



TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Key Aspects of Territorial Development Series



This document is an overview of the research and capacity-building and policy-dialogue activities carried out within the context of the Rural Territorial Dynamics Program (*Programa Dinámicas Territoriales Rurales*, or DTR, in Spanish). The Program's objective is to contribute to the design and implementation of public policies that encourage and support virtuous circles of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability in non-metropolitan areas of Latin America. It was coordinated by Rimisp and implemented in collaboration with 52 partner organizations in 11 Latin American countries. This initiative has received financial support from the International Development Research Center (IDRC, Canada), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the New Zealand Aid Programme.



Rimisp-Latin American Center for Rural Development is a non-profit organization operating since 1986. Its mission is to achieve rural development in the continent. Development is understood as strengthening the capabilities of rural social groups and as the expansion of the liberties of people in the region's rural societies. Rimisp's knowledge contribution supports institutional change, innovation and the strengthening of social actors, to revitalize and transform Latin American rural societies so they become more just and equitable.

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Key Messages

Territorial governance of natural resources is dependent upon the territorial authorities management capacity as well as upon their ability to negotiate with other relevant authorities both inside and outside the territory. (Page. 2)

The performance of municipal governments vis-à-vis natural resource governance varies greatly among territories, even among those under the same legal and administrative framework at the national level. One of the factors that explain this difference in performance is the level of economic inequality and its interaction with political inequality which contribute to define the space municipal authorities have to establish technical and administrative relationships with other relevant authorities both inside and outside the territory.

In places with high levels of economic inequality and where the economic elite does not have environmental interests, it is unlikely that territorial governance emerges with the capacity to ensure sustainable use of natural resources. (Pages. 3 - 4)

High levels of economic and political inequality tend to reproduce institutions and social arrangements that –legally or illegally– favor those who have greater influence. If powerful groups do not have environmental interests, natural resource governance that leads to sustainable use is not likely to emerge. In places where local pro-environmental interests do not exist, or where many have pro-environmental interests but lack sufficient voice to express them, territorial elites achieve their interests by exerting their power over territorial authorities. In places where most of the population does have pro-environmental interests and the voice to express them before territorial authorities, the elite will attempt to invalidate territorial initiatives to establish natural resource governance under democratic control and based on technical guidelines and legal frameworks by in order to promote their own interests at higher government levels and with the legal authorities.

In places with less economic inequality, there is greater probability that actors and institutions will emerge that operate according to technical guidelines and legal frameworks rather than according to the discretion of powerful individuals. (Pages. 5 - 8)

Horizontal interactions between environmental professionals working in different entities at the territorial level, and local governments, NGOs, local universities and state institutions, among others, as well as vertical interactions with the local electorate at the local government level, legislative and judicial institutions at the national level, etc., contribute to the emergence of more transparent governance based on technical guidelines and legal frameworks rather than being based on the discretion of powerful individuals.

There is a positive correlation and causality between transparent and democratic institutional practices and a more sustainable natural resource governance system. However, the former do not guarantee the latter. (Pages. 9-11)

A wider rural constituency and the absence of strong individual actors combined with professionalization of municipal administration, such as hiring professional technicians, promoting retention efforts, etc. contribute to a more transparent and formalized management system that generates a virtuous circle of endogenous or gradual institutional changes and, therefore, a system that is less prone to veto power. This environment together with political rights and free access to information prepare the ground for the emergence of environmental groups that increase environmental awareness and natural resource governance.

Efforts to strengthen territorial governance of natural resources must take into account a variety of actors, their interactions, and the autonomy and transparency of institutions and institutional practices. (Page. 12)

The following must be considered if efforts to strengthen territorial governance of natural resources in a sustainable manner are to be effective: (I) The relative power between those who feel the effects of the unsustainable use of resources and those who cause or have an interest in the unsustainable use of resources; (II) The extent to which both vertical interactions between environmental professionals and citizens, national institutions, etc., and horizontal interactions between environmental professionals from various institutions take place and inform territorial governance of natural resources contributing to ensuring its legitimacy and quality; and (III) The extent to which territorial governance of natural resources is characterized by transparent political and legal processes and by discretionary technical and administrative processes.

