

HEALTHY FORESTS AND PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES

2020–2025 Strategy: Guatemala’s Maya Biosphere Reserve



Photos: Sergio Izquierdo

NATURAL RESOURCES, POVERTY, AND HUMAN MOBILITY

For rural, isolated communities in Guatemala, natural capital is the people’s greatest wealth. With healthy soil and access to water, they can harvest and export high-quality coffee, cocoa, spices, and fruits. Tapping into vibrant forests, they can extract and sell forest products like the Ramon nut, Xate leaf, Allspice, and honey. The steady erosion of these natural resources over time has contributed to the humanitarian crises we see in Guatemala today. Without these resources, communities face an immense struggle to make a living and feed their families. And the fact is, when people can no longer support themselves, and see no hope for improving their situation, they will leave their homes in search of new opportunities to thrive.

CFCs: A COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTION

In Guatemala’s Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), a dense and ancient forestland in northern Petén, nine government-granted community forestry concessions (CFCs) conserve 355,000 hectares of precious forestland. CFCs have exclusive rights to sustainably manage the land; that is, they extract, process and sell timber and non-timber forest products under strict requirements that ensure the long-term health and integrity of the forest. The model consistently outperforms traditional conservation approaches. In fact, while bordering protected areas are burned at alarming rates, in 2017, five CFCs contributed to a *net gain* in forest recovery in the northeastern region of the MBR. Moreover, concession communities have better educational attainment and higher incomes than their non-concessioned counterparts.

Since 1997, the Rainforest Alliance has worked with CFCs to strengthen their organizational and technical capacity to manage natural resources in ways that protect and restore forests while developing successful businesses which offer a

diverse set of high-value products and services.

Program accomplishments from 2013–2021 include:

- 476,173 hectares of certified forestland (Forest Stewardship Council, Fairtrade, Organic) under improved biophysical conditions
- Near-zero deforestation rate in CFCs over the last 15 years
- 45,603 community members benefitting from CFCs, whose members spend more on health, education and housing than neighboring communities
- 12,026 full time-equivalent jobs supported in forest communities, including 2,828 jobs for women, who were historically excluded from forest management processes
- More than 100 small and medium-sized enterprises sold \$ \$69.7 million in sustainably produced agricultural, timber and non-timber forest products within 20 supply chains

Prioritized Regions in Guatemala’s MBR





WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

The Ramon tree grows taller than 100 feet high, towering above the MBR's forest canopy. It not only protects soils and waterways, helps to regulate the climate, and provides a habitat for animals, but it contains nutrient-rich seeds, called Ramon nuts or Maya nuts. The Ramon nut, collected from the ground after it falls naturally from the tree, is gluten free, fat-free, and packed with calcium, fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. As part of our productive forest restoration programs, the Rainforest Alliance supports community organizations to increase coverage of this native species, restoring more than 100,000 hectares of degraded forestland in the process.

Harvesting Ramon nuts provides an excellent income generating opportunity for women. Women's groups demonstrated as much when they learned to make value-added Ramon nut products including flour, bread and cookies. One organization, the Muralla de León Women's Association (AMUL), successfully established a year-long agreement with Guatemala's Ministry of Education in which AMUL will provide the ministry with Ramon nut flour in order to make *atol* (fortified drink) for children's school snacks and lunches in Petén schools. This is a remarkable achievement for the women of AMUL. Not only will they now have an increased regular cash flow, but they will contribute to solving one of the biggest challenges throughout rural Guatemala: children going hungry.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

For the first time since their establishment, the 25-year CFC contracts are up for renewal starting in 2022. Special interest groups in the private and archeology sectors are thus pressuring the Government of Guatemala to cancel – rather than renew – the concessions and develop the area for international tourism instead. In response to this, RA is supporting CFCs to keep their rights and livelihoods intact and proposes the following critical lines of action from 2020–2025.

Strengthen and Scale Up Community-Based Natural Resource Management to Protect Forests and Enhance Ecosystem Services.

- Illustrative activities:
- Facilitate the renewal of all nine CFC contracts by supporting CFC leadership and the Government of Guatemala to conduct evaluations on CFC performance and mitigate technical, legal, and political barriers to renewal
 - Execute a robust advocacy strategy and communications campaign to position the CFC model for expansion outside the MBR
 - In degraded buffer zones adjacent to CFCs and core protected areas, scale up productive restoration activities through agroforestry and silvopastoral systems
 - Apply critical technologies such as drones for forest fire prevention and monitoring of forest product yields

Build a Sustainable Markets Alliance to Enable Forest-Based Businesses, Buyers, and Financiers to Co-Crete a Sustainable Production Agenda in the MBR.

A sustainable production agenda, focused on filling gaps in supply and demand, encourages all market actors to work collectively to strengthen the supply chain. Illustrative activities:

- In partnership with financial institutions, establish innovative financing options for forest-based businesses
- Mobilize our expansive network of national and international companies who have made sustainability a priority to ramp up investments in infrastructure and the identification and development of new forest value chains

KEY PARTNERS

- The **Government of Guatemala** creates the political and legal mechanisms for CFCs to make a living from the sustainable management of natural resources
- **Big market players and companies** commit to more sustainable sourcing and establish agreements directly with forest-based businesses
- **Producer associations** provide dedicated technical training and supportive services to CFCs and their families

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM IMPACTS BY 2025

- At least 4,000 full-time equivalent jobs supported through technical assistance, training, and inputs in technology and infrastructure
- National and international linkages established via purchase agreements in six (6) prioritized markets for products including furniture, decking, guitar parts, cosmetics, coffee, cacao, cardamom, spices, and fruits
- At least 80,000 hectares of forestland with improved biophysical conditions and protected under sustainable land management practices