



Mutual learning and
partnership in promotion
of sustainable forest
management between
Mexico and Finland



COMISIÓN NACIONAL FORESTAL



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY



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Background

The first contacts in the bilateral cooperation in the forestry sector between Mexico and Finland were made already in the 1960s. Broader possibilities for economic, scientific and technical cooperation were studied in the 1970s and several symposia and training courses were organized. In 1982 a formal development cooperation agreement was made between the two parties, which was targeted at forestry development in the state of Guerrero. This represented the first phase of a more intensive cooperation between the two countries. Mutually positive experiences led to the expansion of activities to other states and the national level later in the 1980s and these have evolved since then. The almost 40-year common experience represents a unique case in international forestry cooperation between two countries.

The cooperating parties were the Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources (SARH) and later the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAP/SEMARNAT) on the Mexican side and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and later the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry from the Finnish side.

The consistent objective has been to jointly develop appropriate planning methods and tools for sustainable forest management (SFM) and to build capacity to implement it. In the initial years of the cooperation, forestry planning was not a well-established discipline in Mexico while public administration was weak. Finland had already gained experience in both areas and her experience in planning and institutional strengthening was considered a useful starting point for sharing knowledge. Capacity building has been targeted on both sides during the whole period, which makes this bilateral cooperation different from many other similar programs.

Main Phases of Bilateral Co-operation

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| 1967-80 | Seminars, training and pilot areas on improved forest management and training on forest industries. |
| 1982-85 | Long-term development plan for forestry in the state of Guerrero, community development in ejido Las Compuertas, training. |
| 1986-90 | Integrated forest management planning, sectoral analysis at national level, plantation development, development of appropriate forest harvesting and industries, training, research, community forest management in San Pedro El Alto (Oaxaca) and other communities in other states. |
| 1991 | External evaluation of the Cooperation Programme. |
| 1992-95 | Sectoral long-term planning in the state of Veracruz, forest management planning, plantation development, SME industries, research, education and training, community forestry in Ejido Ingenio El Rosario (Veracruz) |
| 1996-98 | Follow-up activities in planning, training and monitoring. |
| 1999-2000 | Assistance to the preparation of the National Forestry Strategic Plan (PEF) 2025 through a participatory process. |
| 2001-2005 | Support to the implementation of PEF 2025 with a focus on state-level forestry strategic plans, forest inventory, and education and training. |

Key Areas of Work

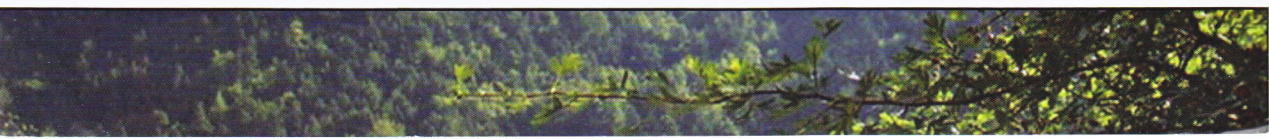


Several thematic areas have been covered by the cooperation such as:

- Sustainable forest management at community level.
- National and state-level long-term strategic plans.
- Small and medium-scale forest industries (competitive production chains).
- Development of planted forests.
- Education and training.
- Technology transfer (appropriate harvesting methods, small and medium scale wood industries, rubberwood utilization, etc.).
- Resource assessment and national forest inventory.
- Research.
- Cross-cultural dialogue and learning.

The work started with a focus on improved forest management methods. There was a strong emphasis on technical aspects of forestry development but it was soon realized that addressing socio-economic issues in a country like Mexico is fundamental. Therefore, the focus shifted to gaining in-depth experience at village level (ejidos and communities) based on which planning methods and training tools were developed and tested. In the third phase, common interventions were targeted at the policy level to contribute to creation of enabling conditions for SFM. Planning, implementation and training have been cross-cutting elements in each thematic area of cooperation.

The main focus of the bilateral program has been sustainable management of existing temperate forests. Since the last six years, linked with the elaboration and implementation of the National Forestry Strategic Plan (PEF) 2025, broader policy issues have also been addressed.



Principles of Cooperation

Bilateral cooperation has been based on a number of principles, many of which were originally implicit:

- There has been a strong long-term commitment by both parties to achieve common objectives; short-term interventions tend to be also short-lived.
- In order to create a change, a critical mass of decision-makers should be involved at different levels; in order to achieve this, long implementation periods are necessary.
- Activities have responded to the authentic priorities of both parties.
- Eye-opening on both sides is necessary to create new visions.
- On-the-ground village-level experience in local conditions is necessary for effective cooperation at policy level and a mechanism of policy feedback needs to be put in place.
- Partners have not tried to clone their own solutions as it was recognized that country situations are quite different.
- The focus has been on development of planning and evaluation tools while their application has been the responsibility of users and beneficiaries.
- Substance of plans needs to be defined by stakeholders, not foreign specialists.
- Planning is only the first step in the change process; systematic implementation, monitoring and evaluation have to be ensured as well.
- Education and training are key elements in the knowledge transfer but they should be demand-driven.
- Mutual learning is a continuous process which is built on trust and respect.
- Commercial cooperation has not been a key goal but, if feasible, it can evolve as a by-product of institutional cooperation.
- Involving students and young specialists in implementation ensures sustainability of cooperation.