Territorial governance of natural resources is dependent upon the territorial authorities' management capacity as well as upon their ability to negotiate with other relevant authorities both inside and outside the territory.

In the cattle raising-coffee growing territory of Esteli in Nicaragua, due to efforts by peasant groups with organizational experience and supported by the Environmental and Natural Resource Ministry (MARENA), townships, NGOs and international cooperation, several protected areas were “activated” as a strategy to ensure a more environmentally sustainable natural resource governance system that was compatible with small- and medium-scale production. In this way, it was possible to have both the Farming and Forestry Ministry (MAGFOR), thought to better represent the interests of large producers, as well as MARENA, as a stronger and strategic partner, as counterparts to the Mayor’s office.

- Natural resource governance reflects and it is shaped by economic, social, political, bureaucratic, cultural and environmental interests. Therefore, conceptually and in political, legal and administrative practice natural resource governance includes –and transcends– environmental governance, i.e. the governance of the use of natural resources for environmental purposes.

- Differences between local governments can often be traced back to the history of their agrarian structure and political institutions where the context, new actors, leadership vacuums, guiding vision, etc., allow for the continuity of non-democratic practices and clientelism, or open the doors for new ways of exercising power.

Natural resource governance

is understood as the creation, reaffirmation and change of political institutions, mechanisms, procedures, practices and organizations that regulate or solve open or imminent conflicts among actors (both users and authorities) in relation to access to and conditions for use of natural resource.



- Natural resource governance constitutes a central issue in Latin American territories considered for this study. This is because economic dynamics have caused environmental degradation or because there is competition among actors for access to and use of natural resources.

- There is no one-directional relationship between the quality and amount of natural resources on one hand and territorial dynamics on the other. Territories without any particular natural resource endowment have been able to compensate for this disadvantage by exerting collective action, investing in infrastructure, etc. In contrast, territories with a relatively favorable natural resource endowment may be characterized by low or null economic growth without reducing poverty or income concentration, and may even have even experienced environmental issues caused by poor resource use.

Under conditions with high levels of economic inequality and where the economic elite do not have environmental interests, it is unlikely for territorial governance to emerge with the capacity to ensure sustainable use of natural resources.



- Land ownership plays a fundamental role in shaping inequalities and natural resource governance because it goes beyond its meaning as an economic asset. Ownership may be collective or individual and with a formal title, or validated through another form of formal or informal possession. Throughout rural history, land ownership has resulted in both *de facto* and formally recognized political power. There is also a very close relationship between access to land and a person considering himself a citizen with rights and responsibilities.
- Due to centuries long colonization processes, large parts of Latin America have been characterized by an

extraordinarily unequal distribution of land that has led to the concentration of power in a few hands. In the vast majority of Latin American rural territories, and at least well into the second half of the 20th Century, land was the basis for economic, social and political power, and territorial societies were organized around the control and use of this key resource.

- With transition to democracy, most Latin American countries have constitutionally broken away from this relationship between economic and political power. Nevertheless, in practice, this relationship is still prevalent to a smaller or larger extent in most Latin American territories.

In Guatemala, the municipalities of Santa Catarina Mita and Asuncion Mita, characterized by greater economic dynamism, show gaps in access to employment and greater levels of inequality than San Carlos Alzate, where there are higher levels of poverty but inequality indicators are lower, especially in access to land. In this last municipality, with a mostly indigenous population, a strong institutionalization of processes related to natural resource exploitation was observed, and these resources are regulated in their statutes. Although these statutes were only put into writing approximately 70 years ago, they are the result of ancestral practices previously transmitted via oral tradition.

In the northwest banks of the Cerron Grande wetlands in the Chalatenango department of El Salvador, indicators related to access to land and education for the municipalities of Tejutla and El Paraiso also show a similar divergence, indicating more deeply rooted social inequalities in El Paraiso. In Tejutla, the presence of a relatively large number of medium-size land owners and a smaller number of latifundistas allows for better conditions in the development of institutional practices based on participation and the enforcement of rights. On the other hand, land concentration levels in El Paraiso had an unfavorable effect on developing ways to exercise power that were compatible with participatory institutions in the territory. This is because El Paraiso is a municipality that was dominated by a large latifundio less than 40 years ago and because of the way in which agrarian reform was carried out in 1980.

