Ecuador is a relatively small country (about half the size of France or 283,561 km2) with an extremely varied geographical landscape and extraordinary biological diversity (MAE 2010a). Ecuador is considered to be one of the world’s megadiverse countries (Mittermeier et al. 1997) and the Amazonian region includes large tracts of intact natural forest of global conservation significance (Bass et al. 2010).

Ecuador is divided into four distinct biogeographic regions: the Amazon, the Andes, the Pacific coastal plain and the Galapagos Islands. The vast majority of forest biomass - approximately 10 million hectares - is in the Amazon region (80%), with about 13% near the coast and the remaining...
7% in the Andean highlands (Stern & Kernan 2011). The country has experienced major changes to its forest cover for many decades, mostly due to agricultural expansion and illegal logging. According to data from 2000, an estimated 198,000 ha of forest were being lost every year, equivalent to an annual deforestation rate of 1.5% (CLIRSEN 2003). Recent data from the Ministry of Environment, however, indicate that the national deforestation rate is significantly lower than the earlier figure and is closer to 61,765 ha per year (equivalent to 0.6% per year) (MAE 2011a). This figure, however, excludes deforestation in the humid north-western area of the country and alternative types of imagery are now being acquired to provide a more accurate figure for the national deforestation rate.

The principal driver of deforestation in Ecuador is the expanding agricultural frontier, followed by other drivers that vary in importance depending on the geographical region, including agroindustry (e.g. African oil palm), logging, mining and infrastructure. Most of the country’s coastal forests have already been deforested for agriculture, and fragile habitats such as dry forests, mangroves and other wetlands have been lost or severely degraded. In the Amazon, broad areas have been affected by oil extraction and subsequent human colonization. The growth of palm oil plantations has decimated natural forests near the northwest coast and gold mining has caused deforestation, habitat degradation and water contamination, particularly in the southern Amazon region (Stern & Kernan 2011).

Reducing deforestation in Ecuador is a national priority and the National Development Plan (known as the Plan for Good Living, 2009-2013) aims to reduce deforestation in Ecuador by 30% by 2013. To help achieve this goal, the Ministry of the Environment’s Socio Bosque Program (SBP) began in 2008 to conserve natural forests by providing financial incentives to private and community forest owners to keep their forests standing.

Ecuador has been a participant in the UN-REDD programme since Oct 2009 when it was formally accepted as an observer country. Since the acceptance of its National Joint Program (NJP) in March 2011, Ecuador became a beneficiary country and joined the group of twelve pilot countries that are implementing activities in preparation for REDD. At the national level, a framework to regulate REDD activities is under development. These activities will be implemented at the national level with the possibility for sub-national projects. All measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) will be carried out at the national level (MAE 2011b). To date, the sub-national activities underway in Ecuador are largely feasibility studies for potential REDD+ projects, reforestation projects and include a few REDD projects that are preparing project design documents (PDDs).

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Institutional arrangements

The Ministry of Environment (MAE) is the official governmental partner to the UN-REDD programme and coordinates all REDD initiatives and activities in Ecuador. During the readiness phase the MAE is responsible for implementation of the NJP and ensuring that the NJP is in compliance with the provisions of the National REDD+ Plan (PNREDD+).

The NJP is governed by an Executive Board that will guide, coordinate, supervise and monitor implementation of the NJP. The Board will be chaired by the Undersecretary of the Environment (SCC) within the MAE, together with the UN resident coordinator in Ecuador, with participation of the three UN agencies involved in the program (FAO, UNDP and UNEP). The Executive Board can also invite other stakeholders to join the Committee including other government agencies, civil society, and representatives of indigenous groups and other forest-dependent communities. Fund management arrangements will be jointly defined by the MAE and UN agencies.

In October 2010, a specific working group on REDD+ was established under Executive Decree No. 495 called the Inter-institutional Committee on Climate Change (CICC). The CICC performs as a high-level institution to coordinate and facilitate the integrated implementation of national policies related to climate change, the National Strategy for Climate Change and the country’s responsibilities under the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Stakeholder engagement and participation

Ecuador has coordinated several actions at the national level to engage key stakeholders in the national REDD+ process. The REDD+ engagement programme, which is supported by UN-REDD, aims to provide information, opportunity for consultation and capacity building on the PNREDD+. The objectives of the engagement program are to assist stakeholders to understand REDD+ and the implications for implementation, reach agreements about REDD+ and generate interest in participation, involve key actors through mechanisms to promote participation and build local capacity to implement the PNREDD+ (MAE 2011c).

