

## ***The Human Face: Participatory Governance in Model Forests***

*One of the newest and least known models of governance is Model Forests. In a Model Forest, the forest is just the starting point from which a group of people organize to sustainably manage the land and ecosystems.*

The report entitled "Millennium Ecosystem Assessment" concludes that over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history and that the degradation of ecosystems could grow significantly worse during the first half of this century.

The document refers to the need for change in institutional frameworks and environmental governance in order to create conditions that are conducive to effective ecosystem management, with reference to the exclusion of local actors in the decision making process, a decision which will invariably increase the possibility of conflicts.

Fourteen Latin American countries have challenged this thinking and see the implementation of the Model Forest concept as at solution for integrating territorial aspirations, stories and interests of thousands of people who live and share ecosystems of great environmental, social, economic and cultural value.

There are currently more than 8 million people living in territories belonging to the 29 Ibero-American Model Forests.





The Model Forest social process is based on representing groups from a variety of stakeholders working together towards a common vision of the sustainable management of their territory.

The generation of partnerships is key to this process. Government, civil society organizations, indigenous groups, NGOs, private companies, scientific institutions and others with interests in the area's development are integrated into a forum for consultation on actions within an agreed strategic plan. Participants define structures that facilitate interaction according to local conditions. Without a judicial authority over the territory, the Model Forest helps catalyze obligatory actions facilitating consensus.

### *Why Governance?*

Good territorial management requires the broad and effective participation of stakeholders from different sectors of society and effective conflict management to reconcile divergent positions and interests;

- During the 1990s, most Latin American states enacted laws that promoted decentralization and participation of civil society, enabling the operation of voluntary platforms, jointly reduced state costs for implementing public policies and encouraged innovation.
- Model Forests represent a way of integrating environmental governance and complement other initiatives such as Biosphere Reserves, Biological Corridors and Co-Management of Watersheds.

Participatory governance in Model Forests is distinguished by:

- Equal voluntary participation of public, private and group actors.
- Representation of a wide diversity of interests and values.
- Collaboration among stakeholders in consensus-based processes.
- Development of a shared vision for sustainable land management.
- Neutrality, transparency and accountability in the decision making structures of Model Forests.



## *Governance Structures in Model Forests*

Most Model Forests have a board composed of representatives of various interest groups from the territory. The board is usually comprised of local governments, the Forest Service and other public entities related to the environment and agriculture representing the productive sector, industry, tourism, NGOs, indigenous groups, private companies, universities or research centers.

Given its voluntary nature, stakeholders all have an interest in the sustainable management of the territory. Each Model Forest is free to include persons from sectors they deem appropriate to serve on its board, which may evolve over time.

For the implementation of activities, each Model Forest should have at least a coordinator or manager and support committees or commissions working closely with the board and management or coordination team.

Most Model Forests have legal status either as an association or foundation, allowing them legal representation to manage funds. Others take shelter under the authority of one of its members for their administrative operation.

The strength of a Model Forest does not lie in its economic resources but in the empowerment of local stakeholders. Some Model Forests have forged strong social connections which may offer stability in the face of few external resources.





## *Concrete Examples*

The Araucaria Alto Malleco Model Forest in Chile has a Committee on Programmes and Projects, Statutory Accounts Committee and a Committee on Promotion and Dissemination. These committees are responsible for issues such as: Projects and Community Development, Development and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and Forestry, Local Economic Development and Agriculture, and Zoning.

In Argentina, Jujuy Model Forest has an "executive committee" as a support platform made up of the most active members of the initiative, which form technical support teams for projects carried out in the Model Forest.

In Costa Rica, the Reventazón Model Forest has established in its statutes the formation of "special committees" made up of volunteer members of the initiative. These committees are defined according to the needs that arise.

**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.

Contact us

CATIE Main Building | Cartago, Turrialba 30501 Costa Rica, Central America

[info@bosquesmodelo.net](mailto:info@bosquesmodelo.net) | (506) 2558-2318