In Nicaragua, in the cattle and coffee producing territory located in the northern part of the country and encompassing the municipalities of Esteli and Condega, the dynamics observed between 1995 and 2005 did not show evidence of statistically significant consumption growth or poverty reduction. Nevertheless, the structure for asset ownership is less concentrated in Esteli and Condega than in the dairy territories of Santo Tomas, San Pedro de Lovago and Villa Sandino located in the central interior region of the country, and whose rural areas show economic growth dynamics with poverty reduction due to the dairy boom and immigration of poor populations to urban centers, Costa Rica and the mountains. However, this production model deepens the lack of opportunities for small producers and landless families who end up leaving rural areas.

- The existence of agrarian structures with large-scale estates (*latifundios*) appears in many of the studied territories to generate dynamics that lack inclusiveness and are polarizing. In many cases, agrarian structures characterized by large-scale estates have enjoyed support and protection from the State, resulting in the almost total absence of productive transformation processes and in extended economic stagnation with very low productivity levels and weak ties to dynamic markets that could infuse some form of competition.

- In the three countries studied for this paper –El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua–, even though they went through democratic transitions and initiated the political and administrative decentralization processes entailing local elections and the creation of new institutions and institutional practices for municipal-territorial governance, they were not able to totally erase existing economic and political institutions. Therefore, to various degrees, this decentralization process and creation of new institutions and institutional practices has been based on or linked to the previously existing institutional system.



Under conditions with less inequality there is greater probability that actors and institutions will emerge that act guided by technical criteria and legal frameworks rather than under the direction of powerful individuals.

- The less inequality in land distribution, the greater social inclusion and the more distributed natural resource exploitation is among actors with few resources, and not only for large landowners. This allows for the existence of a wider rural constituency.

- The initiatives of these rural constituency bases contribute to strengthening horizontal and vertical interactions between municipal/territorial professionals. In turn, professionals gain confidence in their daily work of balancing their performance between powerful political and economic actors and keeping their professionalism in applying the law, widening, in this way, the array of options for institutional change.

- In places where the conditions for these interactions to emerge and strengthen are not existent, there is frustration, for example, among environmental experts who due to their education and extra-territorial professional contacts know there are other alternatives. This frustration could be the source for institutional change but, in many cases, there is a lack of a critical mass that could mobilize and make social demands, and create social coalitions and epistemic communities among professionals, in order to realize this potential.

- The fact that there are large groups of small-scale farmers –as in the case of Nicaragua’s cattle and coffee producing region– that see themselves as



independent economic actors and who have municipal representation through, for example, community organizations, such as communal committees, fire brigades, volunteer forest rangers and project committees, creates the feeling of a citizenship with legitimate rights and responsibilities.

- When there are more equitable agrarian structures, and in places in which small producers have more political weight and capacity to exercise social control over municipal authorities, there is also a larger space for innovations in local governance to emerge. This space is even larger when there are well-trained technical experts in municipal governments. In a sense, this reflects a situation in which the farmers’ social agency opens up political and administrative spaces (or prevents them from being captured by others), leading to technical experts also being able to exert their individual and collective agency.

In Nicaragua’s cattle and coffee producing territory, especially in Condega, the political and organizational space opened by the existence of a relatively large group of small producers led to a series of institutional innovations that have widened vertical interactions between townships and their citizens as well as horizontal interactions, such as those between technical experts and various state institutions.

In Nicaragua’s dairy territory, due to weak interactions between township officials and pertinent state institutions, together with the influence exerted by powerful ranchers, regulating agricultural burning –especially the burning of pastures– has been difficult. This has led to an invalidation of the budding attempts to formalize natural resource governance.



