The politics of REDD+ MRV in Mexico

The interplay of the national and subnational levels

Paulina Deschamps Ramirez
Anne M. Larson
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Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

Measuring reduced impact logging and carbon sequestration in the ejido Felipe Carrillo Puerto’s annual cutting area (Quintana Roo, Mexico)

Photo by Dawn Rodriguez-Ward

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Acronyms

ATREDD+  REDD+ Early Actions
AATREDD+  REDD+ Early Action Areas
APDT  Public Agent for Territorial Development
CONAFOR  National Forestry Commission
CONABIO  National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity
CTC-REDD+  Technical Advisory Committee for REDD+
ECOSUR  Colegio de la Frontera Sur
ERPD  Emissions Reduction Program Document
ERPA  Emission Reductions Payment Agreement
ENAREDD+  National REDD+ Strategy
FAO  Food and Agriculture Organization
FCPF  Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FREL  Forest reference emission level
FRL  Forest reference level
GCF  Governors’ Climate and Forests Task Force
GCFF  Governors’ Climate and Forests Fund
GHG  Greenhouse gas
GT-MRV  Technical working groups at the state level for MRV
INECC  National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change
INEGI  National Institute of Statistics and Geography
INFyS  National Forest and Soils Inventory
IPCC  Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRE  Emissions Reduction Initiative
JIBIOPUUC  Junta Intermunicipal Biocultural del Puuc
MAD-Mex system  Activity Data Satellite Monitoring System for Mexico
M-REDD+ Alliance  Mexico REDD+ Alliance
MRV  Monitoring, Reporting and Verification
NDC  Nationally Determined Contribution
OSM  Observatorio de la Selva Maya
PMN  Project “Reinforcing REDD+ Readiness in Mexico and Enabling South–South Cooperation” (also known as Proyecto México-Noruega)
REDD+  Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, including conserving carbon stocks in forests, sustainable forest management and enhancement of preexisting carbon stocks in developing countries
SAGARPA  Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food
SEDER  Secretariat of Rural Development – Government of the state of Yucatan
SEDESOL  Secretariat of Social Development
SEMARNAT  Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources
SNMF  National Forest Monitoring System
SNMRV  National Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification System for REDD+
UTEMRVR  Technical Unit Specialized in Monitoring, Reporting and Verification
UNDP  United Nations Development Programme
UNFCCC  United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN-REDD  United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
VCEFM  Virtual Center of Excellence in Forest Monitoring
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The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) encourages developing countries to implement activities under the policy initiative ‘Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and the Role of Conservation, Sustainable Management of Forests and Enhancement of Forest Carbon Stocks in Developing Countries’ (REDD+). The guidelines provided by UNFCCC indicate that countries planning to implement REDD+ activities must create a national forest reference emission level (FREL) and/or forest reference level (FRL), and establish robust national forest monitoring systems. These must provide accurate data and information that is transparent, consistent over time and suitable for monitoring, reporting and verifying (MRV) anthropogenic forest-related emissions.

However, even apparently technical processes such as MRV need to engage with politics in order to move forward. This occasional paper focuses on Mexico’s approach to REDD+ MRV and the interplay between national and state levels. It arises from a set of questions aimed at comprehending actors’ different interests and understandings of REDD+ MRV, why visions vary, how coordination (or the lack of it) functions across actors and scales, the underlying factors affecting coordination, and how these can be addressed to create a well-functioning multilevel REDD+ MRV system. To answer these questions, 45 interviews were conducted between August and November 2016 at national and subnational levels (in the states of Chiapas and Yucatan) with representatives of the national government, state governments, academia, nongovernmental organizations, forest producers, national and state level technical advisory committees for REDD+ (CTC-REDD+) and Yucatan’s Public Agent for Territorial Development (Agente Público de Desarrollo Territorial or APDT).

This research seeks to identify challenges and areas of opportunity and provide insights into how the process can be improved to create a multilevel REDD+ MRV system that responds to the different needs and interests of national, state and local actors.

Results reveal tension generated by the lack of understanding around what the country is required to provide in regard to the purpose of international (UNFCCC) REDD+ MRV, what the constraints are and what the roles and responsibilities of subnational actors could and should be in the process. Across levels, sound channels of communication and coordination are much needed to inform on REDD+ MRV (objectives, decisions), establish institutional arrangements, and clearly define and put in practice actors’ roles and responsibilities, thus increasing the possibilities of being perceived as a transparent system where trustworthy decisions are made. Questions on how information is shared, and how subnational technical capacities, experiences, needs and interests are included and strengthened need to be answered. Given that drastic federal budget cuts are undermining the government’s capacity to extend the scope of REDD+, the interest of national and subnational authorities as well as other actors and sources of finance will be needed to support further development of REDD+ MRV and other monitoring initiatives.

Also, the design of the MRV system for REDD+ in Mexico is testing traditional top-down work patterns. Subnational forest monitoring platforms led by civil society organizations, academia and voluntary working groups on MRV are becoming crucial to ensure that information is collected and shared among actors. Also, efforts undertaken to strengthen subnational technical capacities for MRV have been lauded by subnational actors.
and should continue. The potential Emission
Reductions Payment Agreement with the Carbon
Fund of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
(FCPF) and subnational capacity-building efforts
and mechanisms, such as the Governors’ Climate
and Forests Task Force, represent opportunities to
shift toward a more institutionally inclusive MRV
system. The development of the REDD+ MRV
system could become an innovative attempt to
transform how actors share and analyze results,
how policies are designed in Mexico, and how to
assess which activities work and why.

More recent steps taken by the National
Forestry Commission (Comisión Nacional
Forestal, CONAFOR) are starting to result
in improvements in the way REDD+ MRV
is currently being discussed between national
and subnational actors. However, continued
financial, technical and administrative support
for further implementation and improvement of
Mexico’s REDD+ MRV system and of monitoring
initiatives will be needed to attain the country’s
ambitious climate change and rural sustainable
development goals.
1 Introduction

As part of global efforts to mitigate climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) encourages developing countries to implement activities under the ‘Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and the Role of Conservation, Sustainable Management of Forests and Enhancement of Forest Carbon Stocks in Developing Countries’ (REDD+) policy initiative. The guidelines provided by the UNFCCC under the Warsaw Framework indicate that countries planning to implement REDD+ activities must create a national forest reference emission level (FREL) and/or forest reference level (FRL) and establish robust national forest monitoring systems. These must provide accurate data and information that is transparent, consistent over time, and suitable for the Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) of anthropogenic forest-related emissions and emissions reductions (UNFCCC 2009, 2010, 2013).

Various studies have used a multilevel governance perspective to analyze countries’ progress on building their REDD+ MRV systems, which go beyond the technical aspects of REDD+ to understand the political challenges of MRV (Korhonen-Kurki et al. 2013; Ravikumar et al. 2015; Kowler and Larson 2016; Vijge 2016). By analyzing the flow of information and the interplay of myriad actors, interests and power relations across levels, the design and implementation of REDD+ MRV systems is understood not only as a technical requirement, but as a political issue as well. This approach allows an exploration of the ways even apparently technical processes like MRV need to engage with politics to move forward.

In Mexico, the REDD+ process is led by the National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR). As a REDD+ flagship country, Mexico is currently reviewing its national REDD+ Strategy (ENAREDD+), although it is not clear when the final version will be published. CONAFOR has also established REDD+ Early Actions Areas (Áreas de Acciones Tempranas REDD+, or AATREDD+) intended to put institutional arrangements, governance models, monitoring and finance schemes into practice, providing relevant lessons for the implementation of REDD+ (CONAFOR 2015c). The early action areas have been set up in five states: Chiapas, Jalisco, Campeche, Yucatan and Quintana Roo. These states were responsible for 36% of the national forest sector emissions in the 2001-2011 period (CONAFOR 2016). Individual states represent the subnational jurisdictions for REDD+ implementation in Mexico (Robles et al. 2014), and several are in the process of finalizing their REDD+ strategies. So far, the draft of ENAREDD+ establishes objectives and lines of action for the country’s REDD+ MRV system and for establishing its FREL. Mexico is part of both the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD) and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), which are the two main global REDD+ initiatives.

It is particularly timely to examine the development of the MRV system in Mexico in light of the 2015 Paris Agreement (UNFCCC 2015), which “stresses the importance of stakeholder efforts to address and respond to climate change, including those of civil society, the private sector, financial institutions, cities and other subnational authorities” (de Sy et al. 2016: 2). The Paris Agreement also refers to the monitoring of impacts on people, human rights, safeguards, and others: “[L]and-use sector information will not only be needed for improving national GHG [greenhouse gas] reporting and
global stocktaking, but also for guiding local mitigation planning, implementation of land-use activities, and the accountability of actions and stakeholders (i.e. for tracking corporate zero-deforestation commitments)” (ibid.). Although specific changes in REDD+ MRV requirements based on the Paris Agreement have not yet been determined, the Enhanced Transparency Framework the agreement establishes is aimed at supporting good practices, legitimacy and accountability of all stakeholders in the progress of MRV on nationally determined contributions to reducing GHG emissions (UNFCCC 2015).

