



# Lacandón – Forests for Life

## 1. Newsletter 2011



Dr. Volkhard Wille,  
Executive Director,  
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Forest Foundation

*Dear Friends of the Tropical Rain Forest,*

*in your hands you hold the first issue of our newsletter. Through it we would like to provide you with an initial look at the Lacandón – Forests for Life project and tell about the work we do in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park. We are dedicated to protecting this unique, diverse, and simply beautiful forest and to making an active contribution to protecting our climate. This project will be conducted over the next four years with financial assistance being provided by the E.U. and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment. Our biannual newsletter will keep you informed about the current events taking place, our experiences gained through the project, and the progress it has made. Thank you for your interest and support in protecting our rainforests!*



Oscar Manuel Nuñez,  
Executive Director,  
Defensores de la Na-  
turaleza Foundation

*Sincerely,*



Dr. Volkhard Wille



Oscar Manuel Nuñez

## 1. General Design of the Project

The poorer countries of this earth are increasingly being threatened by the consequences of climate change, as global warming continues. Logging and forest degradation are responsible for up to 17 percent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions globally. We can make a vital contribution to protecting our climate by slowing down the rate of forest loss. In light of this, forest projects are becoming more and more popular, with actions ranging from official climate protection policies enacted by members of the United Nations (UN) and its Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) to the voluntary contributions of individuals aiding in climate protection measures. However, there is often the problem that these actors lack experience in how to exactly implement these activities and what their impact would be. Furthermore, there are risks involved: The positive effect of long-term climate protection can be jeopardized by fires, for example, which would release the greenhouse gases trapped by the forests into the atmosphere again. Additionally, there are other projects being implemented with negative consequences to biodiversity and the local communities, causing more damage than actually helping in the end.

This is where the Lacandón – Forests for Life pilot project steps in. Through innovative measures is making its contribution to **maintaining biodiversity** and **strengthening local development structures** to help **reduce deforestation** in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park. The approaches used in implementing the project on the local level and the experiences gained there will be discussed at national and international level in forums on forest and climate protection. Pursuing these **dialogues** is yet another focus of the project.

The project is supported by the European Union (EU) and the International Climate Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMU). The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the position of the European Union and the Ministry.

Supported by:



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of the Federal Republic of Germany



The forest of the national park provides the only means of existence for many families living here.



Globally 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> of tropical rain forests are destroyed each year; in Guatemala the rate is nearly 700 km<sup>2</sup> annually.



## 2. Overview of the Project

The tropical rain forest in northern Guatemala is a hotspot of biodiversity—it is one of the most biodiverse and, at the same time, most endangered ecosystems in the world. It provides refuge to endangered species such as the scarlet macaw and the jaguar. In addition the region is abundant in cultural and historical points of interest, such as the ruins of numerous Maya temples, some of which are in many pockets of the area hardly accessible to people. Yet this forest is in immediate danger because the rate of deforestation in northern Guatemala is extremely high due to forest fires, illegal logging, cattle ranching, and encroaching settlements. The Sierra del Lacandón National Park was set up in 1990 to halt this development. With an area of 202,865 hectares, the park is a core zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve, the largest natural conservation area in Guatemala. Some 95,529 hectares are forests that have been well preserved, and another 54,000 hectares are currently being regenerated. Even though the area is protected, an average of 1,240 hectares of forest land in the national park is being cleared every year. In the area there has been a lack of effective protection measures enacted, which require careful planning and meticulous management. These measures involve funding that Guatemala's government cannot procure by itself.

### ► Reducing Deforestation

This is where the Lacandón – Forests for Life project steps in, having set a goal of reducing deforestation in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park. The involvement of local communities and protection of biodiversity are two key components of the project. Together with the local communities activities to conserve intact forest areas and to reforest other areas will be carried out in order to slow down the rate of forest loss. Along the same lines, the national park needs more frequent patrolling and more park staff to protect the park from illegal logging and settlements deep within the park borders.