The National Advisory Committee (COASNA) was established to ensure that the implementation of the NJP is an inclusive process with equal representation of interests. COASNA is comprised of government and civil society stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and will initially consist of a representative and acting representative of the National Planning Secretariat (SENPLADES) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Ranching, Aquaculture and Fishing (MAGAP), to facilitate governance and coordination among different levels of government as stated in the mandate of the 2009-2013 National Plan for Good Living (MAE 2011b).

Ecuador has also established a review group for the NJP and has convened various workshops and a series of public meetings that serve as primary forums for stakeholder engagement around the UN-REDD process. Finally, the national Social and Environmental Standards (SES) Committee has engaged with a wide variety of stakeholders to develop standards and safeguards for REDD+ in Ecuador.

Updated date:
5/2011
Land tenure arrangements and carbon rights

Land tenure in Ecuador is an important determinant of land-use and deforestation dynamics in the country. The agrarian reform that took place during the 1960s and 70s required that land beneficiaries demonstrate that land in their possession was being used. This drove thousands of peasant farmers to occupy forested areas in the northwest and the Amazon regions of Ecuador, causing large-scale deforestation and destruction to forested ecosystems (Morales et al. 2010). The resulting situation is that many indigenous territories are now populated by colonists - in many cases with encouragement from the government - and the remaining forest resources are fragmented across a large number of individual, cooperative and communal landowners (Morales et al. 2010).

Ecuador does not have a forest concession system for production forests; instead, forest tenure is held by either the state, private landowners, or indigenous peoples and local communities. By far the largest owners of forests in Ecuador are indigenous communities (including Afro-Ecuadorians), who hold roughly 7.5 million ha of native forest (Palacios and Revelo 2005 cited in Añazco et al. 2010). Government lands include native forests within the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP), which account for around 4.8 million hectares, and the so-called forest patrimony, which cover over 2 million hectares. While forests within the SNAP are not allowed to be used for commercial purposes, they may be used for subsistence by indigenous communities. Land under forest patrimony, on the other hand is a combination of production and conservation forests (Añazco et al. 2010).

Forest patrimony is, in theory, controlled by the state, but in practice these lands are often in the possession of settlers, communities and logging companies and the issue of control of these lands remains one of the key issues to resolve within the forestry sector (Añazco et al. 2010). Data on forest tenure is also conflicting, and statistics on land ownership include a significant overlap given that Ecuador has a total forest area of 10 million hectares.

Last updated:
5/2011

Forest management

Ecuador has a number of forest-related laws and policies relating to the enforcement and providing incentives for sustainable land-use practices. The Forestry Law, currently being updated, specifically details a range of prohibited actions that include (illegal) logging, grazing, transport of forest products, forest destruction and invasions on forested land.

The National Forestry Directorate (DNF), within the MAE, is responsible for compliance with forest management policies and other aspects of the Forestry Law. To date, the focus within the DNF has been on controlling the transport of illegal timber on the highways and the Directorate has had a limited role in controlling illegal activities within the forest. It has been proposed by the Ministry of Environment, though, that the future strategy for law enforcement be concentrated mainly within the forest industry (50% of the DNF’s effort allocation), with additional controls in the forest itself (30% effort) and on highways (20% effort); almost the reverse of the current situation. Enforcement at sawmills and other industrial operations will involve engagement of additional authorities including the military, police, local governments and the country’s Internal Revenue Service (MAE 2010b).
The Socio Bosque Program (SBP), though not formally a REDD+ program, is an incentive-based policy for forest conservation. From its initiation in September 2008 to December 2011, the SBP has achieved conservation agreements with private individuals (114,701 ha) and indigenous community partners (768,522 ha) to conserve a total of 883,223 ha of native forests, humid Andean grasslands (páramos) and other native vegetation formations, with estimated benefits for more than 70,000 people (MAE 2011f). MAE is considering a range of additional incentives which may be monetary in the form of direct financial compensation (as is the case with the SBP), tax breaks for sustainable activities (e.g. for forested lands or imported machinery) or non-financial incentives such as facilitation in the acquisition of logging permits, administrative services through mobile offices in timber production zones, free technical assistance from MAE to develop management plans, or the deregulation of plantations (MAE 2010b). Further incentives to promote sustainable forest management and reforestation are also currently under consideration (MAE 2010b).

