi and Echeverría 2003). However, little attention was

given to the impact of these measures on existing local institutions and administration programs.

Here, we have sought to show that local institutions in Guatemala have played an important role in the management and administration of local and communal forest resources. Strengthening municipal forest management programs is important in the current process of decentralization in Guatemala, but does not go far enough to guarantee an authentic decentralization to traditional user communities. Currently, the decentralization program does little to support the rights of local institutions linked to communal forests, and actually weakens systems of communal management that have protected the few remaining blocks of Western Highland forest.

Access to forest incentives by rural communities is insignificant in comparison to the number of (mostly private sector) actors currently participating in state-subsidized reforestation and forest management programs. Strict government requirements for participation (including legal land titles and legal standing for community groups) are out of reach for many communities. The subject of land titles, for example, continues to be taboo in many parts of the Western Highlands, where communities historically have engaged in struggle with the state to protect their land rights which continue to be the source of ongoing territorial conflicts (Lovell 1985; Davis 1997; Palma and Taracena 2002; Grunberg 2003). The required elaboration of a technical forest management project is another barrier due to its cost. Finally, projects that must conform to INAB-approved management practices generally do not make allowance for local needs.

These financial incentive programs could potentially be useful to local communities not only to finance forest programs, but also to stimulate other productive activities and strengthen local organizational capacities and social equity programs. For example, AMEDIPK, a women's group in Huehuetenango, has achieved recognition for their forestry activities; another association in Sololá has successfully based its employment and income strategy on forest activities. However, additional study is needed to better understand how these forest resources contribute to improving living conditions, social equity, and local administration. Caution must be taken to ensure that resources are not used to consolidate the power of existing traditional economic and political elites.

The major efforts under the framework of forest sector decentralization have focused on strengthening municipal forest administration capacity. This has increased the power of the municipalities to generate income (via licensing and sales of municipal forest products) and has also increased their control over all forest resources within their territorial jurisdiction. It has also extended state control over these natural resources, as municipalities have historically represented the strengthening of central power over society. The process of forest sector decentralization has been severely limited, however, by the failure to develop instruments to implement decentralization as a national strategy. In the forest sector, current programs resulting from the 1996 Forest Law assign responsibilities to municipalities, but are not linked to other decentralization initiatives such as those emanating from the more general Decentralization Laws passed in 2002 requiring the implementation of Urban and Rural Development Councils.

Increased capacity for forest management at the municipal level does not necessarily mean an increase in the capacity of local-level management and administration. Recent experiences have shown the growing subordination of community organizations to municipal agencies to

be counter-productive within a framework of policies designed to improve the quality and benefits of forests for local development. Local institutions linked to the governance of communal resources in the Western Highlands have made important contributions to the conservation and management of remaining forests in the region, but this contribution has not been sufficiently valorized within the decentralization policies currently underway in the forest sector. How can local capacity for forest management be recognized and strengthened through a decentralization program? We recommend the following:

- ? Regularize and legalize communal land tenure based on ancestral rights to guarantee community control over forest use and administration.
- ? Develop community land use planning programs in coordination with state agencies. This may be a challenge. In addition to issues of power inherent in such negotiations, the state views land use planning as a technical exercise rather than a social and political process.
- ? Create a dialogue around how traditional forest management practices and knowledge can be integrated with technical forest management practices promoted by state and non-governmental agencies. At the global policy level, increasing recognition and valorization [validation?] of local knowledge and management systems should facilitate discussion on how to integrate these objectives.

Within the framework of the proposed decentralization of forest and natural resource management, governmental and related agencies should establish mechanisms to recognize and support local administration carried out by local institutions, adapting these mechanisms to local specificities and strengthening local organizations. Such measures would serve to consolidate social capital and concretize the proposals of grassroots organizations, establishing clear rules of interaction but not subordinating local governance structures to municipal authorities and other governmental, political, or economic agencies. Only thus can a truly effective and democratic decentralization occur for Guatemala's forest administration system.

