PROSPEROUS AND RESILIENT LANDSCAPES IN GUATEMALA

Scaling up sustainable and low-emission livelihoods in Petén, the Western Highlands, and Alta and Baja Verapaz

In Guatemala, large swaths of rural populations depend on ever-collapsing ecosystems and fast-disappearing natural resources for their livelihoods. Decreased incomes limit families' ability to respond to weather- and market-related shocks, and unsustainable production practices put immense pressure on forests, further threatening livelihoods. Economic desperation leads many communities to turn to informal, temporary income sources, or even illegal economic activities; as a last resort, they often migrate in search of a way to make a living.

Prosperous and Resilient Landscapes (PRL) (2023-2028) is an ambitious, five-year USAID-funded initiative that builds on more than 30 years of Rainforest Alliance experience transforming sustainable natural-resource management and market systems in Guatemala. PRL is co-designed and implemented with the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP), Association of Organizations of the Cuchumatanes (ASOCUCH), and Federation of Cooperatives of the Verapaces (FEDECOVERA). The program engages with national and subnational governments, private sector actors, forest communities, Indigenous peoples, women, and other stakeholders to restore and protect natural landscapes and scale low-emission livelihoods across 1.8 million hectares of productive and forest landscapes in Petén, the Western Highlands, and the Verapaces.

By 2028, PRL will reduce, sequester, or avoid 10.2M tons of CO_2e, with projected progressive emission reduction by 2030 of 20.8M tons CO_2e, representing 41 percent of Guatemala's total 2030 NDC target.

STRATEGIC APPROACH 1

Enable scale-up of forest conservation and low-emission livelihoods through policy, regulatory, and market instruments. PRL is developing, improving, and implementing policy, regulatory, and market instruments that facilitate the implementation of Guatemala's national climate strategies and frameworks locally. Applying a landscape approach, PRL incentivizes collaboration among stakeholders to drive implementation of national climate strategies through the development of Landscape Action Plans (LAPs), which outline climate adaptation and mitigation actions included in Guatemala's departmental climate change adaptation plans or its national Low Emission Development Strategy. Data collected through LAPs will feed into overlayed maps, offering stakeholders integrated ecological connectivity data for decision making on current and future land use, as well as emissions reduction data connecting multi-use farms at a landscape scale.

STRATEGIC APPROACH 2

Restore rural landscapes and strengthen low-emission livelihoods, accelerating carbon capture and emissions reduction across target regions. PRL is supporting producers across landscapes to systematically measure and account for emissions in their production and transformation systems, identifying "leaks"— areas that contribute the highest emissions and have the greatest potential for reduction. Through easy-to-use emission measurement tools, such as the Cool Farm Tool, 170 producers thus far have accounted for emissions within priority value chains (cardamom, coffee, cocoa, cattle) and co-constructed a plan with PRL to reduce their emissions through use of renewable fuel sources for drying, fertilizer and soil management, climate-smart livestock practices, and responsible sourcing of primary materials. This work scales the Rainforest Alliance's productive landscape restoration approach[1]

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1   A proven methodology for scaling regenerative and restorative practices, which combines behavior change and learning strategies that include visioning, land use planning, peer-to-peer experience exchange, and "model" or demonstration farms.

over nearly 18,000 hectares of degraded landscapes, supporting producers to assess their farms and plan for a more biodiverse, economically viable, and low-emission future.

PRL uses market incentives to attract public and private sustainability investments. Armed with emission measurement and production data collected through LAPs and the Cool Farm Tool across landscapes, PRL is designing a portfolio of differentiated product options and presenting these to market actors and buyers. Once products and services can make verifiable low carbon or "0 footprint" claims, they will be connected to companies interested in their low-emission product offerings.

STRATEGIC APPROACH 3

Bolster community-based sustainable forest management and governance models to protect forests and drastically reduce emissions across natural landscapes. Guatemala's community forestry concessions (CFCs) have conserved 475,173 hectares of forestland in the Maya Biosphere Reserve at a near-zero deforestation rate, while developing forest-based enterprises that, between 2013 and 2022, with the support of the Rainforest Alliance and partner ACOFOP, sold more than US$58,000,000 in sustainably produced forest products in national and global markets. To ensure sustained economic prosperity and self-reliance, PRL employs an integral CFC development strategy to enhance capacity for inclusive forest governance and modernize forestry and value chain operations to generate diversified and sustained profitability, including through:

- Co-designing and implementing new business development and forest management plans with CFCs
- Establishing a pilot field school and leadership program to engage youth in forest management and governance, preparing them to take over forestry operations and join CFC boards of directors
- Adapting CFC governance mechanisms that increase social and economic benefits to member communities
- Providing dedicated technical support to two new concessions formed in 2022 (74,960 hectares)

IMPACTS TO DATE

- Nearly 200 forest and nature-based enterprises have **sold US$14 million** in sustainably produced products. These are sold through commercial agreements with local, regional, and international buyers, many of whom are U.S. companies.

- **2,500 jobs** generated in the forestry and agriculture sectors across target landscapes, including more than **600 jobs for women**.

- Across all landscapes, communities have incorporated more than **9,300 hectares of responsibly managed forestland** into the Guatemalan government's various forest-incentive programs to date. Families are now receiving compensation from the government for their sustainable forest management, restoration, and production activities.

PLEASE SUPPORT THIS CRITICAL WORK

In the wake of the U.S. Government's pause on foreign aid and subsequent suspension of this program, the Rainforest Alliance is seeking immediate funding to continue critical activities with local partners in the three target regions, Petén, Western Highlands, and Alta and Baja Verapaz. These activities include providing technical support to two recently established CFCs and supporting community fire brigades to maintain firebreaks and strengthen early warning systems in preparation for the start of the fire risk season (February to June). PRL's work to expand market access and job creation in forestry and agriculture sectors is also a priority, as delays in progress have led to immediate loss of income generating opportunities for forest-dependent communities.