Last updated: 5/2011

Reference levels

Ecuador will use an historical reference level (RL) for deforestation rates based on 1990 levels (MAE 2011a), and the government has recently begun a process to develop a national reference level for emissions from deforestation. The first component of this RL is the estimation of carbon stocks associated with different types of land use and vegetation cover, with an emphasis on forest ecosystems, which is being estimated as part of the National Forestry Evaluation. The second component is the calculation of the historical rate of deforestation that entails reliable estimation of the area and location of previous deforestation events.

In February 2011, the MAE made publically available the first results on historic forest cover and land use for continental Ecuador for the two periods 1990-2000 and 2000-2008, based on a comparison of LANDSAT and ASTER images (MAE 2011a). The study estimated that Ecuador's total forested area in 2008 was 9,599,679 ha, and that the deforestation rate in Ecuador was 74,300 ha/yr between 1990 and 2000, and 61,800 ha/yr between 2000 and 2008.

It is important to note, however, that these preliminary figures exclude about 30% of the total land area in Ecuador, primarily in the Esmeraldas Province in the North West of the country, due to a lack of cloud-free satellite images. Given that much of this area is forested land that has undergone large-scale deforestation and forest degradation in the past two decades (Sierra et al. 2003; Stern & Kernan 2011), the actual figures for historical deforestation are likely to be significantly higher than current estimates.

The MAE plans to use historical reference data to focus national efforts across geographic areas with increased historical deforestation rates and to increase effectiveness of the Forest Governance Model.

Last updated: 5/2011

MRV

Historically, Ecuador has been poorly equipped to monitor deforestation and forest degradation; national and regional data on forests are largely outdated, unreliable, incomplete and inconsistent
and the current administration has subsequently made great effort and investment to create reliable data on the state of the nation’s forests, the first results of which were published earlier this year (MAE 2011a).

The MRV program in Ecuador consists of four principal projects. The MAE developed a historical scenario to determine where deforestation and land use change occurred over time, during the periods 1990-2000 and 2000-2008. In Feb 2011, the SBP reported its first results with a national historical deforestation map based on LANDSAT and ASTER satellite imagery with minimum possible cloud cover (MAE 2011a). Ecuador anticipates but has not yet done a projected reference scenario. The National Forestry Evaluation programme, financed by the FAO, is being developed to procure data on tree species and biomass from plots in diverse forest types throughout the country with information on some forest types (e.g. dry forest and part of Amazonia) to be completed in Jan 2012 (MAE 2010b). MAE is currently developing a national forest monitoring system which is expected to be implemented in 2012.

Last updated:
5/2011

Safeguards

Ecuador aims to comply with the safeguards that are outlined within the Cancun Agreements (UNFCCC 2010). These safeguards will be integrated into the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system currently being developed, with emphasis on the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, conservation of biodiversity, ecosystem services and other social and environmental benefits.

In addition to its commitments under the UNFCCC, Ecuador is one of five pilot countries to develop voluntary national REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards (SES). This process includes an extensive stakeholder consultation process, workshops with diverse actors, revision by the Ministry of the Environment’s legal department and the establishment of a National Standards Committee. During the SES implementation phase in Ecuador, an information and monitoring system for safeguards will be developed to link REDD+ SES with the UN-REDD program to ensure compliance with safeguards as well as multiple benefits from REDD+ implementation. This monitoring plan will be used in the Socio Bosque Program as a pilot effort, to be scaled up for use in the National REDD+ Plan (MAE, 2011b).

In March 2010, the MAE and UNEP-WCMC began a joint program to identify social and environmental benefits from the implementation of REDD+ in Ecuador (MAE 2011c) and the global UN-REDD Programme will also produce tools and guidance to assess biodiversity and ecosystem services in forested areas that will be used in Ecuador.

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8/2015

Gender Equality

The Constitution of Ecuador (2008) prohibits gender-based discrimination (Article 11(2)), promotes the right to public participation in a gender inclusive way (Article 61(7)), encourages the state to mainstream gender considerations into all plans and policies and achieve equality between men and women (Article 70). Further, it makes reference to National Equality Councils which are public
bodies charged with monitoring respect for human rights and particularly the impact of national policies on gender issues (Articles 156 and 157). Ecuador also has in place a National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017 which emphasises the need for equality between women and men and for gender justice.