Chalatenango, El Salvador

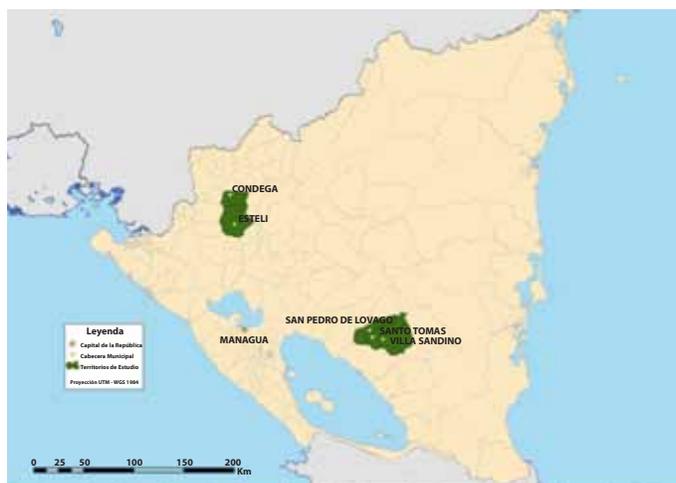


Source: Gomez, Ileana; Elias Escobar y Rafael E. Cartagena, 2012.

Chalatenango (El Paraiso y Tejutla), El Salvador: In Chalatenango, El Salvador, the municipality of El Paraiso has historically been characterized by highly unequal land distribution due to the presence of the Santa Barbara hacienda, which has kept strong ties with economic power structures based on latifundios that belong to oligarchic families or those with strong local influence. A large portion of the area's productive activity revolved around this hacienda because it housed sugar cane plantations and the San Esteban refinery. It also housed fields of basic grains, yucca and other staples. With agrarian reform, the hacienda was transformed into a cooperative that broke apart as time went on, and the land was divided among some of its members. On the other hand, haciendas in the municipality of Tejutla were not large enough to be affected by the reform. In Tejutla there has always been a relatively large group of land owners with enough land to ensure their livelihood and maintain economic and

political independence. In terms of institutional practices, we find more democratic practices in Tejutla than in El Paraiso. For example, with the current Mayor's election in Tejutla (2009-2012) council members were selected through short candidate lists proposed by community assemblies in each canton, and the population choices were respected even when some of the elected officials were not members of the Mayor's political party. In El Paraiso, on the other hand, council members are selected by the Mayor and usually belong to the same party. Moreover, thematic commissions have been created in Tejutla, including one focused on environmental issues that is coordinated by council members and allows for wider participation. They are also experimenting with accountability mechanisms through a Municipal Newsletter.

Santo Tomas y Esteli Nicaragua: Historically, the dairy territory of Santo Tomas (represented by the municipalities of Santo Tomas, San Pedro de Lovago and Villa Sandino) has been characterized by the existence of large farming groups and by a tendency to have an accumulation of several lots owned by one individual in various agro-ecological areas. Despite attempts to redistribute the land during the agrarian reform in the 80s and 90s, a land re-concentration process has taken place, as well as a considerable reduction in the number of small- and medium-size producers. On the other hand, without being qualified as having equal land distribution, the cattle and coffee producing territory in Esteli has historically been characterized by having a relatively significant number of small- and medium-size producers. The high level of organization found in the population of Esteli and Condega is historical. Since the 60s there have been grassroots organizations, with networks used by Catholic organizations. Also, the entire territory is considered heir to the Sandino legacy because he fought in the area and many of the inhabitants fought along with him against U.S. troops. These elements have given a sense of identity to the territory, in which information flow and organizational forms, such as fire brigades, take place easily, something that cannot be found in dairy territory. This less unequal distribution of land and more-inclusive organizational practices found in the cattle and coffee producing territory of Esteli is also telling when comparing the performance of municipal governments in both territories.



Fuente: Gomez, Ligia y Rolando Buitrago, 2012.



Johana Gutierrez – UAM Technical Expert, Condega



San Diego Community Leader, Condega.



Cerro Las Brisas Sector, Esteli, (affected by forest fires during the summer)



Landfills affecting rivers and inhabitants in the San Diego community, Condega.