International finance has played a key role in supporting the development of Mexico’s national REDD+ MRV system (also known as Sistema Nacional de Monitoreo, Reporte y Verificación or SNMRV). Mexico received financial support from the Government of Norway through the project “Reinforcing REDD+ Readiness in Mexico and Enabling South–South Cooperation” (also known as Proyecto México-Noruega or PMN). This project was managed by CONAFOR and received technical and administrative support from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The PMN was implemented from June 2011 to March 2016 and had an initial budget of over USD 14 million.1 The PMN invested over USD 7 million of this (52% of the project’s budget) in the design and implementation of the SNMRV. The PMN was set up primarily to develop and implement the SNMRV and position Mexico as a center of excellence for South–South cooperation in the Mesoamerican region by exchanging experiences and capacities on MRV systems (CONAFOR et al. 2016).

Also, The Nature Conservancy in conjunction with Rainforest Alliance, Woods Hole Research Center, and the NGO Espacios Naturales y Desarrollo Sustentable created the Mexico REDD+ Alliance (M-REDD+ Alliance), financed with USD 33 million by the Global Climate Change Program of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The initiative has worked with landowners and governments across levels to support the development of the ENAREDD+. The M-REDD+ Alliance has an MRV component that aims to support the design and development of the country’s REDD+ MRV system. As such, the M-REDD+ Alliance has played a crucial role in coordinating efforts, together with the National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO) and CONAFOR, toward the implementation of the REDD+ MRV system.2

Also, from 2014 until 2016, the ATREDD+ state governments led two projects funded by the Governors’ Climate and Forests Fund (GCFF) in coordination with the PMN to strengthen capacity at state level for estimating, analyzing and reporting forest sector GHG emissions at subnational level.3

Mexico’s accumulated experience in monitoring forest resources and emissions has been in part documented by CONAFOR and the PMN, identifying lessons learned and good practices for state-level GHG inventories, MRV for CONAFOR’s national subsidy program on payment for environmental services, and for the development and continued implementation of the National Forest and Soil Inventory (Inventario Nacional Forestal y de Suelos or INFyS) (CONAFOR 2014a, 2015b, n.d.b). Also, there is ongoing research that examines the experiences of community forest monitoring in Mexico, presenting its limitations and opportunities in the REDD+ MRV context (Balderas 2013a, 2013b; Balderas et al. 2014; CONAFOR 2014b; EcoLogic 2016; McCall et al. 2016). Taken together, these sources provide valuable information that can potentially help improve the design and implementation of REDD+ MRV in Mexico. Furthermore, the PMN developed a series of documents that gathered lessons learned about the REDD+ MRV process in Mexico and that could serve as tools to understand challenges and areas of opportunity for REDD+ MRV and

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1 Contract amount was Norwegian Krone (NOK) 90 million and funds were to be disbursed annually, although the actual amount in USD changed due to currency fluctuations.


the role of state-level actors. For example, PMN prepared documents that summarize tools and lessons derived for MRV capacity building at state level and that outline links across the SNMRV and REDD+ public policies. However, these documents were not publicly available when research was conducted.

Current efforts to construct a well-functioning MRV system in Mexico also need to face the broader political context that has shaped the REDD+ discussion. Despite the great innovation potential of the Mexican REDD+ intervention scheme, REDD+ efforts are constrained by multiple barriers, such as limited coordination across and within institutions and sectors; the prevalence of traditional, top-down work patterns within CONAFOR and other institutions; the lack of capacity at different levels; and a lack of political will, efficacy and legitimacy on the part of government bodies, among others (see Deschamps et al. 2015; Libert and Trench 2016).

In this context, it is important to explore the ideas and interests voiced on REDD+ MRV in Mexico, how coordination (or the lack of it) functions across actors and scales, what underlying factors explain the lack of effective coordination, and how can these be addressed. This is necessary to build a REDD+ MRV system that not only meets the UNFCCC’s technical guidelines under the Warsaw Agreement (Ochieng et al. 2016), but also demonstrates the effectiveness of activities; ensures transparency, good governance, accountability and credibility of results; and builds confidence that resources are used effectively (Singh et al. 2016), as now embedded in the Paris Agreement.

This paper uses evidence from 45 interviews to understand how actors at different levels in Mexico view developments with regard to REDD+ MRV and how their needs and interests differ or coincide. To understand the interplay across levels, interviews were conducted at national and subnational levels (in the states of Chiapas and Yucatan) with representatives of the national government, state governments, academia, nongovernmental organizations, forest producers, technical advisory committees for REDD+ (CTC-REDD+, Spanish acronym), and Yucatan’s Public Agent for Territorial Development (Agente Público de Desarrollo Territorial or APDT). This paper focuses particularly on the interplay between national and state levels. Since REDD+ and the REDD+ MRV process in Mexico are currently under development, this research only captures findings from previous stages (interviews were conducted between August and November 2016). Nonetheless, by investigating actors’ perceptions, ideas, interests and roles regarding REDD+ MRV, this study seeks to identify challenges and areas of opportunity and provide insights into how the process can be improved to create a multilevel REDD+ MRV system that responds to the different needs and interests of national, state and local actors. Another objective of this study is to derive insights about the need of the REDD+ MRV systems to address not only technical issues in carbon measurement, but also a range of environmental and social variables with the help of diverse national and subnational monitoring initiatives. This is of particular importance in Mexico and represents a great area of opportunity, since REDD+ is being promoted as a broad territorial development strategy, and synergies across current monitoring systems (such as the National Forest Monitoring System, the National Biodiversity Monitoring System, and community initiatives) and the development of new monitoring initiatives can be expected. Although often seen as a primarily technical endeavor, REDD+ MRV must face the challenges of the political context in which it is crafted.

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5 The document is: Jessica Fong and Eder Larios, Vínculos entre el Sistema Nacional de Monitoreo Forestal y la gestión de políticas públicas relevantes para REDD+. Mexico, PMN, July 2015.

6 Ochieng et al. (2016) distinguish a set of technicalities and good governance requirements in the UNFCCC’s guidelines on how to perform REDD+ MRV. The first correspond to guidelines that outline methods, demand that these are accurately applied and define the scope of REDD+ MRV. The good governance requirements are identified by the authors as the UNFCCC’s guidelines that refer to transparency, accountability and participation in MRV.

7 The APDT is a key figure in Mexico’s REDD+ implementation model. APDT are local public entities in charge of assisting regional planning by promoting integrated rural development. APDT include intermunicipal associations that support local development agents and communities (see CONAFOR 2015a.)
The rest of this paper unfolds as follows. The second section presents key elements of multilevel governance and briefly reviews current literature on the opportunities and challenges faced during the design of MRV systems in other REDD+ countries. The third section presents the methods. A brief context is provided to understand Mexico's steps toward REDD+ MRV in the fourth section. After analyzing data from the interviews in the fifth section, the sixth section highlights areas of opportunity and factors that challenge the design and implementation of a multilevel MRV system in Mexico. The last section concludes the analysis.
2 MRV as a multilevel governance challenge

The theoretical framework for studying REDD+ as a multilevel governance challenge highlights that national states are not the sole actors in decision making, since power is shaped and shared by a diversity of actors that play out at multiple levels (Saito-Jensen 2015). In this way, a multilevel governance approach compels us to study the diversity of actors and the complex social and political contexts in which decisions are taken. The multilevel governance framework applied to REDD+ allows us to unpack relations between society and state by apprehending the multiple actors, cultural and social norms, interactions and forms of agency that are at the center of REDD+ decision making (ibid.).

REDD+ will not work unless actors at all levels believe they are contributing to achieving change that is meaningful and important. Analyzing REDD+ from a multilevel governance perspective sheds light on the conditions that constrain or facilitate this process. Studies that aim to understand the multilevel governance challenges and opportunities in the design and implementation of MRV mechanisms also highlight the diverse challenges of linking subnational monitoring systems and reference levels with the national level and, in this sense, stress the need to harmonize information and incentives across levels (Korhonen-Kurki et al. 2012, 2013). By analyzing the flow of information and the interplay of actors, interests and power relations across levels, the design of MRV systems is therefore understood not only as technical, but also as political (Korhonen-Kurki et al. 2013; Ravikumar et al. 2015; Kowler and Larson 2016; Vijge 2016).