References

- ADEGO, AMEDIPK, CASODI, MAGA, and RUTA
2002 Poder Local, Participación y Descentralización. Lecciones aprendidas desde la perspectiva y experiencia de organizaciones locales. Unidad Regional de Asistencia Técnica.
- Blaikie, Piers, and Harold Brookfield
1987 Land Degradation and Society. New York: Methuen.
- Dary, C., S. Elías, and V. Reyna
1998 Estrategias de sobrevivencia en ecosistemas frágiles. Los chortís en el oriente de Guatemala. Guatemala City: FLACSO.
- Davis, Shelton
1997 La tierra de nuestros antepasados. Estudio de la herencia y la tenencia de la tierra en el altiplano de Guatemala. Guatemala City: CIRMA.
- Elías Gramajo, Silvel
1995 Tenencia y Manejo de los Recursos Naturales en las Tierras Comunes del Altiplano Guatemalteco. In XIX International Congress/Latin American Studies Association (LASA) 95. Washington, DC.
- Elías Gramajo, Silvel
1997 Autogestión Comunitaria de Recursos Naturales: estudio de caso en Totonicapán. Ciudad de Guatemala: FLASCO.
- Elías Gramajo, Silvel, and Violeta Reyna Contreras
1999 Comunes y Cacicazgos: El control de los bosques y territorios en Totonicapán. Guatemala City: FLACSO.
- Ferguson, James
1994 The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ferroukhi, L. , and Echeverría
2003 Las políticas de gestión forestal descentralizada en Guatemala. *In* La gestión forestal municipal en América Latina, ed. L Ferroukhi. 89-112: CIFOR -IDRC.
- Grandin, Greg
2000 The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Grunberg, G.
2003 Tierras y territorios indígenas en Guatemala. Guatemala City: FLACSO/MINUGUA/CONTIERRA.
- INE, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas
2004 Informe del Censo Nacional Agropecuario. Guatemala City:
<http://www.segeplan.gob.gt/ine/index.htm>.
- Katz, Elizabeth G.
1995 Guatemala: Land Tenure and Natural Resources Management.: World Bank, Latin American and the Caribbean Regional Office.
- Lovell, W. George
1985 Conquest and survival in colonial Guatemala: A historical geography of the Cuchumatán Highlands 1500-1821. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- McKean, M., and E. Ostrom
1995 Bosques comunales en propiedad común: ¿Solo un vestigio del pasado ? Unasylva 46:3-15.
- Ostrom, Elinor

- 2000 El gobierno de los bienes comunes. La evolución de las instituciones de acción colectiva. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- PAF-G
2000 Guía para el Establecimiento de Oficinas Municipales de Administración de Recursos Naturales/Forestales en Guatemala. 37. Guatemala City: Plan de Acción Forestal para Guatemala.
- Palma, Gustavo, and Arturo Taracena
2002 Procesos agrarios desde el siglo XVI a los Acuerdos de Paz. Guatemala City: MINUGUA.
- Reyna, Violeta
2002 Autogestión en los bosques del Altiplano Marquense. Guatemala City: FLACSO.
- Secaira, Estuardo
2000 La Conservación de la Naturaleza, el Pueblo y Movimiento Maya, y La Espiritualidad en Guatemala: Implicaciones para Conservacionistas. 1-101. Guatemala City: PROARCA/CAPAS/USAID, UICN, FCG, and the Nature Conservancy.
- Tiu, R., and P. García
2002 Los Bosques comunales de Totonicapán, Historia, situación jurídica y derechos indígenas. Guatemala City: FLACSO - MINUGUA.
- Utting, Peter
1993 Trees, People, Power: Social dimensions of deforestation and forest protection in Central America. London: UNRISD/Earthscan.
- Veblen, Thomas T
1978 Forest Preservation in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. The Geographical Review 68:417-34.
- Wittman, Hannah
2001 Fragmentación y Manejo de Terrenos Comunales y Municipales en el Altiplano Occidental de Guatemala: Experiencias de las Municipalidades de San José Ojetenam y Ixchiguán, San Marcos. Guatemala City: CARE.
- Wittman, Hannah
forthcoming Negotiating Locality: Decentralization and Communal Forest Management in the Guatemalan Highlands. Human Organization.

Acknowledgements

Research support and funding for this work came from FLACSO-Guatemala, the Facultad de Agronoma at USAC, INAB, CARE/Guatemala, the Cornell Institute for International Food and Development (CIIFAD) and the Mario A. Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University. We are also grateful for comments from Violeta Reyna and Charles Geisler as well as the anonymous reviewers.