

## Policy pointers

**Fostering an equitable** multi-stakeholder process will improve the governance and livelihoods of indigenous and *mestizo* communities and solve conflicts over natural resources in the Bosawás reserve.

**Supporting indigenous** and *mestizo* women's socioeconomic empowerment in Bosawás reserve is key to sustainable economic development and sustainable natural resources management.

**Strengthening producer** organisations' capacities will enhance forest-dependent livelihoods and boost the local economy.

**Empowering Indigenous** Territorial Governments and strengthening their organisational structures will enable them to take community voices to the higher levels of governance institutions.

# Multi-stakeholder governance strengthens sustainable livelihoods in Bosawás, Nicaragua

Multi-ethnicity and complexity have long defined Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. This complexity reaches an even greater level in the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve, where the Mayangna and Miskito people live side by side with *mestizos* (people of mixed race). Forest resources are under high pressure and land rights are often contested, while the sheer number of public institutions, political and community authorities, private companies and producer organisations (often poorly organised and with low capacity levels) makes natural resource management a challenge. To help address these issues, the Forest and Farm Facility aims to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination among stakeholders, promote the revitalisation of Mayangna culture, emphasise the role of women's producer organisations and give them the support they need to ensure their small-scale production of forest-related products can contribute to their economic and social empowerment.

Nicaragua's Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) is responsible for managing Nicaragua's system of protected areas. This includes the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve, one of the most important protected areas in Central America.<sup>1</sup> Although the reserve is managed and regulated by the Technical Secretariat for Bosawás (SETAB) — a body mandated by MARENA — there are several other stakeholders involved, with different levels of power, seniority and longevity in the area, as well as diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The reserve is home to various indigenous groups forming a rich ethnic, linguistic and cultural fabric; around 43.5 per cent of the Bosawás core area is occupied by Mayangnas, 25.8 per cent by Miskitos and 30.7 per cent by *mestizos*.<sup>2</sup> These are the three most represented ethnic groups. Some of

the *mestizos* have been living in Mayangna territories for many years while others are more recent settlers. All groups live mainly from subsistence agriculture (maize, beans, rice, cacao, beets), domestic animal-raising and traditional medicine practice in their collective territories. Although the relationship between the indigenous groups and the *mestizos* with a long local history is generally good, the situation is more complex when it comes to more recent settler groups and often leads to land disputes and cultural clashes.

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF, see Box 1) has taken up the challenge of supporting the ongoing coordination efforts to mainstream forest and farm policies in the reserve's production strategy. A key first step has been developing a common agenda to improve sustainable natural resource use in and around

## An equitable multi-stakeholder process will improve governance and livelihoods of communities

Bosawás. The FFF will supplement the efforts of SETAB-MARENA to help coordinate dialogue and further joint planning, enhancing different stakeholders' participation in the process. It also aims to facilitate a cross-sectoral process between public institutions to develop a joint agenda at local level, strengthen the Cabinet of Production and Trade and enhance coordination between different initiatives.

### The Forest and Farm Facility in Nicaragua

Nicaragua's forest policy framework has been strengthened through various initiatives, including the National Forest Programme, the National Forest Programme Facility and the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests. However, many challenges remain: the weak

organisation of forest and farm producers, the lack of the sector's visibility in terms of production and income generation, and the insufficient integration between the forest sector and other productive clusters, such as agriculture and livestock.

To address these issues, Nicaragua was identified as one of the pilot countries of the FFF in January 2013. The Development Secretariat for the Caribbean Coast and leaders of indigenous organisations highlighted the need for FFF to focus its activities in the Northern Autonomic Region (RAAN) and the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve was selected for its rich biodiversity, environmental services and indigenous culture, and the pressure on its natural resources from the expansion of the agricultural frontier. The reserve's core and buffer zones are the ancestral home of the Mayangna, the most numerous indigenous group in Bosawás. Therefore FFF activities are focusing on preserving and rehabilitating the Mayangna's traditional natural resource management practices whilst recognising the culture, costumes and practices of the *mestizos* living in or around the reserve.

The FFF action plan was agreed by the FFF multi-stakeholders and is structured along three main components:

1. Empower territorial and community indigenous governments by strengthening their organisational structures, capacity to negotiate and participation in decision-making processes.
2. Strengthen the organisational capacity of Mayangna and *mestizo* producer organisations (providing special support to women's organisations), and enhance their productive skills by providing support and tools to improve production processes through the introduction of new technologies and better access to domestic markets.
3. Strengthen local governance processes, particularly focusing on the Cabinet of Production and Trade, providing training, planning and dialogue tools and support.