Ochieng et al. (2016) have assessed various indicators of countries’ progress in implementing good governance mechanisms and technical guidance for MRV. The authors identify criteria related to acquiring and owning technical methods, developing administrative capacity and exercising good governance (participation, transparency, accountability and coordination) in MRV. For example, participation is measured by the degree of involvement of different actors and by the development of participation and conflict resolution mechanisms. Indicators for transparency in MRV are related to results, methodologies and datasets that are made public and in a timely manner. Accountability is assessed by whether countries have clarified reporting and communication channels, and the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders. Coordination is examined by the development of interagency, multilevel coordination mechanisms. Participation, transparency, accountability and coordination are key aspects that help to analyze the complex set of decisions, challenges and areas of opportunity that shape the MRV process in Mexico, although in this paper we focus more on practice rather than specific indicators.

This paper therefore seeks to understand the MRV system not as a technical instrument that tracks the implementation of REDD+ goals, but as a practice crafted within a country-specific context, where the interplay among government institutions and other actors, rules and norms, and ideas, interests and information are shaping the politics and the policy process.
3 Methods

3.1 Interview design and data collection

Based on the theoretical framework explained above, the research was guided by a set of questions that seek to comprehend actors’ understanding of REDD+ MRV, why visions vary, differing interests, how coordination or the lack of it affects different actors and scales, the underlying factors affecting coordination, and how these can be addressed to create a well-functioning multilevel REDD+ MRV system. Based on this, a semi-structured interview protocol was designed. First, the questions explored actors’ understanding of MRV, which allowed us to determine the clarity of the objectives of the MRV system and to identify actors’ ideas and interests regarding what MRV should be. Second, they examined actors’ roles in the MRV process. This allowed us to identify how actors perceived their roles in the MRV system and to estimate what is needed to better define roles and responsibilities. In both cases, interviews sought to identify how the interplay across levels of government, particularly from national to state level, was affecting the process.

Interviews were carried out in person or via Skype from August to November 2016. An initial list of key stakeholders was prepared, and further interviewees were identified using snowball sampling. A total of 45 stakeholders were interviewed: 17 from national level, 27 from subnational level (14 in Chiapas and 13 in Yucatan) and 1 international actor. Since the research sought to understand the interplay across actors, interviews were held with a range of stakeholders from national government, state government, academia, NGOs, representatives of CTC-REDD+ (at national and state level), forest producers and the APDT. Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of interviews performed by type of actor.

Figure 1. Interviews performed by type of actor, August–November 2016.
3.2 Site selection

To understand the relationship between the national and subnational levels, the states of Chiapas and Yucatan were selected based on the following considerations:

- Both states are part of Mexico’s ATREDD+.
- Chiapas has the highest deforestation rate of any state in Mexico. It also has the longest history of engagement with forest carbon markets, and it was the first state to receive subsidies for REDD+ through CONAFOR’s Special Program for the Conservation, Restoration and Sustainable Use of the Lacandon Rainforest in Chiapas (Programa Especial para la Conservación, Restauración y Aprovechamiento Sustentable de la Selva Lacandona en el Estado de Chiapas) (Deschamps et al. 2015).
- Yucatan and the other two states (Quintana Roo and Campeche) of the Yucatan Peninsula have committed to establishing the Regional Strategy for Climate Change and Mitigation in the Yucatan Peninsula (CONAFOR 2015a).
- Yucatan has an intermunicipal agency (junta intermunicipal), the Junta Intermunicipal Biocultural del Puuc (JIBIOPUUC). Juntas intermunicipales are seen as the key type of APDT, which aim to promote cooperation and planning beyond traditional legal and administrative boundaries (CONAFOR 2015a), (CONAFOR 2015c).8

- When research was conducted, the state government’s term in office was about to finish in Quintana Roo and the administration of Campeche had only been running for one year, while Yucatan had had the same administration for 4 years and therefore provided a better case study.

3.3 Response analysis and limitations

Responses from the interviews were translated into English and transcribed into a matrix where rows identified the type of actor (national, subnational) and columns were organized according to the questions from the interview protocol. Data was analyzed to identify major themes, differences and

8 To learn more about CONAFOR’s intermunicipal model of governance for REDD+, see http://www.conafor.gob.mx/web/temas-forestales/bycc/acciones-de-preparacion-para-redd/modelo-de-gobernanza-intermunicipal-redd/ (accessed January 2017).
agreements in stakeholders’ responses. Secondary literature was used to support and enrich the discussion.

Although the study tried to identify differences between responses given in Yucatan and Chiapas to understand how the MRV discussion was being adopted in each region, the interviews revealed virtually identical results in both states. This may be explained by the current lack of a clear definition of objectives and roles for REDD+ MRV in Mexico, especially at state level, which overshadowed state-level differences, and because the process was still in a somewhat early phase. Some contrasts in perspectives detected in each case are highlighted in Chapter 5.

Interviews conducted for this research correspond to a particular moment in the REDD+ MRV process in Mexico, hence perspectives and progress may have changed by the time it is published. The last two chapters point to relevant updates to help frame the context of future challenges and areas of opportunity. Also, the research is not intended to be exhaustive. In particular it does not include all the ATREDD+ states. Nevertheless, we believe that the interviews conducted include an important portion, and a diverse cross-section, of stakeholders involved in the REDD+ MRV process in Mexico. The paper seeks to shed some light on the MRV process in Mexico, showing that it is not merely technical, but also that it is shaped by the challenges and opportunities of multilevel governance.

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9 Nor does it intend to analyze the outcomes of the many different projects that have supported the development of the MRV system and capacity strengthening at the subnational level.
4 Context

4.1 Mexico’s steps toward REDD+

During the sixteenth Conference of the Parties (COP-16) to the UNFCCC, the government of Mexico presented the document ‘Mexico’s Vision on REDD+’, which sets the basis for REDD+ policy and the construction of the ENAREDD+. Mexico’s commitments for REDD+ are also supported by a legal and policy framework for climate change, sustainable development and natural resource management and use (Alianza M-REDD+ n.d.). In particular, the General Law on Climate Change establishes the ambitious goal of a rate of 0% carbon loss in original ecosystems by 2020 (CONAFOR 2015c). In the context of the Paris Agreement, Mexico’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) aims for 0% net deforestation by the year 2030 (Gobierno de la República 2015). Furthermore, in support of the Bonn Challenge, Mexico has committed to restore 8.5 million hectares as part of the 20x20 Initiative, which aims to restore functionality to a total of 20 million hectares of degraded land by 2020 (WRI n.d.).

CONAFOR explains REDD+ in Mexico as:

a set of strategic guidelines that simultaneously promote mitigation and adaptation actions through an integrated landscape management that advances low-carbon Sustainable Rural Development and, therefore, point to a convergence between the environment and development agendas. (CONAFOR n.d.a).

Based on this concept, the model proposes territorial planning at different scales and the articulation of intersectoral policies and programs to incentivize sustainable rural development (CONAFOR 2015a). As part of the states’ efforts to define REDD+ at subnational level, Campeche published its REDD+ strategy in 2015, and the rest of the ATREDD+ states, as well as the states of Oaxaca and Chihuahua, were in the process of finalizing their REDD+ strategies at the time of this research (Alianza M-REDD+ 2016).

In 2016, the country submitted its Readiness Package (R-Package) and the Emissions Reduction Program Document (ERPD), also known as the Emissions Reduction Initiative (Iniciativa de Reducción de Emisiones or IRE), to the FCPF. The IRE is a five-year national initiative to reduce emissions from the forest sector, and, if approved by the FCPF’s Carbon Fund, it will provide the opportunity to put Mexico’s REDD+ intervention model and a results-based payment scheme into practice (CONAFOR 2016). The IRE will be implemented in each ATREDD+ through investment programs (programas de inversión), which are long-term planning instruments that identify detailed activities for achieving REDD+ results in each region. The investment programs for the states included in the IRE have been published (CONAFOR 2016). The IRE is required to follow guidelines of the UNFCCC and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In December 2016, the IRE was provisionally included in the portfolio of the Carbon Fund,10 to be considered for a potential Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA).

REDD+ benefit sharing has been a subject of ongoing discussions in Mexico, as in other REDD+ countries. CONAFOR (2010) recognizes the MRV system as a key element to claiming and obtaining

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10 FCPF provisionally included the IRE in the portfolio of the Carbon Fund, which will be approved upon fulfillment of a “roadmap designed to conduct an accuracy assessment of the activity data on deforestation and forest degradation in the reference period” employed in the IRE (FCPF 2016: 1).
benefits (i.e. results-based incentives), and, given the progress of the IRE, the government has now provided more guidance on the subject. Based on Mexican legislation, the draft of ENAREDD+ and the IRE state that carbon stock ownership lies with forest owners and that the “development of any type of market mechanism on carbon storage and on additions to this stock, which meets the requirements of the established market, shall result in remuneration to the owner of the forestland” (CONAFOR 2015c, 2016).

