

Model Forests and Conflict Management

Model Forests are neutral platforms for participatory governance bringing together a wide range of organizations and individuals who voluntarily associate and work together toward a common vision for the sustainable management of their natural resources.

Actors who apply the Model Forest concept are better able to recognize and translate conflicts into opportunities.

Conflict management at a territorial scale inherently requires the involvement of various stakeholders, including those who traditionally have not worked together or are often in conflict. This approach values local experiences and participation, ensures that each actor has a place to express themselves, participate in the decision making process and recognizes the common elements of the various viewpoints around the table.

Model Forests have provided an effective platform to enhance communication among stakeholders, joint negotiations and the building of a consensual vision for their respective areas.

Model Forest initiatives promote the progressive involvement of a variety of actors willing to identify their common interests, form alliances and work together. Based on the common elements, actors jointly define priorities, opportunities and challenges perceived locally and globally, and make decisions on how to develop on a collaborative basis, thus avoiding or minimizing the impact of intractable conflicts in other context.

Empowerment: Key to the Process

Because a Model Forest has no legal authority over the territory, it is important that civil society organizations and institutions, private companies and governments play an active role in the empowerment process. Their support is needed to establish and commit to effective programs.

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The governance structure that characterizes a Model Forest is based on the empowerment of local groups. For example, in the Lachuá Model Forest in Guatemala the Community Development Councils (COCODES) are made up of representatives of local people. Engaging in the Model Forest, offers them the opportunity to participate with several projects that meet their different needs and respond to community interests and producers they represent. It also offers more opportunities to participate in negotiations and decision-making associated with land management policy and promotes local, regional and national impact.

Supported projects allow for the building of capacity and provision of economic alternatives to members, increasing their ability to respond to changes and opportunities in terms of market mechanisms to mitigate climate change, bioenergy and forest conservation. Through the Model Forest initiative, the COCODES built a partnership with the National Council of Protected Areas (a Board member of the Model Forest) providing the opportunity to become responsible for the co-management of the Lachuá National Park. The COCODES have since become partners with the local management of the protected area and developed a tree nursery. Members of communities and farmers are directly involved and receive benefits from these activities.

Conflict Resolution

In over 15 years of experience, the Ibero-American Model Forests have accumulated interesting case studies.

For example, the neutral platform for dialogue offered by the Model Forest Araucaria del Alto Malleco in Chile has provided a great opportunity to solve a historical conflict between two ethnic groups and to involve representatives of both groups on the board of the Model Forest. Their leaders are now active participants in decision making under a common vision of sustainable forest management planning. Their 2009-2012 Strategic Plan outlined the priorities of actors through specific lines of action as defined through a participatory process. These actions continue to guide the development of local and regional activities based on local conditions and interests, as well as global challenges such as changes in local markets for forest products, bioenergy, and climate change.

The Ibero-American Model Forest Network (RIABM) links areas where initiatives for the proper management of forests and natural resources are conducted. RIABM is a voluntary partnership between Model Forests backed by government representatives from each member country, which is attached to the Secretariat of the International Model Forest Network (SIABM). The Network currently links 29 Model Forest territories, thanks to the commitment of 15 member countries.

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