### ► Maintaining Biodiversity

Habitats with a large biodiversity can remain stable if intact forest areas are preserved. Areas that have been damaged are reforested with native species allowing the forests to regenerate to a near-natural state. This acts as a key contribution to maintaining biodiversity. Camera traps are amongst



others used to monitor the positive effects on the biodiversity and can, for instance, control the local population of key species such as the jaguar and tapir.

### ► Strengthening Development Structures

The third focus of the local activities is strengthening local development and involving the communities in the project. The Sierra del Lacandón National Park had already been the home to ten communities when the area was placed under official protection. An effective and long-term protection of the area can only be guaranteed by integrating these communities into the project's activities. The Guatemalan National Council of Protected Areas (known by its Spanish abbreviation, CONAP) and the Defensores de la Naturaleza Foundation (the "Defenders of Nature," abbreviated in Spanish, FDN) share the management activities for the national park. They work together with local communities to conclude cooperation agreements that contain the guaranteed usage rights for the lands of these communities within the park borders. In exchange the communities pledge to actively contribute to forest protection initiatives and sustainably use resources. A system of incentives through which landowners receive payments in return for protecting the area and reforesting individual sites was devised based on this in cooperation with community members. Furthermore sustainable sources of income such as the planting of local crops or beekeeping, which provide a steady income for community members, are being promoted as alternatives to



The Sierra del Lacandón National Park is home to the rare scarlet macaw.



The numerous ruins in the park are testimonies of the Maya culture.



The region is known for its amazing richness in plant and animal species



The exceedingly rare jaguar can also be spotted in the national park.



illegal settlements or squatting. Local committees are also being set up as a means for the local population to take an active role in implementing the project. Regularly scheduled courses and seminars sponsored by the FDN and OroVerde, the Tropical Forest Foundation, are offered to assist committee members and support their work and participation in the project.

### ► Promoting dialogue

Project activities directed at promoting dialogue are being conducted at national and international level, in addition to the local measures. The experiences gained in the project implementation will serve as examples for developing criteria for use in national and international regulations that integrate protection of biodiversity and promotion of local development initiatives into forest and climate protection measures.

Project reports on the experiences gained will be prepared on a regular basis at national level and provide a basis for the government of Guatemala in national legislation. A group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in climate protection activities through forest projects in Guatemala was established. Its members convene regularly to exchange ideas on the possibilities, challenges, and experiences from their respective projects and closely follow the developments in national laws and mechanisms in Guatemala.

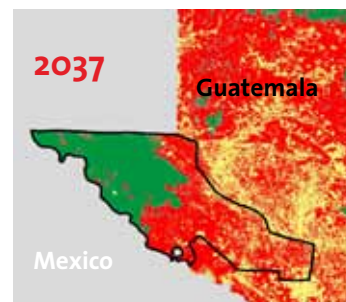
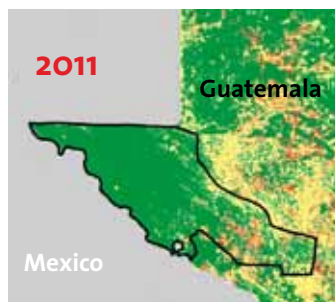
At the international level the experiences from the pilot project will be discussed in networks and together with other project coordinators. In this manner information can be exchanged and conclusions discussed so they can eventually flow into the development of international policies. The aim here is to improve the implementation of projects aiming at reducing emissions caused by deforestation in the long term and to develop criteria that guarantee the protection of biodiversity and the participation of the local communities in the projects.



Alternative, sustainable sources of income can secure the livelihood of local families.



Illegal activities can be stopped by stepping up patrolling activities.



The results of an international study show the projected extent of future deforestation (red) in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park (black), if no further measures to protect the forest are taken. The areas depicted in yellow have already been cleared. Under the scenario there would hardly be any more rain forests in the northwestern part of Guatemala by 2037.



Native species are being grown in nurseries to be used in reforestation activities.