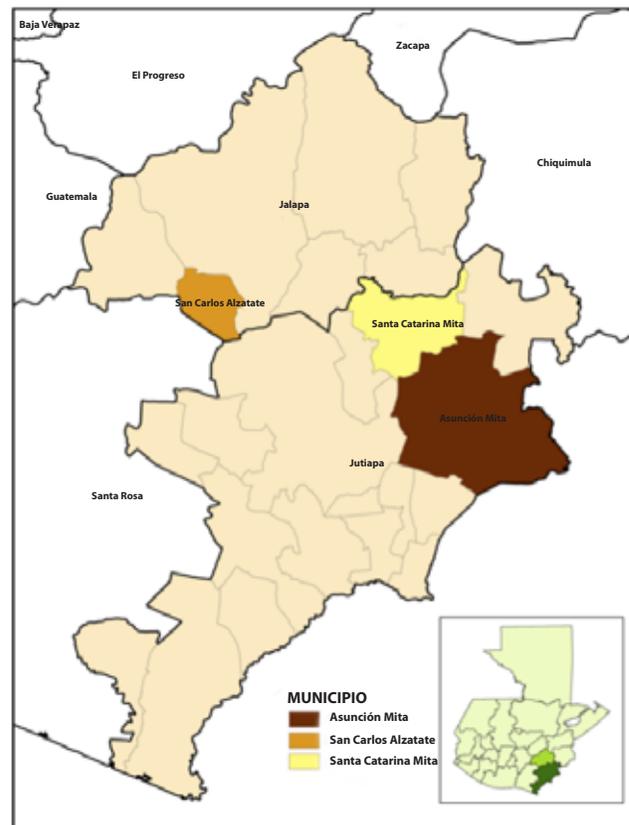


Cattle farming, main economic activity in the Santo Tomas area





Ostua-Guija Guatemala: In the Ostua-Guija basin in Guatemala we find a predominance of small-scale farming operations in the municipality of San Carlos Alzatate, where 25% of population is identified as indigenous. In Asuncion Mita, and to a lesser extent in Santa Catarina Mita, there are large-scale farming operations. Indicators for the municipalities of Santa Catarina Mita and Asuncion Mita show similarities, while the behavior in Carlos Alzatate is completely opposite. The first two municipalities show considerable low levels of poverty but greater inequality both in consumption and access to land, as well as gender gaps, in the Economically Active Population (EAP). Asuncion Mita and Santa Catarina Mita have shown a move towards economic development aided by, among others, plentiful water sources, its border location with El Salvador (a significant production end-market, especially agricultural production), and an adequate road network both for connecting municipalities with one another and for traveling to El Salvador, Guatemala City and other important cities in the country. In comparison, San Carlos Alzatate is one of the municipalities with the highest poverty in Guatemala even though this is where the River Ostua begins and it shares the basin with other more dynamic municipalities. Its economy is less diversified, and production is not enough to create a surplus beyond local consumption. Nevertheless, in San Carlos Alzatate there is wide participation from the indigenous community in decision making, and institutional systems and participation seem to be much weaker in the other two municipalities, especially in Asuncion Mita.



There is a positive correlation and causality between transparent and democratic institutional practices and a more sustainable natural resource governance system. However, the former do not guarantee the latter.



In Nicaragua, in the cattle and coffee producing territory, and especially in Condega, the presence of a rural constituency base has led to a series of institutional innovations that have also widened both vertical interactions between townships and their citizens as well as horizontal interactions, such as those among technical experts. For example, departmental delegates now have a set schedule for visiting the area. In this territory, every time an environmental technician does an on-site inspection to make decisions or give recommendations regarding natural resource exploitation requests, the technician brings along a technical expert from another institution, ministry, police, etc. This only happens in one third of the on-site inspections carried out at the other municipalities studied for this project. In cases where inspections are done due to complaints about misuse of natural resources, the environmental technician brings along, in average, two other technicians from other institutions. Technicians from the other three municipalities many times have to go alone or accompanied by only one technician from another institution.

- Institutional practices that are more transparent and democratic are not in themselves a guarantee for more sustainable natural resource governance. However, political rights and free access to information prepare the ground for environmental groups, who can then

increase environmental awareness and natural resource governance.