Some of the principles listed above sound trivial but are easily forgotten.



Modus Operandi

Periodically negotiated administrative agreements between the executing parties have provided the overall framework for the implementation. Jointly prepared detailed work programs have specified activities to be carried out. Their implementation has been systematically monitored. Flexible revisions of work programs have been made in order to meet changing priority needs, which has ensured the program's continuous relevance to the parties.

Detailed responsibilities have been clearly allocated for executing bodies, which has enabled effective implementation. There has never been an expatriate resident project manager or long-term specialists in Mexico. National coordinators have ensured that action plans are duly implemented. Technical missions and training activities have been implemented in both countries. Participatory approaches in forestry planning from the village to national level have been pioneered throughout the cooperation programme. These approaches have created a strong ownership to the outputs by actors and beneficiaries. In addition, the approach has been cost-efficient in terms of program management.

Actors and Beneficiaries

At the central government level, the key actors have been forestry administrations, currently the Mexican National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) and the Forestry Department of the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. A very broad range of actors and beneficiaries has been involved in the program:

- State governments.
- Forest communities (ejidos).
- Forest owners.
- Forest industry.
- Non-governmental organizations.
- Universities and forestry training institutions.
- National research institutes.
- National and international financing institutions.
- Providers of forest management services.
- Technology suppliers.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the University of Helsinki was the executing agency on the Finnish side enabling extensive participation of young specialists in the program activities, which was important for mutual learning.

Impacts

Two external evaluations have been carried out on the bilateral cooperation (1991 and 2002), which have provided information on direct and indirect impacts:

Direct impacts

- Improved forest management: Significant areas have been brought under improved forest management systems in Mexico; there has also been a paradigm change in the management of temperate forests induced by the bilateral cooperation; without the cooperation this change “would have been grossly delayed or not occurred at all”.
- Introduction and operationalization of integrated participatory approaches to forestry planning at different levels (village, state, national) with due consideration of social, economic and environmental aspects as part of sustainable forest management.
- The first long-term national strategic plan for forestry 2025 in Mexico and two completed state-level plans (one being updated and three more in process) prepared through well-established procedures for participatory planning.
- Several forest communities with adequate plans and human resources to manage their forests for improved economic, social and environmental benefits.
- Strategic growth in plantation development induced by establishment of trial plots, development of planning and evaluation methods, appropriate technologies as well as training.
- Improved understanding on, and skills in, various aspects of sustainable forest management among about 2500 Mexican professionals and stakeholders ranging from farmers and workers up to technical and professional level specialists, and political decision-makers at state and national levels.
- Improved skills of about 100 Finnish professionals who have participated in the program activities.

- Integration of appropriate technologies in sectoral support programs (e.g. PRODEFOR).
- Strengthened institutions at federal and state levels with improved planning and research capabilities.
- Improved knowledge base on forest resources and their sustainable management.
- Incipient mechanisms for payment for environmental services in operation in both countries.

The most important impacts on the Mexican side have been in three areas: practical forest management on the ground, improvement of skills and understanding, and policy development. The most important impacts on the Finnish side have been in skill development through on-the job training of the participating specialists. Capacity building has been a truly two-way process throughout the cooperation.

Spillover and indirect impacts:

The most important indirect impacts of the cooperation include:

- Commercial cooperation in transfer of forest technology is intensifying including harvesting and transportation equipment, processing machinery and information technology.
- The planning tools developed have inspired commercial applications and CATIE has developed its forest management planning tools largely based on the experiences gained in Mexico during the bilateral cooperation.
- Regulation has been streamlined and organization of forest owners and communities is making fast progress in Mexico drawing on experiences in Finland.
- Establishment of a modern Master's Degree program on SFM (University of Veracruz).
- Programme-trained young specialists are well located in organizational hierarchies in both countries and many of them have been working extensively elsewhere in Latin America transferring their skills and knowledge to third countries.
- Cooperation between consulting companies in both countries is developing.