The seedlings are planted on destroyed or degraded forest areas.



### 3. Project Implementation

#### OroVerde, the Tropical Forest Foundation

OroVerde was founded by renowned individuals from business and the natural sciences in Germany in 1989.

The non-profit foundation actively initiates, supports, and promotes projects directed at preserving rain forests and promotes environmental education in this area in Germany. OroVerde supervises the Lacandón – Forests for Life project and is in charge of publishing the project results in international circles. OroVerde provides professional guidance in Guatemala in planning and subsequent implementation of activities. This work involves regularly trips to the site to coordinate the systematization of the experiences gained from the project.

[www.oroverde.de](http://www.oroverde.de)



#### The Defensores de la Naturaleza Foundation

The Defensores de la Naturaleza (FDN) Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation dedicated to sustainable development and conservation activities and was founded in Guatemala in 1987. The foundation prepares forest management and protection plans and provides guidance and support to the local communities regarding reforestation and forestry in general. The FDN and the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) have been working together to manage the Sierra del Lacandón National Park since 1999. The FDN implements activities both locally and nationally in Guatemala through the Lacandón – Forests for Life project. The foundation's work concentrates on protecting the forest areas in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park, cooperating with members of the local communities, exchanging experiences, and carrying out work in the political realm in Guatemala. The FDN actively participates in international discussions by sharing its experiences from the project.

[www.defensores.org.gt](http://www.defensores.org.gt)



### 4. Project partners

**The National Council of Protected Areas** (abbreviated in Spanish, CONAP)

[www.conap.gob.gt](http://www.conap.gob.gt)



**Eberswalde University of Applied Sciences, dedicated to sustainable development**

[www.hnee.de](http://www.hnee.de)



### 5. Project financing

**EUROPEAN UNION (EU)**



**The German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety** (abbreviated in German, BMU)



## 6. Previous Activities

### Risk Management Workshop As Part of the Lacandón – Forests for Life Project



The park's current situation was analyzed at the risk management workshop.

In March 2011, the Eberswalde University of Applied Sciences (HNEE), the FDN, and OroVerde organized a risk management workshop as it relates to the national park, in which representatives of the CONAP also participated. The three-day workshop aimed at formulating a

systematic analysis of the current situation in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park. A special focus was placed on the future risks that could pose an increased threat to the park and in turn become more relevant for the park management. These threats include environmental factors such as climate change and socio-economic factors such as political instability.

Factors that are yet unknown also need to be evaluated in order to prepare appropriate recommendations for the future and develop proper strategies. The team from the university modified the approach laid out in the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation ([www.conservationmeasures.org](http://www.conservationmeasures.org)) and offered it as an option by which interrelations between the individual factors can be visualized in a clear manner and in turn show the complexities, interaction, and interdependence of the various factors. The team at the Center for Ecnics and Ecosystem Management, which was founded in Eberswalde shortly afterward, is now applying and further developing the methodology known as MARISCO (which is Spanish for manejo adaptativo de riesgos y vulnerabilidad en sitios de conservación, or “adaptive handling of risk and vulnerability in conservation sites”) in other protected areas.

The workshop resulted in numerous new suggestions for management strategies that could be clearly derived from the comprehensive analysis being developed. The large circle of participants meant that a wide range of significant perceptions were available, and it was possible to map out a broad picture of the park situation, leaving only few “blind spots” and informational gaps, and to identify risks and opportunities.

The event was conducted with financial assistance from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (abbreviated in German, BMZ) as part of a program to adapt to climate change in cooperation with the German aid agency Welthungerhilfe.

