



ENVIRONMENT IN GUATEMALA

Environmental issues are critical in Guatemala because of the country's large natural resource endowment. Guatemala is one of the most ecologically diverse nations on the planet, with 14 different eco-regions and great biological and cultural diversity. Four million hectares of forest are found in Guatemala, 70% located within natural protected areas like the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) in Petén. Guatemala has the largest forested area in Mesoamerica and the second largest contiguous forest in the Americas after the Amazon, but these areas, as well as other parts of the country, face threats related to habitat loss, deforestation, over-exploitation of natural resources, and environmental contamination. In addition to these threats, Guatemala is one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Guatemala is also a focus country for Enhancing Capacity for Low Emission Development Strategies (EC-LEDS) under the Presidential Global Climate Change (GCC) Initiative.



COUNTRY DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION STRATEGY

To address the above mentioned threats, USAID/Guatemala, as part of its Country Development and Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), designed a Development Objective focused on the Management of Natural Resources to Mitigate Impacts of Global Climate Change through three key areas for intervention: 1) implementation of market-driven conservation and management strategies, 2) reduction of vulnerability to climate change, and 3) strengthening of environmental governance. Cross-cutting themes within this framework include a focus on both gender and indigenous populations.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

- Climate, Nature, and Communities in Guatemala Program (CNCG)
2013-2018 - \$25 million
by Rainforest Alliance
- United for Lake Atitlán
2013-2014 - \$1.25 million
by University of Nevada, Reno
- Interagency Agreement for LEDS
2012-2014 - \$0.5 million
by U.S. Forest Service

The focus area for these interventions include the biologically significant MBR, and Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve (SMBR), Alta and Baja Verapaz, as well as the Western Highland Departments of San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapan, Quiché, and Huehuetenango.





KEY ACTIVITIES

Biodiversity

Because of the importance of Guatemala's biodiversity, USAID activities focus on biodiversity conservation and monitoring in key natural protected areas in the country, especially the MBR and SMBR. Projects in the MBR have worked to reduce deforestation, protecting critical habitat for key species such as the scarlet macaw, jaguars, and monkeys. Other biodiversity activities, not only in the MBR, focus on fire management, updating management plans for protected areas, strengthening biological monitoring systems, and sustainable forestry activities. The key forestry activities in the MBR are centered on the sustainable harvest of timber and non-timber products from multiple-use zones under Forest Stewardship Council certification. This process of certification and sustainable harvest has increased incomes for communities, as well as reduced deforestation and improved the conservation and management of the areas. USAID/Guatemala coordinates closely with the US Department of the Interior in the MBR on work related to environmental governance and law enforcement capabilities.

Sustainable Landscapes

Sustainable landscapes is one of three focus areas under the Presidential GCC Initiative, with the main goal of slowing, halting and reversing emissions from deforestation. USAID interventions focus on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation of Forests (REDD+), either in the support of on the ground activities that protect forests to allow them to sequester carbon, or to support strategies and policies related to REDD+ frameworks. Reducing emissions from forest destruction has been identified as one of the potentially most cost-effective ways to reduce the rate of increase of atmospheric greenhouse gasses that lead to climate change. Additionally, Guatemala is working to develop a Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) as part of the EC-LEDS Initiative.

Adaptation

Adaptation is another of the focus areas under the GCC Initiative and USAID/Guatemala is working to help communities in the Western Highlands anticipate and incorporate plans for responding to potential climate change impacts into economic and political systems to ensure a more secure future. Effects from climate change in Guatemala will include things like increased flooding and drought, thus efforts to reduce vulnerability to these impacts focus on adapting new agricultural practices, watershed protection, developing early warning systems, and the integration of climate change impacts into municipal plans. Adaptation activities are occurring in the five previously mentioned departments of the Western Highlands in close coordination with USAID/Guatemala's agricultural projects under the Feed the Future Initiative.

Lake Atitlan

USAID/Guatemala is currently supporting the monitoring of water quality and watershed health in Lake Atitlan.¹ Increasing development in the lake's watershed, coupled with unsustainable watershed practices has resulted in an increase in agricultural and urban runoff, cyanobacteria blooms, and changing floral and faunal composition in the lake. Current activities focus on better understanding the lake's dynamics, as well as what is contributing to the lake deterioration.

¹ Lake Atitlan was a focus area under the previous strategy that ended in 2012, therefore future interventions will not work in Lake Atitlan.