Red Iberoamericana de Bosques Modelo

RIABM

Ibero-American Model Forest Network

Model Forests: Spaces For Territorial Management

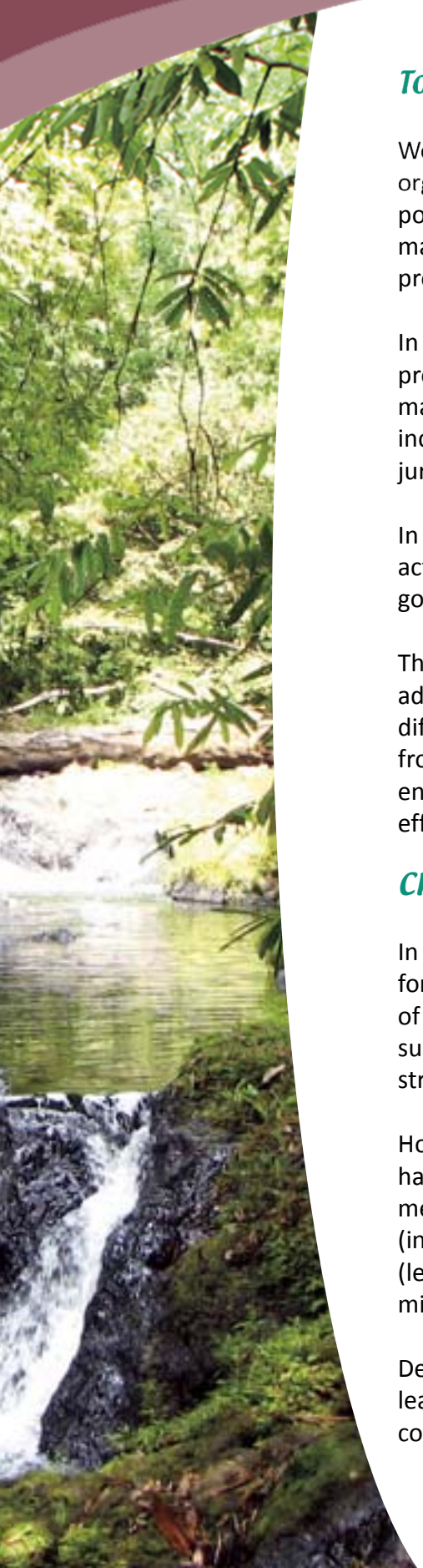
Model Forests have become ideal spaces for landscape or territorial management with agreements from stakeholders to ensure the sustainable development of their respective region. Concrete experiences of this can be seen in multiple Ibero-American Model Forests.

Background

Environmental policies in Latin America are generally oriented toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (ONU 2000), but conditional on multilateral agreements, the socio-economic context and political circumstances of those in power.

In this sense, public policies in the countries where the Ibero-American Model Forest Network is located (especially Latin America) must achieve strategic solutions for territorial development, addressing the differences and regional imbalances by generating opportunities for all those involved.

Model Forests are by definition the place to create this harmonization through land management, particularly if one starts from the assumption that land use planning ensures the functionality and sustainability of natural systems. A Model Forest acts and supports the social and economic processes helping to achieve a balance between what is produced and preserved so that ecosystem services will be successfully preserved in the long term.



Towards an Integrative Concept

We understand land management as the amalgamation of administrative, organizational and operational decisions developed by society to implement policies, strategies and strengthen its capacities in planned land use. Land management is applied at multiple spatial scales; from a private or community property, to a municipality, province or state, up to the national level.

In Latin America, a scale that has been taken into account in land use planning processes is the city. This reflects an opportunity to promote land management processes that integrate both local and high level actors to incorporate multiple perspectives of ecological integrity and inter-jurisdictional governance.

In this context, Model Forests, defined as geographical areas where human activities take place and interact with nature, form a wide platform to boost governance processes and land management systems.

The management of complex, dynamic, and unpredictable spaces requires an adaptive approach to respond to decisions based on continued learning. The differing contexts of territories that make up Model Forests require actors from a variety of professional disciplines to address the search for solutions to environmental, social and economic landscape level problems quickly and effectively.

Challenges in Model Forest Management

In the context of Model Forests, land use planning is a tool of great potential for its management. This is because Model Forests are focused on the creation of voluntary platforms between actors in a given landscape committed to the sustainable use of natural resources, establishing transparent governance structures and promoting collaboration.

However, it is widely recognized that the implementation of land management has strong limitations. These barriers are technical (availability of methodologies, access to information, trained personnel), financial (investment required to develop and implement plans) and socio-political (legal uncertainty in land tenure, conflict due to access to natural resources, missing or inadequate public policies), among others.

Despite the difficulties of implementation, land management is a reality in at least three Model Forests in Latin America where it is working on comprehensive planning processes and land management.

Concrete Cases

The Bolivian Chiquitano Model Forest has promoted land use planning at various levels: regional, municipal and amongst rural communities. They framed the process in public policy and incorporated the interests of local stakeholders, especially local governments, indigenous communities and cattle ranchers. They have successfully implemented land use planning on more than 10 million hectares, about 50% of the Model Forest.

Another important case is in the Model Forest of Risaralda in Colombia that has been conducting various initiatives with government support. As coffee is the main productive agricultural resource in the region, the Model Forest has been applying techniques in water management of forests.

Reventazón Model Forest in Costa Rica has also shown that land use planning has enabled better management of environmental services and the coordination of the various productive sectors, particularly agriculture and livestock.

In the special case of the Model Forest Urbion in Spain, land use planning is a process that takes centuries and is oriented to the management of mountain areas, focused largely in the management of forests and non- timber resources (e.g. mushrooms).

Territorial Management Actors

Meeting, engaging and understanding the actors involved in land management is a critical success factor in the implementation of the Model Forest concept. Knowledge of local skills and abilities are necessary to understand these actors and achieve consensus in the formation of effective and transparent governance structures. From the perspective of Model Forests, governance involves the participation of a broad spectrum of sectors and stakeholders: community leaders, local authorities, government agencies, private businesses, civil society organizations, educators, aid agencies, etc.

In the context of land management, two key stakeholders are our academic and scientific partner organizations for their contributions concerning financial support and analysis of global priorities. The academic and scientific community allows for continuous monitoring of impacts and benefits of the territorial forest management model.

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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