### Root Cause Analysis of Deforestation in the Sierra del Lacandón National Park

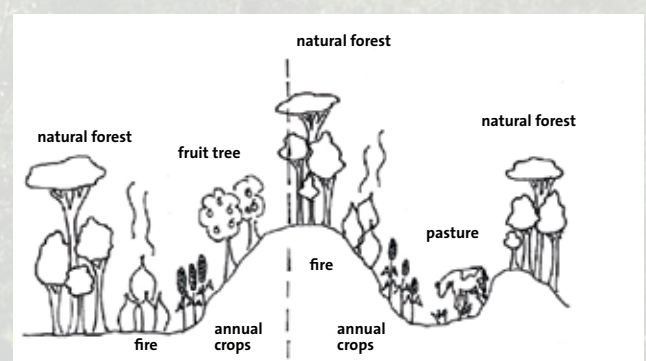
Processes and specific factors of deforestation were examined during a preliminary stage of the Lacandón – Forests for Life project in order to understand the socio-economic causes of logging in the national park. The results from this analysis were based on remote sensing material, terrestrial data and participatory surveys in 11 communities on the rural community's ways of life.

Three main groups of actors that contribute to deforestation were identified:

- 1) Small farmers, who grow food products such as corn, beans, and fruit for their own consumption.
- 2) Cattle ranchers, who clear forests for profitable pasture land.
- 3) Illegal settlers in protected areas, who are often offered land by middlemen.

Through the surveys it became apparent that factors like migration and accessibility of the forest areas (e.g., along the waterways) play an important role in the expansion of deforestation. Similarly, forest fires that get out of control and move from agricultural to natural forest areas contribute substantially to forest loss. The marginal presence of governmental institutions (e.g., police, other government agencies etc.) is weakening the control and compliance with regulations.

According to the root cause analysis, deforestation in the park can be reduced by better adjusting the practices of small farmers to forest conservation, for instance by traditional agriculture systems like agroforestry. Additionally, alternatives to livestock farming for generating income have to be created. These include the use of non-timber products but also forestry incentive payments. The control of the region has to improve through an increased presence of governmental institutions in order to inhibit illegal activities. The first activities of the Lacandón – Forests for Life project were developed with these assessments in mind.



Example of a profile of current land use in a community area in the park. The scheme was developed together with the communities.



## Communications Activities with the Local Communities

Through the first contact with the local communities it was possible to exchange information on climate change and the ecosystem services of the forest. The communities were encouraged to develop and share their own project ideas and potential activities. To this end, seven workshops were offered to members of the Unión Maya Itzá, La Lucha, La Técnica Agropecuaria, Guayacán, Villa Hermosa, San Juan Villa Nueva, and Pozo Azul communities dealing with the “impacts of climate change on our community.”

Nearly 300 community members took part in the events. They described how they experience the impacts of climate change on their daily lives. In addition, they explained how they have adapted to this process and discussed the measures to limit the risks of climate change they are actually implementing or could implement in the future. The communities asked for a means to optimize their traditional methods of agriculture for cultivating corn and beans and for better systems of agroforestry to be able to feed their families. Furthermore, they expressed a desire to have their own sources of income by implementing intensive agroforestry systems with marketable products and by contributing to the conservation of the forest through incentive mechanism.



The young trees in the reforestation areas...



... require a great deal of care in the first few years so they grow healthily.



The “Impact of climate change” workshops were well attended by members of the communities.



The park residents had the opportunity to contribute their ideas during the workshops, too.

