

Community Action for Conservation

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Editors

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Mexican Experiences

 Springer

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Foreword

Mexican Lessons to Take to Heart: Traveling the Path to Biodiversity and Forest Conservation in Our Age of Global Change

As we move forward in this century of Global Climate Change and the closing of wide-open frontiers, locally generated conservation and management of forests and biodiversity is of increasing national and global importance. Yet, conflicts between local people's self-generated conservation of natural resources versus state and nongovernmental organizations' externally designed conservation programs have been documented and analyzed in innumerable papers and books over the past several decades.

Self-generated conservation arose locally—either over thousands of years, in which case conservation-supportive values are embedded in cosmological and customary patterns continually adapted to evolving situations; or recently, over the past few decades, as communities have recognized that new limits must be placed on exploitation of their environment. In response to new challenges, communities have increasingly created their own formal, internal regulations and attempted to defend their resources against more powerful outsiders.

In the best-case scenario, external actors (the state, nongovernmental organizations, and private sector) respond positively to “discovered” self-generated conservation and shape their activities, laws, and programs to respect local agency of communities to take decisions. They create governance frameworks and programs that enable and assist communities to defend their resources against outside interests. Mexico is an undisputed leader in this emerging arena of innovative design responses to “discovered” conservation.

As this book illustrates, the Mexican path of collaboration has not been easy but it can be achieved. Progress has largely been made due to an admirable long-term alliance between academics based in Mexican universities, people working in the field offices of national agencies, locally grounded NGOs, Mexican community leaders, and their organizations. Together they have demonstrated to national government the

paths forward when national politicians have lacked an understanding of rural realities or the political will to confront rural issues. To be sure, Mexican community-based conservation began with the advantage of collective tenure gained through policy reforms after land-grabs led to the Mexican Revolution. In many other parts of the world, in South America and Africa in particular, the pre-Revolution situation of land-grabbing is threatening communities' self-generated conservation and management of natural resources. Unclear carbon rights threaten local conservation in many countries, yet the success of Mexican community-based conservation is again manifest in the ways communities have entered the carbon market.

Two important keys to success are Mexican willingness to appreciate and support local diversity, and an understanding that future national resilience depends on maintaining local, self-generated resilience within supportive national frameworks. Ostrom's Law — "if it works in practice, it can work in theory" — is alive in Mexican initiatives, despite push-back and challenges.

This lively and deep-running book offers invaluable stories and analyses of the Mexican experience with conservation told by some of the key actors themselves, demonstrating the willingness of Mexico to respond flexibly to local conservation options that vary from place to place within the country. This Mexican book will serve as a beacon and touchstone for other countries to guide them as they design Nested REDD+ to meet dual goals—to sequester carbon in designed landscapes in compliance with the Climate Change treaty (UNFCCC) and to achieve the Aichi Targets of the Biological Diversity treaty (CBD).

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Janis Bristol Alcorn

Preface

Community conservation or community-based conservation is not a new subject in Mexico or the world, but it has recently gained importance given changes in the way biodiversity conservation is understood and addressed. The latter applies not only to changes regarding how nature–human relations are realized but also to changes regarding how nature’s governance is evermore subject to interactions of different actors at varying scales. That is, the local is subject to different types of processes occurring at regional, national, and international levels through forces ranging from legislation, government programs, international treaties, and the market, among others. As this volume goes to press, these tensions are everywhere in evidence, since recent federal legislation has facilitated the privatization of ejidal land. Since it is at the local scale that resulting outcomes of this interconnections reflect decision-making (and affect environmental outcomes), understanding the role that local people play or could play regarding nature’s conservation becomes relevant not only for the academic arena, but also for policy and human livelihoods.

The purpose of this volume is not to provide a comprehensive overview of community conservation in Mexico, as the extent of Mexican territory and its contours, as well as the different issues regions face, are so diverse. Rather, we bring together several chapters reflecting examples or cases illustrating some of the issues at stake, hoping to stimulate the reflections of some of these matters, as well as communicate some of our research findings. The volume, written in English for an international audience, is also intended to bring the discussion of community conservation in Mexico to a supranational level, because many of the issues that are raised echo shared realities in other countries. The Mexican case stands out in the annals of community conservation for reasons explained hereafter. Transmitting the relevance of the Mexican case to a national audience is also a goal of the text.

The endeavor of writing the volume was born from the collaboration of most of the authors in an international and interdisciplinary project addressing community conservation in Mexico. We decided to make use of the opportunity of writing a first book together to integrate research mostly from previous work. We also invited a few external colleagues to join the effort. As only few of the authors in the volume speak English as a first language, its completion represented a real challenge, which

extended the process of its creation to more than 2 years. We hope that its contents serve to provoke debate and further inquiry regarding the issues addressed.

We would like to acknowledge the anonymous comments of two external reviewers on the initial proposal for the volume, which helped us to design the final direction it would take. We would also like to give special recognition to Gary Martin, who contributed greatly in the initial phase of putting the volume together, and to Emily Caruso, who assisted in the editing process. We are also grateful for financial support for the CONSERVCOM project (through Fondo de Cooperación Internacional en Ciencia y Tecnología UE-Mexico—FONCICYT Project # 94395) and grants from the Programa de Cooperación Inter-Universitaria e Investigación Científica, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación (A/023406/09 and A/030044/10) and Fundació Autònoma Solidària-UAB (XXVII and XXVIII), which supported the work of several of the authors and editors of this volume during the book's development. We give special thanks to rural and indigenous communities in Mexico for their lessons and efforts concerning biodiversity conservation.

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