



Red Iberoamericana
de Bosques Modelo

RIABM

Ibero-American Model Forest Network

Economic Development: Local Economic Development in Model Forests

Model Forests help communities explore economic opportunities while maintaining an appropriate balance of social and ecological values. Community tourism and product development related to tourism services are an alternative that many members of the Ibero-American Model Forest Network are implementing.

The Model Forest concept proposes management of territories and areas of influence to advance sustainable human development, optimally using all means of life and capital of the community through a comprehensive strategic plan.

In contrast to other concepts, a key element of the Model Forest approach is the central role of forests in the livelihoods of the resident population. Consequently, the management of forests has implications at a higher level, thus requiring the sustainable management of their resources.

Representatives of different groups are organized and connected through the platform of a Model Forest as stakeholders, where future challenges can be more easily addressed. Community tourism is gaining as an alternative income source as groups search for sustainability at the local level.

Local Economic Development

Model Forests support efforts to achieve effective conservation, strengthen the management of natural resources, facilitate collaboration and support alternative sustainable management of protected areas, buffer zones and other forest landscapes.

All Model Forests have beautiful landscapes in their territories under some category of protection or private ownership. In most of them, tourism initiatives are in every sense: rural, cultural, special interest, ecotourism, etc.

According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism in natural areas has become the tourist mode with the highest growth in recent years, close to 20% annually, accounting for about 15% of world tourism.

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Considering the previous data and the fact that Model Forests cover a geographic territory over 31 million hectares in 14 countries in Latin America, it is clear that the commitment to sustainable community tourism is a necessary and appropriate step in the development future of these territories.

From the perspective of the RIABM, community tourism is an opportunity for local economic development. For Model Forests to ensure sustainability, it is necessary that communities within the territory benefit from this activity, while maintaining the equilibrium between the social landscape and environment.

Successful Economic Experiences in Ibero-America

In 2008, indigenous communities living in areas adjacent to two protected areas within the Reventazón Model Forest in Costa Rica were first involved in the participatory process for the preparation of a management plan for a national park. This process led to job creation, new incomes streams (guides, ecotourism and handicraft sales), strengthening relationships between communities and park managers, creating agreements that gave priority to the provision of services and activities. Moreover, there was an increase in the perception of stakeholders about the importance of protecting these areas, which is now being promoted by the national authorities as a model for the preparation of management plans for other protected areas in Costa Rica.

The Model Forest, Tierras Adjuntas in Puerto Rico is organizing an exhibition that allows local producers to promote and sell products such as fruits and vegetables, coffee, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and crafts in the town of Adjuntas. The exhibition is accompanied by cultural and educational activities as well as musical performances and art exhibitions. This activity allows local producers to build close relationships with members of the community and visitors, increasing its potential sales revenue and reducing the carbon footprint associated with transporting products over long distances to supply markets.

In the Model Forest Lachuá in Guatemala indigenous communities are involved in the co-management of the National Park Lachuá in the areas of administration, management, education and ecotourism in the protected area. The identification of alternative economic activities for local producers has been one of the strategies used to reduce pressure on the natural resources of the parks. Small landholders living within the Model Forest are also being incentivized to formalize land tenure and access the national forest system.

One of the priorities defined by the Model Forest Araucaria del Alto Malleco in Chile is local economic development. For over five years, they have conducted various activities to achieve the sustainable economic use of resources. For example, from 2009 to 2012, the Model Forest has defined specific activities in relation to climate change mitigation and obtaining non-timber forest products (NTFPs). The Territorial Innovation Program supports the diversification linked to NWFP (pinion morchella rosehip and fungi). This program was selected for the diversity of interests, skills and experience associated with these products, its high economic potential and the experience of the Model Forest. A wide variety of actors are involved in the program, including universities, municipalities and private companies.

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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