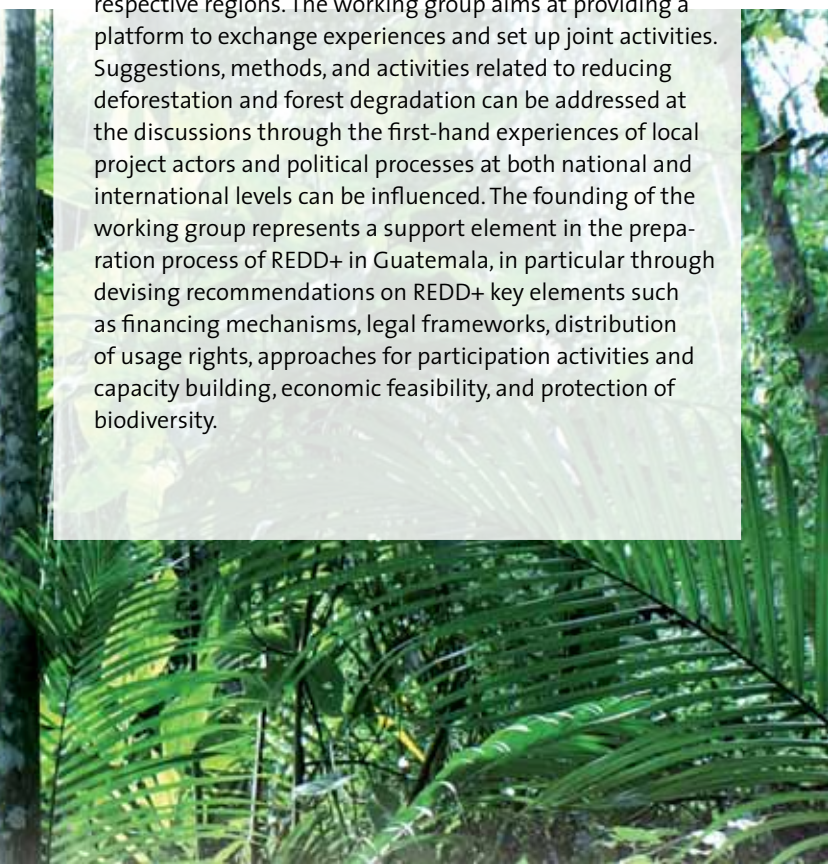
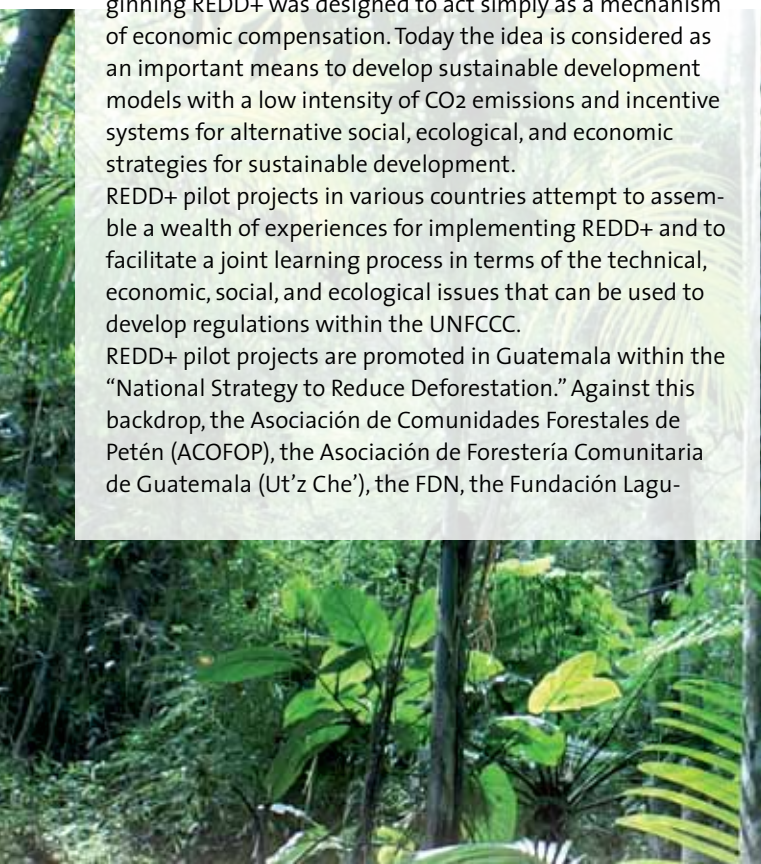
## Establishment of the REDD+ Project Group

REDD+ stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. This concept has gained footing at international level as a mechanism for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly because the consequences of climate change are becoming clearer and more serious, particularly for communities in developing countries. In the beginning REDD+ was designed to act simply as a mechanism of economic compensation. Today the idea is considered as an important means to develop sustainable development models with a low intensity of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and incentive systems for alternative social, ecological, and economic strategies for sustainable development.