### Supporting productive and economic initiatives for women

During the 2014–2015 biennium, at the request of the Mayangna president, FFF is putting special emphasis on empowering women's organisations, providing institutional spaces and technical tools to strengthen their networks, increase their negotiating powers and improve the quality of their products.

The FFF will support Mayangna women's organisations and work with *mestiza* women in four territories: Mayangna Sauni As (Bonanza);

#### Box 1. Forest and Farm Facility

The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) was launched in 2012. Its vision is that "smallholders, communities and indigenous peoples' organisations have improved their livelihoods and the decision making over forest and farm landscapes". The FFF funds partnership agreements and small grants with smallholder, women, community and indigenous peoples' producer organisations and governments at local, national, regional and international levels through the following three pillars:

- **Pillar 1.** Strengthen smallholder, women's, community and indigenous peoples' producer organisations for business/livelihoods and policy engagement.
- **Pillar 2.** Catalyse multi-sectoral stakeholder policy platforms with governments at local and national levels.
- **Pillar 3.** Link local voices and learning to global processes through communication and information dissemination.

Forest and Farm Facility is a partnership — with a management team comprising staff of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and IIED. It is guided by a steering committee with representatives from smallholder family forestry organisations, community forestry organisations, indigenous peoples' organisations, the international research community, business development service provider organisations, the private sector, government, and donors.

FFF is founded on the fact that nearly a third of the world's forests are managed by local people, either formally or informally. It is these local groups of smallholders, women, communities and indigenous peoples that make many forest investments work on the ground. Yet despite their crucial role, forest and farm smallholders are often marginalised from decision-making processes and isolated from economic and market opportunities. The facility aims to help tackle this.

Find out more about the Forest and Farm Facility at: [www.fao.org/partnerships/forest-farm-facility](http://www.fao.org/partnerships/forest-farm-facility)

## Box 2. Overview of the multi-level governance in the RAAN

The North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) has a complex multilevel governance system, with multiple and overlapping centers of authority, empowered communities with titles to multi-community territories and empowered leaders at several spatial levels.

In 1987, through peace negotiations after several years civil war, indigenous rights were recognised in the Nicaraguan Constitution. Also in 1987, the Autonomy Statute was passed, resulting in the establishment, in 1990, of the first elected autonomous regional councils in the RAAN and South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS). The processes of decentralisation and devolution in the RAAN resulted in the formal recognition and empowerment of four layers of governance in natural resource decision making below the central government — regional, municipal, territorial and communal — aiming to grant greater 'local' control to indigenous communities and traditional peoples over these regions and their natural resources.

In 2000 the struggle for regional autonomy started shifting to a struggle for the recognition of territorial rights, and specifically for the demarcation and titling of indigenous traditional lands. In 2004 legal reforms started granting indigenous peoples the right to land titles and to representation through their community and territory leaders; however indigenous communities — and their representatives at the community and territory scale — are still the weakest link in multi-level governance.

Since May 2005, the Nicaraguan government has recognised land titles for 86 Mayangna and Miskito communities. This recognition provides rights over agricultural and hunting lands, as well as co-dominion with the state over conservation areas located in the highlands of the Isabelia Mountain Range. Together, the indigenous territories and the co-management areas cover most of the core zone of the Bosawás reserve.

The RAAN case shows that effective multi-level governance is an evolving process that requires understanding of power relations, fostering dialogue among actors, building the capacities and empowering the weakest actors and constantly adjusting laws and regulations to enable fair and equitable participation in decision-making processes.

Mayangna Sauni Bas (Siuna); Mayangna Sauni Arungka (Bonanza); and Mayangna Sauni Tuahka (Rosita).

Indigenous women have traditionally used natural resources — bamboo and rubber from the bark of the *tuno* tree (*Castilloa fallax*) — in environmentally friendly ways, to produce handicrafts such as purses, necklaces and bracelets. However, many of these products are of low quality and produce little income. The FFF will provide technical advice and training to enable these women to adopt low-cost value-added practices that will improve design, quality and productivity. Although small, there are domestic markets that could provide a steady demand for these products.

The FFF also aims to encourage sharing of innovation and best practice to promote cultural revitalisation and interchange between Mayangna, Miskita and *mestiza* women. To this end, the FFF will organise an exchange between representatives of women's organisations from Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras to share lessons learnt on production, organisation and leadership, and to facilitate new contacts and communications between local Mayangna, Miskita and *mestiza* women's organisations and those from other countries.

### Community decision-making structures and policy framework in Bosawás

According to the latest national forest inventory (2007–2008), 62 per cent of Nicaragua's forest is found in the Northern and Southern

Autonomous Atlantic Regions, making the Caribbean region very wealthy in terms of natural resources.