Nonetheless, with regard to avoided emissions, CONAFOR (2016: 4) states that “ownership of the avoided emissions is not determined by the ownership or tenure of the land and cannot be awarded to smallholders, communities and ejidos [a legally recognized form of collective land ownership by indigenous people and former landless laborers], since deforestation in Mexico constitutes a prohibition which is punishable by this State”. However, it also states that:

the right to receive financial benefits from results-based payment for avoided emissions will relate not only to land owners but also to the inhabitants of the regions who, despite not having ownership rights, make the effort to halt forestland deforestation and degradation using mechanisms established for this purpose, while observing their right, at all times, to full and effective participation in designing the benefit sharing mechanisms and to decide on their own priorities with regard to the development process. (CONAFOR 2016: 4–5).

Under the IRE framework, the arrangement for benefit sharing involves three levels: national, state and local. At national level, CONAFOR “will receive the resources generated from the payment for results on account of emissions reductions which will be received via a national fund such as the Climate Change Fund or the Mexican Forest Fund” (CONAFOR 2016: 246). Then, “resources will be distributed to the states in accordance with their performance on emissions reductions,” and “accounting of emission reductions will [be documented] for each individual state through the […] Forest Registry” (ibid.). States should therefore receive monetary benefits in proportion to their achievements, that is, against their state FREL. The mechanism for the local distribution of benefits under the IRE has not been defined (CONAFOR 2016: 220), but CONAFOR proposes a participatory process at local level for designing IRE benefit sharing, employing a methodology reviewed by civil society, experts and state governments.11 It is expected that this methodology will establish the IRE Benefit Sharing Plan, which will specify how benefits are to be distributed and the criteria to guarantee “that the potential beneficiaries […] have just, fair and effective access to 100% of the benefits resulting from the payment for results received at national level and distributed at state level” (CONAFOR 2016: 248). The Benefit Sharing Plan will be published upon approval of the IRE by the Carbon Fund and after the ERPA has been signed (CONAFOR 2016: 247). The IRE mentions that resources will be used to finance additional activities, selected and prioritized by communities via a participatory process, that support the integrated management of their territories (CONAFOR 2016).

4.2 The approach to REDD+ MRV

4.2.1 MRV in the ENAREDD+ draft12

To receive results-based payments from the implementation of REDD+ activities, the UNFCCC indicates that REDD+ countries should have: (a) a national strategy or action plan, (b) an assessed FREL and/or FRL, (c) a national forest monitoring system, (d) a system for providing information on how the safeguards are being met.

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11 See: Metodología para guiar el proceso de construcción participativa de los arreglos de distribución de beneficios a nivel local en el contexto de la Iniciativa de Reducción de Emisiones (IRE) de México. Mexico: M-REDD+ Alliance, May 2016. Available at http://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2016/Oct/Anexo%204.%20Metodolog%C3%ADa%20para%20guiar%20el%20proceso%20de%20construcci%20n%20participativa%20de%20los%20arreglos%20de%20distribuci%20n%20de%20beneficios%20a%20nivel%20local%20en%20el%20contexto%20de%20la%20IRE%20%20M%C3%A9xico. pdf (accessed March 2017).

12 It is important to mention that the current draft of the ENAREDD+, which is presented here, has gone through a public consultation process at the national level (in 2015–2016), and the draft is expected to be modified. Hence, by the time this paper is published, the details may vary. The public consultation process is reported at http://www.enaredd.gob.mx/#consulta (accessed April 2017).
addressed and respected, and (e) the full MRV of the results-based actions.\textsuperscript{13} According to the UNFCCC, REDD+ countries’ forest monitoring systems must provide transparent, consistent and accurate data on forest emissions, and countries should follow the technical guidance and guidelines established by the IPCC (UNFCCC 2009, 2013). So long as safeguards are not compromised, REDD+ countries will be rewarded on the basis of their success at reducing emissions, measured by national MRV systems against the technically assessed national FREL. Compliance with these technical requirements is thus necessary for Mexico to be rewarded for REDD+ activities.

It is important to understand that this demanding international context is what conditions the roles and responsibilities of national and subnational actors. That is, meeting UNFCCC requirements demands a national FREL and a consistent and standardized national REDD+ MRV system. This national standardization is shaping subnational actors’ roles and participation. However, as we will present below, subnational actors’ needs and interests by far exceed those required by the national REDD+ MRV system which, due to UNFCCC requirements, has an emissions-centered approach. The challenges and opportunities therefore reside in how broader efforts to implement the SNMRV can be supplemented by national and subnational monitoring initiatives that go beyond carbon while still meeting REDD+ needs.

The national legal and policy framework in Mexico recognizes the need for a well-functioning REDD+ MRV system. The General Law for Sustainable Forest Development mandates the creation of a national MRV system to evaluate and systematize emissions reductions from REDD+ (DOF 2016a).\textsuperscript{14} The National Strategy on Climate Change and the National Forestry Program 2014–2018 refer to the MRV system, as does the ENAREDD+. In the current ENAREDD+ draft, the objective of its MRV component is to develop a:

- robust and transparent national forest monitoring system for the monitoring, reporting and verification of mitigation activities in the forest sector, and which will contribute to examination of the effectiveness of mitigation policies, offer both transparency and accuracy to the broadest extent, and promote local and community participation (CONAFOR 2015c: 65).

It specifies that:

The design of the MRV system will be carried out transparently and as inclusively as possible, in such a manner as to offer certainty and confidence to the participants in REDD+ actions (CONAFOR 2015c: 64).

To achieve this objective, the ENAREDD+ establishes three main lines of action: to design and create the national MRV system for REDD+, to develop and consolidate capacities to implement and maintain the MRV system at different scales and to develop institutional arrangements for the operationalization of the MRV system. With regard to the FREL, the ENAREDD+ has the objective to:

Construct the national reference level, allowing disaggregation of state reference levels so that mitigation performance of the REDD+ activities undertaken can be assessed, including carbon projects that develop mitigation actions in the forestry sector. (CONAFOR 2015c: 60–1).

The disaggregation of the national FREL into state FRELs is mentioned as a second step of the process, where these subnational reference levels could be improved based on each state’s orientation to REDD+ (CONAFOR 2015c).

As part of UNFCCC requirements for REDD+, the ENAREDD+ also considers the establishment of a National Safeguards System (Sistema Nacional de Salvaguardas) and a Safeguards Information System (Sistema de Información de Salvaguardas) (CONAFOR 2015c). It is expected that Mexico’s National Safeguards System and the national MRV system will be aligned to report REDD+ safeguards related to emissions (Rey et al. 2013).\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} See http://redd.unfccc.int/fact-sheets/redd-mrv-and-results-based-payments.html.

\textsuperscript{14} See Artículo 45 (IX) and Artículo 2 transitorio.

\textsuperscript{15} The REDD+ safeguards related to emissions and included in the Cancun Agreements are safeguards (f) actions to address the risks of reversal and (g) actions to reduce displacement of emissions (see UNFCCC 2010: 27).
4.2.2 The construction of the MRV system

The design and implementation of the REDD+ MRV system has largely been developed through the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation in the Field of Environment, Forest and Climate Change signed in 2010 by the governments of Mexico and Norway. The resulting agreement, the PMN, had as its first objective the design and implementation of the SNMRV, to estimate forest GHG emissions by sources and removals by sinks, forest carbon stocks and forest area changes, as part of the process to prepare Mexico for the REDD+ mechanism (CONAFOR et al. 2016: 5). The PMN was conceived by CONAFOR as an external project that included the design of the process for the institutionalization of its results, including the national REDD+ MRV system, into CONAFOR’s internal structure.

Other national government agencies that played a key role in the PMN included the CONABIO, the Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC), and the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). A number of academic institutions and NGOs were also involved.

The final report of the PMN explains that the national MRV system uses a “combination of remote sensing and ground-based forest carbon inventory approaches for estimating GHG emissions and removals”, and that it is flexible enough to allow improvements over time (CONAFOR et al. 2016: 6). According to CONAFOR (2016), the SNMRV was consolidated in 2015. According to the final report of the PMN, since 2014 the SNMRV “has been under implementation and has collaborated with other institutions and stakeholders in assessing the results of REDD+ activities in Mexico and in delivering the following reports: (i) The Biennial Report Update of the National Greenhouse Gas Inventory for the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry Sector […] ; (ii) The section related to Mexico’s Biomass and Carbon for the Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA) […] and (iii) Mexico’s Forest Reference Emission Level Proposal submitted to the UNFCCC” (CONAFOR et al. 2016: 5–6).

So far, according to Singh et al. (2016), Mexico’s SNMRV corresponds to an MRV of GHG emissions. Singh et al. (2016) differentiate this type of MRV from others, such as an MRV of mitigation activities to assess their carbon and non-carbon effects and monitor their implementation. According to these authors, it is important to disentangle the MRV concept so that actors can identify which type(s) and level of MRV is relevant to them.