REDD+ pilot projects in various countries attempt to assemble a wealth of experiences for implementing REDD+ and to facilitate a joint learning process in terms of the technical, economic, social, and ecological issues that can be used to develop regulations within the UNFCCC.

REDD+ pilot projects are promoted in Guatemala within the “National Strategy to Reduce Deforestation.” Against this backdrop, the Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén (ACOFOP), the Asociación de Forestería Comunitaria de Guatemala (Ut’z Che’), the FDN, the Fundación Lagu-

na Lachuá (Fundalachuá), the Asociación Guatemalteca de Exportadores (AGEXPORT), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Rainforest Alliance, and OroVerde from Germany established a working group in March 2011. All members of this „Grupo de Implementadores REDD+“ implement REDD+ activities themselves in their respective regions. The working group aims at providing a platform to exchange experiences and set up joint activities. Suggestions, methods, and activities related to reducing deforestation and forest degradation can be addressed at the discussions through the first-hand experiences of local project actors and political processes at both national and international levels can be influenced. The founding of the working group represents a support element in the preparation process of REDD+ in Guatemala, in particular through devising recommendations on REDD+ key elements such as financing mechanisms, legal frameworks, distribution of usage rights, approaches for participation activities and capacity building, economic feasibility, and protection of biodiversity.





## Preparatory Work for Reforestation Activities

To date, the reforestation activities have been well-received by the communities, in particular where implementation of these activities is tied to incentive systems. However one of the difficulties has been the availability of seeds and seedlings of native species for larger scale reforestation programs because the commercial sector primarily deals with cultivating non-native timber species. To counteract this shortage of native species and prepare further planting activities through incentive mechanisms, a nursery was opened in the community of La Técnica Agropecuaria, where nearly 60,000 seedlings from 15 different species of native plants are being grown. This selection of species includes fruit trees, agricultural crops, and timber: breadnut (*Brosimum alicastrum*), Spanish cedar (*Cedrela odorata*), Tropical American Mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), Machiche (*Lonchocarpus castilloi*), Aripin (*Caesalpinia velutina*), Amole (*Sapindus saponaria*), Sapodilla (*Manilkara zapota*), Kapok (*Ceiba pentandra* -> national tree of Guatemala), Guanacaste (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*), Logwood (*Haematoxylum campechianum*), Cypré (*Cordia alliodora*), Swartzia (*Swartzia* sp.), Marupa (*Simarouba amara*), Canalete (*Cordia dodecandra*), and Xaté Palm (*Chamaedorea ernesti augustii*). Members of the La Lucha, La UMI, and La Técnica Agropecuaria communities will receive the seedlings once they are robust enough to be planted in the envisioned areas around the park. In this manner these communities can contribute to responsible land use and the plants will act as an alternative source of income for the community members.



A working group was set up to negotiate the cooperation agreements.



The cooperation agreements are discussed at community meetings.

## Progress Made in Negotiating the Cooperation Agreements

Legislation in Guatemala enables the right of residence for villages already existing within protected areas. For this reason the CONAP in its capacity as official administrators of the Sierra del Lacandón National Park penned cooperation agreements intended to minimize the negative impact on the park's biodiversity caused by human settlement. An interinstitutional group was founded on June 20, 2011, to actively advance the negotiations and activities that are necessary for signing the cooperation agreements with the seven communities of the national park. This group is made up of members of various institutions that provide guidance to the communities in this respect: the CONAP, the Secretariat for Agrarian Affairs of Guatemala (known in Spanish as SAA), the FDN as co-administrator of the national park, the municipality of La Libertad, and the religious organization Pastoral Social de la Tierra (from the towns of Santa Elena and La Libertad). The cooperation agreements aim at providing a guarantee for the communities' historical land rights in order to legalize their settlement status. In this manner social conflicts can be reduced and more security for natural resource management can be provided.



