

This has substantially decreased the potential yields from traditional agriculture-forest rotations. In addition, conflicts among communities have not made it any easier to reach agreements on the use of remaining forests or on the restoration of degraded and cleared areas. These inter-community conflicts can be extremely violent, sometimes involving religious parties. Only a handful of communities have been able to organise themselves to manage their forest stands and secure financial support for certified forestry or carbon sequestration.

### Outlook

When will the *Zapatista* conflict end? Not soon, apparently. Crucial legal, political and planning issues related to forest use are still waiting for solutions or show only sluggish progress. An increasing number of groups ask for technical advice on forest restoration, not an easy question in view of the complex, biological richness of their resource base. There may be some 1,300 native tree species in Chiapas, which makes the urgent ecological restoration of diversity a most challenging task, even if the aim is to use only 100-200 species. On the side of the *Zapatistas*, the emphasis on community-agreed forest use in the context of the *JBG* is encouraging. No single research institute is able to provide the required expertise to guide such initiatives on its own. Restoration projects can successfully request widespread involvement of local people, particularly from women and teenagers, in collecting, producing, and maintaining the required planting materials, provided the projects are scientifically and technically sound, and are based on confidence and respect. When academic institutions can organise themselves and make sincere progress in

this direction, they will probably be better prepared to support social organisations, community assemblies, and Governments with sustainable forestry projects and peace can be finally achieved.

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### WHY IS THERE VIOLENCE IN SOME FOREST AREAS OF MEXICO?

*By Salvador Anta Fonseca*

Mexico has achieved important economic and social goals in the last few years; still, it lags behind in political, social and economic terms that manifest themselves principally in rural areas. In the Mexican countryside and especially in the forest areas there are still high levels of poverty, marginalization, and ungovernable places.

The Mexican Government's efforts to strengthen the forestry sector remain limited and insufficient; 8.6 million hectares are managed under commercial forest management permits and another 8.2

million hectares of forested areas lie within Natural Protection Reserves. This totals 16.8 million hectares, only. In contrast, the remaining 110 million hectares of forested areas in our country lack forest management programs, incentives, and local governance, which would promote the protection and the sustainable use of natural resources. It is precisely in these forest areas where violence and ungovernableness are most frequent. In many cases there are organised, armed groups that carry out illegal activities, such as illegal timber extraction, drug cultivation, and the occupation of forest lands. The violence causes a serious deterioration of the forests and disrupts the quality of life of the population.

Mexico does have successful examples of good forest management, where community forest enterprises operate under the administration of communities and *ejidos*. In places where 'community forestry' is practiced and in places where the forest is managed, landholders tend to protect the natural resources with the support of local government. This local support is complemented by the federal government's system of forest management permits. For this reason deforestation, forest fires, illegal logging and the cultivation of illegal drugs have had a low incidence rate in lands covered by these permits.

On the other hand, the main causes of violence and ungovernableness in Mexico's forest regions are related to agrarian conflicts between neighboring villages, impacts of a number of public policies, general weakening of local government structures, drug trafficking, and the lack of law enforcement. The Mexican federal

government has identified 100 critical regions and nine ungovernable regions where illegal forest activities take place. The nine ungovernable regions are: The Tarahumara Range, the Tepehuana Range, the Monarch Butterfly Reserve, the Lacandona Forest, the Zoque Forest, the Petatan and Coyuca Ranges, the Zempoala Range and the Izta-Popo National Parks. In the Monarch Butterfly region, as in other regions within Michoacan and Estado de Mexico, illegal logging has become a serious problem, as heavily-armed groups have raided community and ejido forests at night. These groups have illegally extracted timber without the consent of the landowners, who, fearing reprisals, have avoided confronting them or bringing them before the authorities.

Illegal logging finds its origin in weakening local governance caused by loss of social capital through migration, parceling-out land and by corrupted government officials. The Forest Law of 1992 has also had an influence, through its attempts at deregulation and at increasing forest management efficiency. In pursuing these policies, the law has weakened government mechanisms for controlling and monitoring forest products. Although the present situation has partially improved thanks to new legislation, the illegal practices in these regions are difficult to eradicate.

In forests in the states of Guerrero, Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua, drug cultivation has weakened governance and increased violence, with serious social repercussions for local inhabitants. For lack of economic alternatives in their region, inhabitants have become involved in this type of cultivation, leading to increasing problems with the law.

Violence in the forest areas stems from agrarian problems and legalistic disputes over boundaries that have remained unresolved over many decades. This is the result of a lack in law enforcement and government responsibility. In turn, communities have taken justice into their own hands, causing a series of armed clashes between communities, ejidos, and small landholders. Some of the most recurrent conflicts have taken place in the indigenous communities of Oaxaca, the Chimalapas, and in the Huichola and Tepehuana regions.

Agrarian conflicts have caused very violent incidents, such as the one that occurred in the South Range of Oaxaca in 2002, when an armed group killed more than twenty members of a neighboring community because of a boundary dispute. This problem arose because the government failed to address the agrarian and social problems of the region. Rather than to take-up its responsibility, the state government chose to transfer it and blamed the federal forest sector authorities.

Due to the lack of response from the federal government, it was not possible to determine the true responsibility of the institutions, and the forest communities and ejidos remained discredited as a result. Instead of inquiring into, and clearing up these events, the federal government preferred to establish new measures that over-regulated forest activities. These measures proved most harmful for those who had made the best attempts towards the management and sustainable use of forest resources: the forest communities and ejidos of Oaxaca and Mexico.

As one can see, the violence that thrives in

the various forest regions of Mexico can only be solved with public policies that strengthen the governance of forest communities and ejidos, and their technical and organisational skills. Paternalistic channeling of resources does not help. Rather, through the investment of economic funds in these areas, good forest management practices can be promoted, and in turn, generate profits. The federal government has begun to take important steps in the resolution of the agrarian conflicts, however, on a sectoral level, the Government should also take up a leading role in the national forest policies. This would prevent the impunity and injustice that frequently arise from powerful political and economic groups at state and regional levels.

Only by addressing the problem in a comprehensive manner, can Mexico avert more casualties and violence in its forests, and continue to advance its democratic transition and social justice processes.

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