- One factor that contributes to this positive correlation is when the local population, both rural and urban, can perceive environmental problems,

In Tejutla, El Salvador, there is evidence of a process with greater possibilities for the formation of institutions and institutional practices. The evidence includes a process of infusing professionalism into public administration, having accountability through publication of activities in the Municipal Newsletter, creating a municipal website, the way in which the mayors select their council members, the practice of organizing public consultations, forming commissions such as the environmental commission, looking for a more equitable representation between men and women, and creating a process of technical administrative modernization through training.

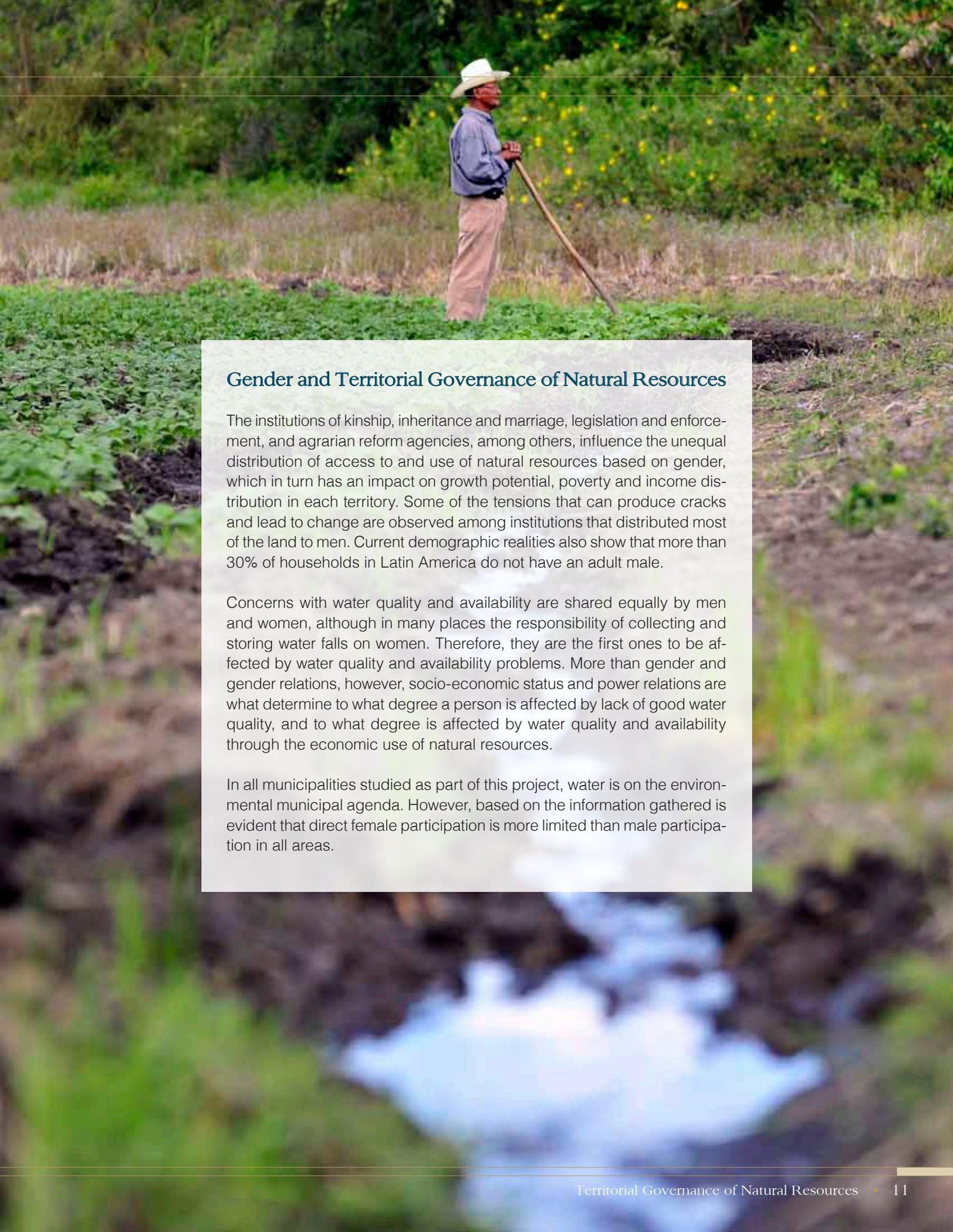
including water quality and availability and issues related to the use of fire for land clearing and deforestation, such as smoke, heat, wind and dust. If the local population is effectively represented, it can put pressure on the local government to take direct action or strengthen its interactions with other relevant State entities.