In the Mayangna territory sustainable use of natural resources and the revitalisation of ancient cultural and management practices have been promoted through the Development Plans of Indigenous Territories developed and enforced by the Indigenous Territorial Governments (GTI, see Box 2) in coordination with communal governments. The GTIs have the responsibility to represent and to promote programmes and projects that benefit communities.

The Mayangna population is estimated at 20,000, one-third of whom live in the indigenous territories of the Bosawás and maintain a traditional organisational structure, allowing them to hold on to their cultural traditions and customary use of natural resources. Governance over natural resources takes place through a mix of community and territorial structures (see Box 2), including a Senior Council (a group of leaders in charge of land administration), territorial leaders, the *Wihta* (territorial judge) and/or *síndico* (community member in charge of land and natural resources).

In Bosawás various instruments ensure the sustainability of local resource use and respect for ancestral indigenous community rights. The Bosawás Biosphere Reserve's Protection and Management Regulative Framework guides the reserve's sustainable use strategies and was elaborated through a participatory process involving various stakeholders at local, national and regional levels.

### Box 3. Empowering indigenous women in the RAAN

Nicaragua's political constitution established equality between men and women in 1987. The gender equality policy, approved in 2010, aims to create conditions for the effective empowerment of women and their insertion into the country's social, economic, political and cultural life by promoting gender equality in all aspects of life among the Miskito, Mayangna, creole and *mestizo* communities. In RAAN, women make up 49.6 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup> The economy of most indigenous communities is based on subsistence farming, with families hunting and growing corn, cassava, rice and plantains for their own consumption.

Women are largely in charge of the labour-intensive tasks that maintain the household — carrying water, collecting firewood, childcare, farming and working in the market. Although the women's domestic roles eclipse their productive roles, they play an important role in their communities' productive processes.

External and governmental organisations have been promoting women's leadership in indigenous communities in the region to make them more visible within their communities, families and society in general. Although women are encouraged to participate in political decision making, women still have little say in forest management decisions and have scarce access to land, credit and decent jobs.<sup>5</sup>

FFF in Nicaragua is focusing on helping Mayangna and *mestiza* women strengthen their leadership skills, find new business opportunities so they can contribute economically to their communities and improve their communication networks.

Although these policies have received strong political and public support, implementing them has at times been challenging, particularly in the areas that are home to both Mayangnas and *mestizos*, as cultural and production models as well as their perception of land rights, differ considerably and are not always compatible.

### The FFF's contribution to public policy

From the beginning, the FFF framework in Nicaragua has focused on contributing to national public policy. Nicaragua has many public policy instruments, which the FFF is consistent with, including the National Plan for Human Development, the Caribbean Coast Development Strategy, and the Natural Resource Management Plan of the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve.

In the Autonomous Atlantic Coast Regions, public policies have a strong territorial approach. The broadest of these, the Caribbean Coast Development Strategy, consists of three strategic elements:

- Social and economic wellbeing, including programmes on natural resources, food security,

multi-ethnic identity, education, childhood and adolescence, health, water and sanitation

- Economic and productive transformation
- Autonomous institutional development.

Each of the components of the FFF in Nicaragua is designed to support the implementation of the Caribbean Coast Development Strategy, and in particular the FFF's main aims are to:

- Promote sustainable natural resource use while enhancing the livelihoods of producer organisations in Bosawás, helping to increase food security
- Enhance productivity and increase access to markets
- Empower Indigenous Territorial Governments to participate more actively in decision-making processes related to the governance of natural resources in Bosawás.

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### Knowledge Products

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Located in northeastern Nicaragua, the Bosawás National Natural Resource Reserve was created by Executive Decree No.44-91 on 5 November 1991. UNESCO designated it a biosphere reserve in 1997. The core and buffer zones cover an area of more than two million hectares, and represent almost 15.25 per cent of the national territory. / <sup>2</sup> Stocks, A et al. 2007. Indigenous, colonist, and government impacts on Nicaragua's Bosawas Reserve. *Conservation Biology* 21 (6), 1495–1505 / <sup>3</sup> Mairena, E et al. 2012. Gender and forests in Nicaragua's indigenous territories: from national policy to local practice. CIFOR, Bogor, Indonesia. / <sup>4</sup> INIDE 2005. VIII Censo de Población y IV de Vivienda. INIDE, Managua, Nicaragua. / <sup>5</sup> USAID 2011. Nicaragua - Property Rights and Resource Governance. USAID Country Profile. [http://usaidlandtenure.net/sites/default/files/country-profiles/full-reports/USAID\\_Land\\_Tenure\\_Nicaragua\\_Profile.pdf](http://usaidlandtenure.net/sites/default/files/country-profiles/full-reports/USAID_Land_Tenure_Nicaragua_Profile.pdf)