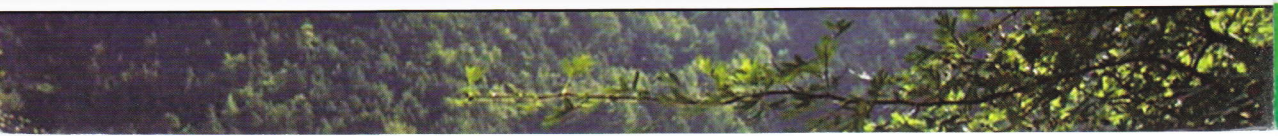
Lessons learnt

There are a number of important lessons derived from the mutual learning process:

- Ensuring long-term institutional and financial commitments and attending stakeholder interests are vital for program effectiveness; many development projects in forestry have too short a horizon to have a true impact.
- Understanding of social problems is fundamental for SFM promotion; its creation needs planned efforts.
- All levels should be addressed in capacity building to reach tangible results in SFM promotion (national, regional, local and policy, public administration, forest communities and owners).
- Policy change needs good feedback system with effective continuous evaluation of instruments and achievements, including from pilot projects.
- National forest program (NFP) processes typically involve implementation of legislative and institutional reforms which are time consuming but necessary; without such measures NFPs easily remain ineffective.
- Systematic monitoring and evaluation, coupled with periodic revision, are fundamental for success in NFP implementation. Piloting is vital in reducing risks related to structural reforms; drastic changes in regulations without careful appraisal can be detrimental
- Environmental regulation alone cannot guarantee SFM and there must be appropriate economic incentives as well.
- Inter-sectoral and inter-agency cooperation and coordination are necessary for removing perverse incentives leading to forest degradation and inappropriate land-use change, and to address structural problems such as illegal logging.
- Clear division of responsibilities between agencies is prerequisite to avoid overlapping efforts creating confusion among stakeholders and inefficiency in the use of resources.
- Paradigm changes in forest management are hard to achieve but necessary; it can take more than a generation to overcome traditional professional blueprints as the forestry profession is very conservative.
- There tends to be paternalistic views among forestry professionals, administrators and donor agencies concerning forest owners and communities; information on what they want and how they react to policy instruments and support efforts is essential but often scant.

- Empowerment of communities is a delicate process and it can be disrupted for many internal and external reasons not related to forest activities.
- Industries operating under tariff protection are doomed if they do not renovate for improved efficiency before trade liberalization.
- Balancing industrial capacity and forest production potential is possible but different situations need different tools: in less organized conditions regulatory measures are necessary to avoid excess capacity to become a driving force to illegal logging while in more developed conditions adequate information on realistic investment possibilities in internationally competitive new capacity can be sufficient.
- In the long run the best tools to eliminate illegal operations are transparency, increasing the risks and costs of illicit operators, and provision of market and other incentives to legally operating actors
- Forest owners are best forest guards.
- Established forest culture represents a strong element of social capital for achieving SFM; it can also allow reduced level of regulation lowering costs.
- Two different countries cannot share the same solutions but the basic approaches and methodologies for SFM are largely the same.
- Techniques and strategies cannot be copied from a country to another but the same analytical methodologies can be used.
- Two-way capacity building can have a strong impact but it has to be an explicit element in cooperation activities to be successful.
- Cooperation parties have to be fully transparent about their objectives and intentions to create mutual trust and true commitment by actors.
- Commercially driven cooperation can easily be short-lived but commercial relations can develop on their own in the environment of mutual confidence.
- Involving several generations in cooperation activities is important for continuity and sustainable impact.

Finally, international cooperation requires good visionaries and committed individuals to achieve the common goals.





Future Challenges

Both countries are facing similar challenges in future efforts to achieve the goal of SFM:

- Awareness raising among policy-makers, financiers and the public at large on forestry's contribution to poverty alleviation, rural development, income and employment generation
- Creation of broad-based understanding among all stakeholders on the vital role of rational utilization of forest resources for their effective conservation in the long term
- Effective implementation of the policy reforms down to field-level implementation
- Appropriate level of regulation on forestry and environment coupled with market-based and other voluntary instruments to promote SFM
- Development of correct instruments and indicators for the evaluation of impacts of forest management on the forest, environment and stakeholders
- Development of effective mechanisms for solving conflicts between stakeholders with different economic, social and environmental priorities
- Internalization of the environmental and social services of forests involving appropriate compensation mechanisms for forest owners and managers in order to enhance the quantity and quality of these services in perpetuity
- Cost reduction, risk mitigation and financing of SFM investments
- Building up and maintenance of efficient production chains and dynamic forest-based clusters to ensure international competitiveness of the sector
- Effective organization of forest owners and their continuous capacity building
- Availability of good-quality, cost-efficient technical services for forest management

Through the long history of bilateral cooperation, Mexico and Finland have established a strong international alliance in order to address these challenges together in the future.



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