The Environment Ministry (Ministerio del Ambiente, MAE) defined a ‘Strategy for the Institutionalisation of Intercultural and Gender Approaches’, which outlines a methodological approach to mainstreaming a gender and intercultural focus into the goals and activities of environmental management projects and processes. According to the MAE’s progress report on Gender and Multiculturalism, a gender approach has been incorporated into emblematic projects including the MAE’s incentive-based conservation programme Socio Bosque, the FORECCSA project (Fortalecimiento de la Resiliencia de las Comunidades ante los Efectos Adversos del Cambio Climático con Énfasis en Seguridad Alimentaria, or Strengthening Community Resilience Against the Adverse Effects of Climate Change with Emphasis on Food Security) and the REDD+ SES process (Coordinación General de Planificación Ambiental, 2011). The FORECCSA project considers it a basic requirement to take a gender sensitive approach in enhancing climate change resilience. An evaluation by WEDO and MAE of the REDD+ SES process (see below), confirms that efforts are under way to mainstream a gender focus into natural resource management and conservation projects (Quesada-Aguilar, A. et al, 2013).

The National Standards Committee oversaw the implementation of REDD+ SES from 2011-2013, and organised a series of meetings in 2012 including one named ‘Gender, Forests and REDD+ SES’. The outcome being recommendations made for the construction of the National REDD+ Plan (PNREDD+), and a recognition that gender issues were important (Félix-Novoa & Lhumeau, 2013). REDD+ SES principles, criteria and country-specific indicators were piloted using the Socio Bosque programme. The indicators consequently include, inter alia, gender-specific clauses (2.2.1, 3.1.2, 3.3.1 and 3, 6.1.2) (Comisión Nacional de Estándares, 2011).

In 2012, WEDO and the MAE, evaluated the gender focus of the REDD+ SES content and process by carrying out workshops and interviews with civil society, the UN, government, grassroots, including women’s, organisations, and academic institutions. The main outcomes were identifying: I) the potential risks and benefits associated with REDD+ implementation, II) measures that would ensure gender considerations in all PNREDD+ phases, and III) gender issues to be addressed in all REDD+ SES principles, with an accompanying preliminary action plan. Workshop participants identified women’s full participation in decision making as the most important factor determining a gender-conscious REDD+. However, it was recognised that whilst Ecuador has a strong methodology in place to ensure participation in REDD+ SES processes, in practice women are usually only invited to participate in forest projects where there are no monetary benefits, and lack the opportunity and time to do so due to domestic chores. Likewise, it was recognised that Ecuador has well-developed gender equality policies and measures, but there are no specific gender-sensitive environmental policies (IUCN and EGI 2013).

References


Morales, M. Et Al. 2010. Seguridad en la Tenencia de la Tierra e Incentivos para la Conservación de Bosques. Quito.


Related initiatives

- Sustainable management of natural resources (Ecuador) [26]
- Generation of Geoinformation for Land Management at a National Level (Ecuador) [27]
- Global Witness Annual Transparency Report (Ecuador) [28]
- UN REDD National Joint Program (Ecuador) [4]
- The Socio Bosque Program [29]

Related news

- Financial pledges for REDD+ slow to be disbursed, finds report [30]
- High gold prices causing increased deforestation in South America, study finds [31]
- Deforestation ramping up in Yasuni as Ecuador sets to open up national park to drilling [32]
- Why are Ecuadorian oil firms talking about building road into Yasuni-ITT? [33]
- Minister of Environment for Peru and UNFCCC COP 20 President highlights new report on Amazon security agenda [34]

Recommended reading

- Addressing social and environmental safeguards and ensuring multiple benefits in Ecuador [35]
- Bridging the gap between forest conservation and poverty alleviation: the Ecuadorian Socio Bosque program [36]
- National Programme Document (Ecuador) [37]
- REDD+ Readiness in Ecuador [38]

External Links

- Ministry of Environment [39]
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- Socio Bosque [41]
- Voluntary REDD+ Database Ecuador [42]

Related encyclopaedia articles

- Allocation [43]
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