At the time research was conducted, the National Forest Monitoring System (Sistema Nacional de Monitoreo Forestal or SNMF) and the national REDD+ MRV system represented, to some actors, the same instrument, and thus the terms were used interchangeably. The distinction was not clear, which in itself was an indication of the lack of communication and misunderstanding that existed. However, as part of the institutionalization process, CONAFOR adopted the term SNMRV to refer to the REDD+ MRV system in Mexico, instead of the SNMF concept, which has a broader scope. It should be noted that CONAFOR is currently designing the SNMF as a broad system that encompasses diverse monitoring initiatives (biodiversity, forest health, forest management and also the SNMRV).16 CONAFOR acknowledges that the SNMF will not necessarily satisfy all the monitoring needs derived from REDD+.

As such, it is expected that the SNMF and the SNMRV will establish links with other monitoring initiatives.37 The MRV component in the draft of the ENAREDD+ also establishes as a line of action the identification and strengthening of links of REDD+ MRV to other monitoring systems, in particular those associated with the follow-up and evaluation of public polices (CONAFOR 2015c: 66).

Furthermore, CONAFOR modified its statutes in 2016 to transform the National Inventory and Geomatics Office into the National Forest Monitoring System Office (DOF 2016b). According to the PMN and the new Organic Statute of CONAFOR, this Office will be responsible for the implementation of the SNMRV and interagency coordination (CONAFOR et al. 2016).

As part of the process of institutionalizing the SNMRV, CONAFOR created a Technical Unit Specialized in MRV (Unidad Técnica Especializada 16 CONAFOR, personal communication.
17 Ibid.
en Monitoreo, Reporte y Verificación or UTEMRV)\textsuperscript{18} in 2016, which is hosted by CONAFOR and currently financed with FCPF funds. According to CONAFOR,\textsuperscript{19} the main objectives of the UTERMV are (a) to operate and improve the SNMVR by preserving the technical capacities for the implementation of the system that have been developed to date; and (b) to continue strengthening capacities on MRV at national and subnational levels, and through South–South cooperation. To share experience and lessons learned in the establishment of Mexico's SNMVR, the PMN also created the Virtual Center of Excellence in Forest Monitoring (VCEFM), which is described as a collaborative online platform to strengthen the construction of other countries' forest monitoring systems (CONAFOR et al. 2016; EcoLogic 2016).

Parallel to the work done under PMN, international finance has also played a key role in strengthening state-level capacities for MRV, notably through the M-REDD+ Alliance and the GCFF projects. The M-REDD+ Alliance financed a series of subnational capacity-building efforts for REDD+ MRV, promoted community based monitoring for REDD+, and supported CONAFOR's Initiative to Strengthen Capacities for Community Monitoring in Mexico (Iniciativa de Fortalecimiento de Capacidades para el Monitoreo Comunitario en México) (CONAFOR 2014b). The GCFF projects were led by state governments and coordinated by the Ecologic Development Fund in the states of Chiapas, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Jalisco and Tabasco, which are, with the exception of Tabasco, ATREDD+ regions under CONAFOR and members of the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force (GCF). The GCFF projects identified key challenges in the construction of Mexico's MRV system, such as the need to strengthen state-level capacity for MRV, to identify information gaps in existing emissions data, and to define the role (scope and functions) of the states in the national MRV system and in the development of a state-level MRV (EcoLogic 2016). It is important to note that Mexico’s legal framework obliges states to carry out activities related to planning, instrumentation, management, evaluation and monitoring in compliance with national climate change policy (CEMDA n.d.). In line with the national legal framework, state-level legal frameworks establish the basis for implementing climate change policy at that level. Legal frameworks vary among states, but they generally include elaborating data on GHG emissions sources at state level (which are not limited to forest sector emissions), publishing a reference scenario for deforestation and forest degradation, creating state registries for emissions (Registro Estatal de Emisiones) and establishing an MRV system for state level emissions.\textsuperscript{20}

The governments of the ATREDD+ states and CONAFOR have signed, or are in the process of signing, coordination agreements for the implementation of the IRE. The coordination agreements of both Chiapas (CONAFOR and

\textsuperscript{18} The UTEMRV was first called Technical Unit Specialized in Forest Monitoring. However, as part of the institutionalization process, CONAFOR recently changed its name.

\textsuperscript{19} CONAFOR, personal communication.

\textsuperscript{20} See EcoLogic (2016) for a discussion on the legal framework for MRV at state level.
Gobierno de Chiapas (2016) and Yucatan (still in draft version) indicate that CONAFOR will generate information through the SNMRV to evaluate the results of the implemented activities, support state-level capacity building for MRV and provide the state government with inputs, databases and maps in a manageable format (for example, the INFyS and the Forest and Soil State Inventory are useful for creating state reference levels). State governments commit to providing information on reduced emissions in the state using a format established by CONAFOR (CONAFOR and Gobierno de Chiapas 2016). According to EcoLogic (2016), such agreements set the monitoring of emission reductions as CONAFOR’s responsibility, but allow for the states to collaborate with the SNMRV in relation to reporting on REDD+ activities and to improve the inputs they employ, but without fully outlining how they are to proceed. The preliminary draft of Chiapas’ REDD+ Strategy also notes that the coordination agreement does not establish dates or deadlines for CONAFOR to fulfill its obligations (Pronatura Sur 2016).
This section seeks to capture a particular moment in the process of the REDD+ MRV process in Mexico. Although the perspectives presented here may have changed by the time the paper is published, they are helpful to identify what could be strengthened in the further development of Mexico’s MRV REDD+ system and in that of other countries.

5.1 Objectives of REDD+ MRV

Interview results show that during the first stage of the REDD+ MRV process, apart from key actors in CONAFOR central offices, national and subnational stakeholders did not understand – and had different ideas regarding – what MRV was and, therefore, what should be monitored (or emphasized) under the REDD+ framework. Whereas CONAFOR was creating an MRV system for GHG emissions, these stakeholders highlighted the importance of other types of monitoring in the REDD+ context. Informants also provided their perspectives on the need to improve information sharing across actors and levels to create a robust and transparent MRV system.

5.1.1 Lack of understanding and absence of relevant communication

Most subnational and national actors (except CONAFOR and UTEMVR) claimed that information on the objectives of MRV, how the SNMRV will operate and how monitoring and reporting should be done and by whom, had not been clearly defined by CONAFOR. This problem existed, according to both national and subnational actors, because there were no clear channels of communication to inform on MRV decisions or because CONAFOR and the UTEMVR had not been able to explain a technically complex MRV system to non-experts. As national level interviewees explained: “Discussions on MRV are technically complex, never-ending and unbearable”21 and “MRV experts need to be trained on how to communicate what it [MRV] is in everyday language”.22 National and subnational actors agreed that CONAFOR and the UTEMVR needed to explain MRV to society at large. As actors mentioned: “CONAFOR should also clarify what MRV is for. Is it for counting carbon, or for understanding which activities work and which do not?”23 and “we still have many questions on MRV that have not been answered: who is going to monitor, what will be monitored, at what scale, whether monitoring needs to be done tree by tree, how is it going to be reported, and what benefit MRV will bring to us.”24

5.1.2 Different ideas on the purpose of REDD+ MRV

Ideas about what should be monitored for REDD+ MRV varied because different actors had different ideas about its purpose, highlighting different monitoring needs. Subnational actors (academia, NGOs and government) consistently expressed the opinion that the MRV system as it was being defined by CONAFOR did not reflect the full scope of REDD+ in Mexico, which seeks to promote sustainable rural development. Respondents at different levels commented: “Mexico is creating a highly carbon-focused MRV system, therefore, social and technical

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21 Interview 5, technical advisory committee for REDD+ (CTC-REDD+), national level, 29 August 2016.
22 Interview 6, government, national level, 29 August 2016.
23 Interview 22, academia, national level, 5 September 2016.
24 Interview 35, forest community/producer organization, Yucatan, 9 September 2016.
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aspects of REDD+ are separated,”25 and “MRV on the ground is actually more than just counting carbon.”26 In particular, respondents from Chiapas and Yucatan identified other (non-carbon) variables as the priority for monitoring. As discussed in Chiapas: “MRV has been centered on carbon but this is too reductionist. In Chiapas, we want to monitor carbon but also environmental services, water, biodiversity and soil”27 and in Yucatan: “Carbon monitoring is needed but it is not the most important thing. There is not even a word in Maya for carbon. Communities are more interested in monitoring water and biodiversity.”28

When asked about the importance of monitoring for communities, respondents consistently remarked that communities were mostly interested in monitoring their natural resources, and not carbon. In line with these arguments, forest producers and the APDT suggested that monitoring should be done to understand the impacts of productive activities (forest management, beekeeping, sustainable agriculture) on preserving biodiversity, ensuring good water quality, generating jobs and improving health. They commented: “we are interested in monitoring biodiversity in order to prove that forest management does not have a negative but a positive impact on it,”29 and “monitoring should allow for projects to be evaluated in order to see if our objective as APDT, which is to improve livelihoods, has been reached.”30 The various interests of local actors in monitoring variables that are relevant to them are consistent with studies that have identified the diversity of Mexican communities’ motivations for monitoring (e.g. McCall et al. 2016).