- On the other hand, without effective representation, the local population may not be able to pressure the local government. This lack of representation could be the result of powerful landowners who besides holding political and

economic power often cause the environmental problems without suffering the effects. In this situation, it is less likely that a sustainable natural resource governance system will emerge.

- The level of social cohesion is a significant factor for respecting norms and agreements related to resource use. Communities with strong cohesion and with a sense of belonging linked to the territory are more likely to carry out established processes at the internal level, more so if these systems are articulated with official authorities and procedures.



A man wearing a light-colored hat, a blue long-sleeved shirt, and tan trousers stands in a field. He is holding a long wooden tool, possibly a hoe or a similar agricultural implement, and appears to be working. The field is filled with green plants, and there are trees and bushes in the background. The overall scene is rural and agricultural.

Gender and Territorial Governance of Natural Resources

The institutions of kinship, inheritance and marriage, legislation and enforcement, and agrarian reform agencies, among others, influence the unequal distribution of access to and use of natural resources based on gender, which in turn has an impact on growth potential, poverty and income distribution in each territory. Some of the tensions that can produce cracks and lead to change are observed among institutions that distributed most of the land to men. Current demographic realities also show that more than 30% of households in Latin America do not have an adult male.

Concerns with water quality and availability are shared equally by men and women, although in many places the responsibility of collecting and storing water falls on women. Therefore, they are the first ones to be affected by water quality and availability problems. More than gender and gender relations, however, socio-economic status and power relations are what determine to what degree a person is affected by lack of good water quality, and to what degree is affected by water quality and availability through the economic use of natural resources.

In all municipalities studied as part of this project, water is on the environmental municipal agenda. However, based on the information gathered is evident that direct female participation is more limited than male participation in all areas.

Efforts to strengthen territorial governance of natural resources must take into account a variety of actors, their interactions, and the autonomy and transparency of institutions and institutional practices.



the environmental issue is raised in the local political agenda. In such matters, local governments can and should play an important role, but they also depend on the efforts of citizens to support them.

- Efforts to promote sustainable environmental use of natural resources, water, land, forests, etc., are not fruitful without actions to avoid/discourage unsustainable uses.
- The articulating function of local governments can be strengthened with structures that promote greater participation from this level and a more advisory and regulatory function played by the central government. This means, applying the State's subsidiary function.
- Natural resources are part of the livelihood of the local population; they offer ecosystemic services and are sources of wealth for the territorial and extra-territorial population. Is due to the magnitude of their significance in the territories that natural resource governance is an illustrative or critical example of democratic processes for decentralization.
- Understanding the institutional arrangements that govern natural resource access and use is an essential part of explaining the relationship between growth, poverty, inequality and environmental quality in any territory.
- When those who are affected by environmental problems have a voice,
- Capacity for territorial governance of the use of natural resources, as well as its quality, not only depends on the capacity of relevant territorial institutions. They also depend on the interactions between these institutions and their national counterparts, private institutions and civil society, as well as with the territory's inhabitants, because these interactions would serve as counterbalance to the discretion of the authorities. Therefore, efforts to strengthen the capacity for territorial governance of natural resources should not only be directed toward territorial institutions themselves but also toward widening, facilitating and improving their vertical and horizontal interactions with other relevant institutions.

Additional Readings

Gomez, Ileana; Elias Escobar and Rafael Cartagena. (2012). *La gobernanza territorial de los recursos naturales. Desigualdad, prácticas institucionales y potenciales de transformación en El Paraiso-Tejutla, El Salvador*. Work Report, Mimeo.

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