

Participatory Forest Sector Development in Honduras

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Overview

In late October 1998, the LSU AgCenter assembled a team of specialists to work with counterparts in Honduras to help in forest sector rehabilitation after Hurricane Mitch devastated the country. The objective of the forestry/forest products project was to empower people from many stakeholder groups to utilize forests in Honduras. The emphasis was on both public and privately owned and managed forests and forest products sectors. Stakeholder groups represented by Honduran counterparts were from non-governmental organizations, academia, government, industry, and local villages/municipalities.

The primary objective of the forestry/forest products project was to empower people from many stakeholder groups to better utilize forests and associated areas affected by forests in Honduras in an efficient and sustainable manner. The emphasis was on pine and hardwood forests and forest products sectors that are both publicly and privately owned and managed. Technology and knowledge transfer can help Hondurans make critical decisions regarding sound forest management and wood utilization that will enhance the country's economic development and poverty alleviation activities while preserving the sustainability of their forest resources.

An interactive strategic planning component was included in the framework of the informational and educational roundtable/workshops that were conducted. Based on meetings with more than 40 individuals representing all stakeholder groups, more than 75 potential post-roundtable/workshop project ideas were generated. Approximately 20 projects were committed to, generally falling into the following broad areas:

- Value-added wood processing
- Workforce preparation/training

- Social and human capital development
- Academic scientist and student exchange
- Forest sector marketing and promotion [(including eBusiness)]
- Policy and planning
- Information and research support
- Forest sector economic analysis
- Forest sector investment

The roles and responsibilities for counterparts and the LSU AgCenter team were articulated early in discussions with stakeholder groups. We clearly communicated with our counterparts that we had no large sum of money to impart to them. Rather, we came to work WITH counterparts, to impart knowledge, and to help to leave something lasting long after we were gone.

We also did not make promises that we could not keep within the context of partnership relationships with counterparts. This was the most important lesson we learned.

The project resulted in tangible deliverables across a broad spectrum of forest sector stakeholders in Honduras. Significant professional and personal relationships were developed between LSU AgCenter team members and Honduran counterparts. In the long-term, forest-sector development in Honduras can contribute to an increase in rural employment and a lessening of poverty. The success of development projects such as this will be measured in the future by the ability to encourage environmentally sound forest management practices and sustainable growth of the forest-based industry sector.