In this context, subnational respondents explained that states’ perspectives on MRV were broader than those of the national government, which focused on measuring deforestation and forest degradation. From this perspective, informants (NGOs, academia, government) in Chiapas and Yucatan identified two types of objectives for the MRV system: (1) measuring carbon sequestration to comply with international requirements, and (2) monitoring and measuring the impact of the REDD+ activities and understanding local dynamics. The latter was explained as the most important dimension of REDD+ MRV, since it entails a strategic type of monitoring – a tool that would enable a better understanding of local dynamics and support design and evaluation of public policies, as well as informing local decision making. Notably, state government officials agreed with this objective for the REDD+ MRV system at the subnational level, since they highly valued its potential to become a decision-making tool. Nonetheless, subnational actors perceived that this dimension was not being addressed by CONAFOR and the UTEMRV. At the time this research was carried out, the REDD+ strategies of Chiapas and Yucatan were still being drafted, but actors commented that their MRV chapters incorporated the need to link monitoring and territorial planning efforts to understand “how right or wrong we are doing things”31 and “why and how to improve.”32

Subnational actors also linked the MRV discussion with other commitments. In particular, Yucatan stakeholders stressed that the MRV system should expand to monitor restoration goals in the context of the Bonn Challenge. This might reflect the state’s strong interest in this agreement, which has led it to pledge extensive restoration goals within its territory.

A forest community leader in Yucatan linked the discussion of REDD+ MRV with broader concerns over monitoring GHG emissions. Although a single comment, this perspective suggests that at least at community level, people could have received mixed messages on Mexico’s responsibilities for monitoring and reporting GHG emissions and for the purpose of MRV for REDD+. It also shows concerns about, and objections to, community monitoring:

25 Interview 4, forest community/producer organization, national level, 26 August 2016.
26 Interview 18, NGO, Chiapas, 3 September 2016.
27 Interview 11, academia, Chiapas, 1 September 2016.
28 Interview 28, technical advisory committee for REDD+ (CTC-REDD+), Yucatan, 7 September 2016.
29 Interview 16, forest community/producer organization, Chiapas, 2 September 2016.
30 Interview 32, APDT, Yucatan, 8 September 2016.
31 Interview 39, government, Yucatan, 16 September 2016.
Monitoring should also be applied to those actors with the largest emissions […] It seems that monitoring is only enforced with the poorest and most marginalized actors, who are forced to do monitoring and are also conditioned. Who monitors the powerful, the industry sector? That sector should also have MRV in line with REDD+ objectives.33

This comment shows how important it is for CONAFOR to establish better communication channels and provide clear information on the objectives and scope of MRV for REDD+, the role of community monitoring initiatives, and on the monitoring and reporting obligations of other sectors in Mexico.

5.1.3 How monitoring should be done: information sharing

Informants at national and subnational level identified insufficient efforts to share information across institutions and actors. This referred both to how CONAFOR coordinates internally and with other institutions and to how CONAFOR shares MRV-related information with subnational actors.

On sharing information among national level actors, technical experts in Chiapas and Yucatan explained that even though the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) and CONAFOR have signed an agreement to guarantee support for REDD+, both agencies need to develop ways to coordinate and share information that is relevant for MRV objectives. In Yucatan, one government official noted that “for Yucatan’s MRV to function, actors like SAGARPA and SEDER34 need to be included since these institutions have information systems that will be helpful to understand what is happening on the ground and to address the Bonn Challenge.” However, some national (government) and subnational (NGOs, academia and government) respondents perceived that it was unlikely that such coordination would occur. This was mentioned even by national government officials, since information flow across government sectors was perceived as uncommon: “Information flow sometimes does not exist across government institutions”35 and “information generated by the National Forest Monitoring System Office does not permeate within CONAFOR because there is no communication strategy”.36

Other national and subnational informants (government officials and NGOs) made clear that the REDD+ MRV discussion had not led to a change in how institutions work. They questioned the capacity of CONAFOR to lead REDD+ negotiations and link REDD+ with high-level policy because CONAFOR, which only represents the forest sector, lacks the political power to elevate the REDD+ agenda and the importance of MRV within other sectors – even within its own ministry, the Secretariat of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT). This lack of a comprehensive administrative approach to planning is, however, a characteristic not only of government departments in Mexico but of government in many countries, as each section of government tends to be oriented to the priorities formulated by its own leaders, and cooperation with others is usually a challenge (Brockhaus et al. 2014; Ravikumar et al. 2015). However, CONAFOR has stressed that coordination and collaboration among the various stakeholders at different levels, including on MRV, is an essential element for success in implementing the IRE and confronting the causes of deforestation and forest degradation (CONAFOR 2010, 2016). CONAFOR hopes that the necessary cross-sectoral cooperation is more likely to occur at regional and local level (where the APDT plays a key role) than at the national level, although it is not clear if this view is realistic.

National and subnational informants also explained that the unwillingness of actors (in government, academia or civil society) to share information on reference levels and monitoring data was also related to actors’ protective approach to their own geographical information systems. As was explained: “Actors that work with monitoring information are reluctant to share their information.”37 The reasons for this probably relate to a combination of fears: that data

33 Interview 35, forest community/producer organization, Yucatan, 9 September 2016.
34 Secretariat of Rural Development – Government of the state of Yucatan.
35 Interview 42, government, national, 21 October 2016.
36 Interview 9, government, national, 31 August 2016.
37 Interview 5, technical advisory committee for REDD+ (CTC-REDD+), national, 29 August 2016.
may be scrutinized and criticized, or that it may be misused, or that credit for the data will not be correctly attributed or sourced. This attitude is very common not only within government itself, but also among different agencies and academic institutions within Mexico (and in other countries). The unwillingness to share information clearly hinders the design of a comprehensive, transparent and robust MRV system for use in decision making and in the evaluation of policy. As one technical expert commented: “Actors need to overcome their territorial and protective approach to information so that it can be socialized. Traditional work schemes need to change”;38 but this may be a problem, as this reluctance to share is rooted in the way that institutions and their leaders are rewarded and punished.

Regarding the sharing of information from the national to the subnational level, subnational respondents (government, NGOs and academia) consistently mentioned their dissatisfaction, and their sense that the information flow from national authorities to state actors had been obstructed. Most subnational actors stressed that CONAFOR had not shared with them the ATREDD+ states’ FREL, which were submitted as part of the IRE. For technical experts, this was perceived as a lack of transparency on the part of CONAFOR: “State government officials do not know […] how the reference level was established. Everything is done at CONAFOR’s headquarters”,39 and “we are unaware which methodologies were employed by the UTEMRV to create the states’ reference level, and this brings uncertainty to the process.”40 However, this was also interpreted by some respondents as a precautionary measure by CONAFOR, which feared that “information will be interpreted and analyzed incorrectly [by subnational actors].”41 In this context, most interviewees from Chiapas and Yucatan stressed the need to establish formal agreements between CONAFOR and state governments regarding information sharing and use.

National authorities gave several explanations why they had not shared information on reference levels with the states, mainly citing lack of staff, infrastructure and financial resources to address the states’ requests in a timely and adequate manner; however, they also said they failed to do so because that they did not know why states were requesting the information on reference levels or how they would use it. The UTEMRV specified that information on reference levels was going to be made publicly available shortly after the interviews from this research were conducted; but subnational interviewees (NGOs) were unaware of this. Such disconnection between subnational actors and CONAFOR regarding the information generated at the national level needs to be resolved if stakeholders want to create a legitimate, robust and transparent MRV system.

5.2 The role of subnational actors

This section sheds light on how subnational actors understood their role in the REDD+ MRV system. It presents interviewees’ perspectives on how roles and responsibilities for REDD+ MRV were or were not defined. It also presents perspectives on how subnational actors value their capacities and experience in MRV.

5.2.1 Undefined roles and responsibilities

Throughout the interviews, there were concerns that CONAFOR had not defined the roles, responsibilities and participation mechanisms for subnational actors (including state governments and the GT-MRVs) in the national MRV system. Informants at all levels expressed their concern that, despite the imminent agreement with the FCPF’s Carbon Fund, these doubts had not been resolved.