Replanting the seedlings of various native timber and fruit trees.



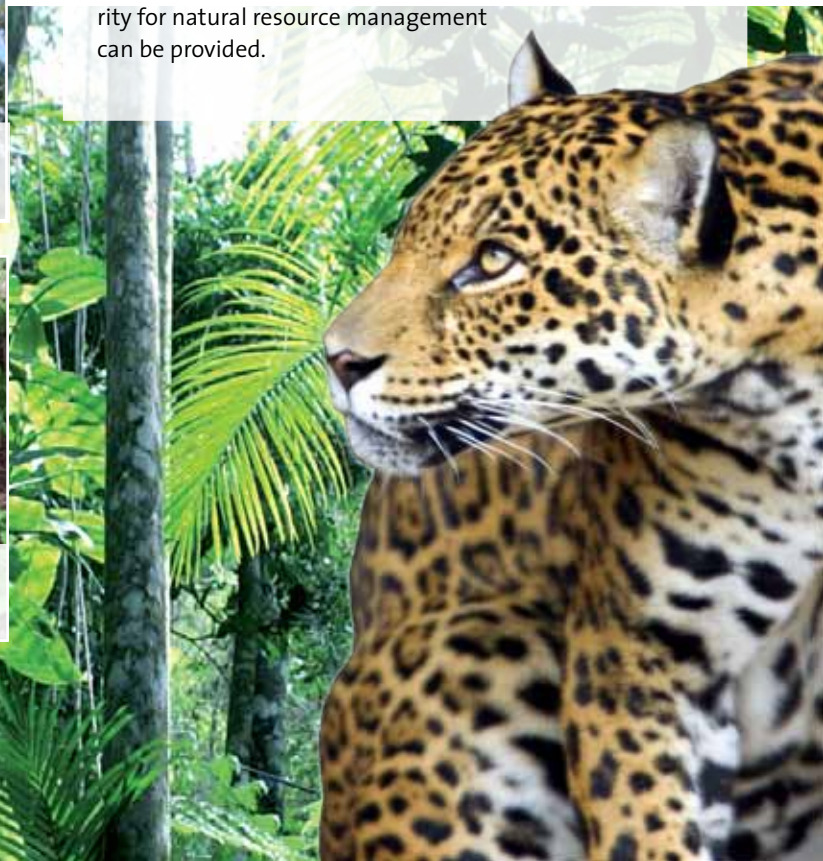
The kapok with its wide, umbrella-shaped crown is the national tree of Guatemala.



The seedlings need lots of care while growing in the nursery.



The young xaté palm trees are subsequently distributed to the communities.







## Forest Protection in International Climate Negotiations

REDD+ was officially adopted in Cancún, Mexico, at the end of 2010 in the final agreement at the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) to the UNFCCC. NGOs also played a vital role in determining the principles and safeguards that are necessary for implementing REDD+ successfully. They include respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, protecting biodiversity, prohibiting conversion of natural forests, and using the forests for the people living in the region in a positive manner. The decisive factor now is to carefully monitor that these criteria are met when taking the next set of steps in order to ensure that these positive commitments are actually put into place in the appropriate manner. The project will actively follow these developments by promoting the exchange of information in particular in terms of protecting biodiversity and the involvement of local communities. The lessons learned in the process will be published and discussed. In this manner they will find their ways into the development of international regulations and legislation.

### Important upcoming negotiation dates on the international arena:

#### October 1–7, 2011, Panama City, Panama:

Third part of the negotiations between the Ad Hoc Working Groups of the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP 16 and AWG-LCA 14) and the meetings of the UNFCCC committees and the REDD+ partnership

#### November 28 – December 9, 2011, Durban, South Africa:

17th Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and 7th Conference of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 7) as well as the UNFCCC committees and working groups

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