When asked to explain this uncertainty regarding roles and participation mechanisms, national government officials attributed it to the lack of clarity in the legal framework and to the fact that the process was still in its early phases. For one national REDD+ government official, the problem was that there was indeed no clear strategy and legal basis to define and divide MRV responsibilities between government institutions at national and state levels.42

38 Interview 30, NGO, Yucatan, 8 September 2016.
39 Interview 37, academia, national, 14 September 2016.
40 Interview 31, NGO, Yucatan, 8 September 2016.
41 Interview 17, government, Chiapas, 7 September 2016.
42 Interview 38, government, national, 16 September 2016.
Other national actors that had been involved in the REDD+ process (in REDD+ discussion forums like CTC-REDD+, NGOs, academia) and subnational actors (NGOs, academia, state government officials) also perceived this problem, which in turn, prevented state actors from defining and understanding their own roles. One interviewee said: “It is hard for state institutions to determine their own participation and responsibilities in the MRV discussion.”

Nevertheless, some subnational actors were sufficiently confident in their role to push the process forward: “National authorities are not clear about the role of states. However, states do not wait for instructions. They are pushing the MRV discussion forward based on their interests” and “despite the lack of definition regarding their role, states have not stopped their efforts to obtain more precise information on their forest resources.”

Subnational respondents also understood this lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities as part of the nonexistent or poor coordination mechanisms across different government levels. When asked about the coordination mechanisms being developed to ensure the operationalization of MRV, most respondents from national and subnational levels (government officials, NGOs, academia and APDT) suggested that clear institutional arrangements still needed to be defined, in order for REDD+ and MRV to be operationalized.

5.2.2 Discussing subnational roles

When questioned on the role that state governments should play in the design and implementation of REDD+ MRV, responses varied. Some state government officials and subnational NGOs indicated that states were simply waiting for CONAFOR to clarify this. However, other national and subnational informants (national authorities and subnational NGOs and academia), considered that state governments should have a more active role, identify their own needs and interests and seek financial resources for monitoring purposes. National government officials suggested that state governments should define institutional arrangements and assign staff that would be in charge of MRV within state government agencies.

Such expectations regarding the potential role of state governments should be contrasted and reconciled with the interests of state governments in MRV. For a Chiapas state authority, the MRV discussions represented an opportunity to strengthen the crucial role that subnational schemes might play in achieving REDD+ goals and help position states in the international arena, offering the opportunity to negotiate increases in carbon stocks directly with other exterior sources of finance through the voluntary carbon market.

As mentioned in Section 4.1. (Mexico’s steps toward REDD+), while reductions in emissions are covered by national FREL and are considered the property of the nation, stock increases (forest enhancement) are considered the property of forest owners; thus there is considerable scope for participation in voluntary carbon markets.

National and subnational respondents (academia and NGOs) also mentioned the need for more clarity on the precise role of the APDT in the REDD+ MRV system. This was brought up in Yucatan since the JIBIOPUUC functions as the APDT in the context of REDD+, whereas in Chiapas there is no intermunicipal association. Yucatan respondents mentioned that as an APDT, JIBIOPUUC should not be responsible for monitoring or reporting emission reductions since it already oversees a myriad of implementation activities.

Actors in Chiapas and Yucatan (academia, NGOs and government officials) also mentioned that CONAFOR state offices could play a more active role in the MRV process at the subnational level but that CONAFOR’s centralized way of working had reduced their role to one of validating national decisions on MRV. Furthermore, national and subnational respondents agreed that the UTEMV and the National Forest Monitoring System Office should be represented in every CONAFOR state office, and that state governments should incorporate staff to act as links with CONAFOR and the UTEMV.

43 Interview 30, NGO, Yucatan, 8 September 2016.
44 Interview 34, NGO, Yucatan, 9 September 2016.
46 Interview 17, government, Chiapas, 6 September 2016.
Responses from forest producer association representatives in Chiapas and Yucatan perceived the REDD+ MRV discussion as a complex subject discussed by elites. Forest producers stressed that their priority is not to get into the technical complexities of MRV, but to translate government subsidy programs into real solutions for farmers and forest owners. 47

The importance of the role of community monitoring in the design and implementation of the MRV system significantly permeated national and subnational actors’ responses, especially those from academia and NGOs. As one respondent explained: “For CONAFOR, Mexico needs monitoring solely for carbon accounting and benefit sharing. In reality, monitoring is needed to assess the impact of each activity and its relation with carbon, and community monitoring can help us understand this.” 48 In this way, respondents emphasized the crucial role of community monitoring for measuring impacts and designing better policies. Community monitoring was characterized in ways that go beyond just measuring carbon to empowering communities in their land-use planning decisions, to preventing them from being deceived by technical supervisors, to strengthening local governance and social capital, to generating more accurate data through the correct identification by local people of species and ecosystem dynamics, to understanding what strategies are functioning and why others are not in terms of climate effectiveness (which activities are achieving results) and to complementing national level remote sensing based efforts (e.g. the Activity Data Satellite Monitoring System for Mexico, MAD-Mex System) for ground-truthing. In regard to this last aspect, one national NGO explained: “[MAD-Mex System] designed by CONAFOR is not functional. However, community monitoring is the best tool to empower communities and allow them to control their resources;” 49 although supporters of community monitoring also acknowledged its limitations, recognizing that it could only be developed in certain communities.

National authorities also recognized the importance of community monitoring for strengthening local governance and social capital and for its potential contribution to state-level monitoring. However, they explained that its link with the national REDD+ MRV system was not straightforward because it was unclear and technically challenging how locally monitored data could be scaled up into a national MRV system. In this regard, informants from academia and NGOs (at national and subnational levels) were concerned that CONAFOR had not made an official declaration on the role that community monitoring should play in the REDD+ MRV system. Nonetheless, a Chiapas state government official stated that “whether or not national REDD+ MRV will consider community monitoring, we will keep building capacities at the community level so that the data collected can help us in decision-making.” 50 Similarly, a representative from the Yucatan state government commented: “We are still unsure if CONAFOR’s MRV system will reach the local level, but we do want to monitor what is happening on the ground.” 51

5.2.3 Subnational capacities for MRV

Subnational respondents (technical experts, mainly from academia and NGOs) were concerned that their technical capacities and experience in monitoring were not being taken into consideration by national authorities. In Chiapas and Yucatan, technical experts took pride in their experience in monitoring forest resources and land-use change in their regions and highlighted that such interest and experience pre-dated REDD+ discussions. They emphasized the crucial role that subnational experts should play in the design and implementation of monitoring activities and in providing valuable advice to improve the satellite-based MAD-Mex System (see Box 1). As an example, these respondents mentioned that subnational experts had to review and filter data from the forest and soil state inventories that had been prepared by external consultants hired by CONAFOR. They argued that this data contained significant errors, such as listing species that do not exist in Chiapas and Yucatan. Subnational technical experts felt that CONAFOR and other national authorities have failed to recognize states’

47 The forest producer associations or asociaciones regionales de silvicultores would have liked to have been included as potential APDTs, but they were excluded on the basis that they were private sector actors. This has been an issue of conflict in the Yucatan Peninsula (Skutsch, pers. comm.).
48 Interview 22, academia, national, 5 September 2016.
49 Interview 1, NGO, national, 25 August 2016.
50 Interview 17, government, Chiapas, 6 September 2016.
51 Interview 25, government, Yucatan, 7 September 2016.
Box 1. Integrating subnational expertise and needs

CONAFOR, through the PMN, in close collaboration with CONABIO and other national agencies like INEGI, originally created the Activity Data Satellite Monitoring System for Mexico (or MAD-Mex System) to offer an appropriate scale for the MRV system (Gebhardt et al. 2014). According to CONAFOR et al. (2016: 12), the MAD-Mex System represents a solution to Mexico’s MRV system since: “[it] is capable of generating maps in a standardized and cost-effective manner through the automated classification of satellite images. Such automated processes can provide timely monitoring for the entire Mexican territory.”

However, national and subnational informants expressed their concern at the use of the MAD-Mex system and supported arguments presented by Mas et al. (2016) that its scale does not allow for the monitoring and understanding of dynamics and effectiveness at local level. As one respondent commented, the MAD-Mex system is for those who “believe that monitoring can be done behind a desk.”a

Although Mas et al. (2016) recognize MAD-Mex as a valuable first effort toward establishing a monitoring system in Mexico, subnational interviewees expressed their discomfort with using a system that they do not consider functional. The MAD-Mex case sheds light on the importance of discussing the design of such systems with subnational experts. As one subnational expert mentioned: “our role should not be limited to validating MAD-Mex. States should also contribute with local information and by providing intellectual feedback.”b National authorities could have built more trust by integrating subnational expertise and the needs and interests of the subnational level. Nonetheless, the MAD-Mex system is currently undergoing modifications for its improvement, which are expected to include subnational actors for its calibration and evaluation.c

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*a Interview 29, academia, national, 7 September 2016.
*b Interview 40, academia, Chiapas, 9 September 2016.
*c CONAFOR, personal communication, April 2017.

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Technical capacity and lessons already learned in MRV decisions.

Technical experts in Yucatan and Chiapas lauded the efforts of the PMN, M-REDD+ Alliance, GCFF project, regional universities and research centers to develop monitoring capacities at state and local levels in the context of REDD+. However, they argued that MRV capacity-building efforts had been disregarded since subnational actors were not invited to review or provide feedback on the reference level that the UTEMRV submitted as part of the IRE.

Actors at all levels, including from CONAFOR, consider that the process has been centralized. Technical experts in Chiapas and Yucatan considered that CONAFOR has centralized the process for the design of the MRV system, which has led to vertical decision making in MRV.

Subnational respondents (government officials, academia, NGOs) blame their lack of progress on vertical decision making, as they had to wait for CONAFOR’s decisions. As explained by a technical expert in Chiapas: “The PMN and CONAFOR built the MRV system with a top-down perspective, and they never considered how local and regional information would feed into the system […] Now CONAFOR needs to transfer technical, administrative, and decision-making responsibilities to the states.”52 However, national authorities explained that this top-down approach had been necessary, since CONAFOR first needed to ensure a fully functional and coherent MRV system, and, in a future phase and with additional financing, states’ capacities could be included in order to improve data and address information gaps (improve resolution, expand monitoring sites).

Based on their capacities, experience and interests, subnational actors (NGOs, academia and technical

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52 Interview 40, academia, Chiapas, 19 September 2016.
experts) considered a multiplicity of options for their roles, such as employing local data to improve states’ reference levels and monitoring information and providing intellectual feedback on design and implementation. This was supported by responses from national NGOs and academia. In general, responses at national and subnational levels noted that the failure to clarify roles and responsibilities, discussed above, generated tensions between subnational actors and national authorities.
6 Challenges and opportunities

Results from this research into the first phase of the REDD+ MRV process in Mexico reveal tensions generated by the lack of understanding regarding UNFCCC REDD+ MRV requirements, the constraints and opportunities offered by the MRV process and what the role of subnational actors could and should be. UNFCCC guidelines require that countries establish a single, unified national MRV system for REDD+ and for measuring carbon emissions more broadly. This does not, however, require that the process to develop this system, or the system itself, be centralized. In this sense, REDD+ countries’ technical experts and central government personnel should be able to explain what is required by the UNFCCC, and what is negotiable or flexible, in ways that non-scientists can understand.

Our results demonstrate that a lack of clarity regarding national and subnational actors’ roles and responsibilities was prevalent by the time research was conducted, and that subnational interests, regarding the purpose of MRV, what should be monitored and how, need to be taken into account. The fact that the SNMRV was in its early phases, and the SNMF was (and still is) in the design process made it difficult for the federal government to establish roles and responsibilities for subnational entities, and the lack of a clear communications strategy contributed to the problem.

At the same time, given the history of the relationships between levels of government in Mexican politics (see Libert and Trench 2016), and given the cuts in the federal budget that also affect the subnational level, a high participation role for subnational actors itself presents a challenge. In fact, CONAFOR is not politically empowered to define subnational roles and responsibilities, as it does not have the same rank as a ‘Ministry’. Nonetheless, efforts have been made by subnational actors in coordination with the PMN, the GCFF projects and M-REDD+ Alliance to strengthen capacities and identify the state level’s role in Mexico’s REDD+ MRV system.

This paper recognizes that the implementation of the SNMRV is still in progress and, as such, the situation may have shifted by the time this research is published. Nonetheless, the following section explores some key challenges and areas of opportunity that lie ahead.

6.1 Challenges

6.1.1 Overcome institutional inertia

As Brockhaus and Angelsen (2012) note, overcoming institutional ‘stickiness’ or resistance to change is one of the key challenges in the REDD+ policy arena. In this sense, most respondents feared that REDD+ was not generating the institutional change that is required to accomplish its rural sustainable development goals, at national and subnational levels. Most actors perceived that Mexico is rushing the process in order to be selected by the Carbon Fund without first securing and putting into practice adequate mechanisms for the flow of information and coordination across levels for MRV matters.

53 CONAFOR was established in 2001 as a Decentralized Public Entity (organismo público descentralizado) to support sustainable forest management in Mexico. As such, CONAFOR depends on the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (SEMARNAT) for its sectoral coordination.
Our analysis shows that in order to create an inclusive MRV system it will be necessary to (a) change traditional work patterns between different administrative bodies to allow for more cooperation; (b) coordinate available databases of information on emissions and forest monitoring in order to improve analysis and inform decision making based on MRV; (c) incentivize the sharing of information across levels and sectors and within government agencies; (d) recognize subnational actors’ interests, experience and knowledge in monitoring; and (e) create synergies with national and subnational monitoring initiatives (including community monitoring) to address the diverse monitoring needs derived from REDD+. We acknowledge the challenges to achieving these, as this may require a radical change in the way Mexican institutions work.

In line with findings of Korhonen-Kurki et al. (2013), our analysis demonstrates that implementing institutional arrangements that will enhance clarity around roles and responsibilities across levels is critical to ensuring effective communication, access to data and information sharing. This applies particularly to information sent from CONAFOR to its state offices, and to INEGI, CONABIO, INECC, SAGARPA and other national and subnational government agencies, as well as independent working groups (GT-MRV and CTC-REDD+) and current monitoring platforms.

The inclusion of subnational actors’ perspectives, experience and knowledge in the implementation of the SNMRV will be critical to secure their acceptance and support of MRV-related decisions.

6.1.2 Securing continuity of MRV efforts and the REDD+ agenda

In looking to the future, the majority of actors interviewed wanted CONAFOR and government institutions at national and subnational level to show more progress on REDD+ institutionalization, including the MRV component. Concerns were voiced that under the current administration (2012-2018), CONAFOR may be losing interest in REDD+, resulting in fewer resources being made available for MRV. Respondents perceived that REDD+ policy consolidation has been dependent on certain key individuals who motivated the process, rather than on the institutions to which they belong. Some interviewees feared that if and when these key figures were to leave their jobs, interest and institutional memory, as well as technical expertise and insight on the negotiating process with subnational actors, would be lost. (Note that interviews were conducted at a time when some UTEMRV main staff were about to terminate their contracts). In particular, subnational respondents said that they have to demonstrate their technical capacities and negotiate their interests and needs in MRV again each time the government changes. In addition, much of the technical work has been done on a project basis, such as the PMN, which must now undergo an institutionalization process within CONAFOR.

Results show the need to internalize the MRV process within government agencies at national and subnational levels, both by generating institutional memory and by creating clear objectives, rules of procedure and assigning technical personnel to ensure the interplay across MRV agencies and stakeholders. Furthermore, institutionalization of REDD+ and of the SNMRV is needed to ensure the survival of the mechanism across political cycles and changes in administration and staff. This will increase the sense that REDD+ is part of a national and subnational policy agenda in Mexico, and not a sectoral or even personal one.

Ensuring continuity and the institutionalization of REDD+ and MRV also faces further challenges that have been identified by Trench (2015) regarding the divorce between REDD+ implementation and the reality of politics in Mexico. He suggests, for example, that subsidy allocation may be based on political favors rather than on real needs and priorities. Nevertheless, a robust and transparent MRV system could, in fact, be expanded to monitor such policy decisions.

6.1.3 Securing financial resources and political will

Mexico is a REDD+ flagship country and its MRV process has evolved within a propitious context characterized by external finance, public commitments for achieving REDD+

54 Nonetheless, technical experts have stayed in the UTEMRV and recent steps are pointing towards an increase in coordination with states.
The politics of REDD+ MRV in Mexico

and through subnational actors’ interest in participating and moving the process forward. However, the high expectations generated contrast with limited progress in implementing climate change policy by the federal government. Most informants were uncertain whether national and subnational authorities will ever really enforce such commitments by guaranteeing continuity in the REDD+ agenda, harmonizing policies and incentives, and channeling the necessary financial resources to support REDD+ and MRV efforts.

Actors at different levels were particularly concerned about the assignment of sufficient financial resources to support the implementation of the MRV system and of subnational monitoring initiatives. They spoke positively of the financial sources that have supported the construction of the MRV system, such as the PMN, the GCFF and the M-REDD+ Alliance. However, since most externally financed projects have ended, actors suggested that national and state governments should demonstrate their interest and support for MRV by integrating it into the state Development Plans (Planes de Desarrollo) and assigning public resources to them. Nonetheless, these actors perceived that this was extremely unlikely to happen, given that Mexico has undergone major budget cuts since fiscal year 2016, which diminished CONAFOR’s operational budget by 40 percent (Deschamps and Zúñiga 2015). According to CONAFOR informants, administrative budget cuts have forced organizational restructuring, which has translated into a loss of staff, programs and limited operative capacities. For the 2017 fiscal year, substantial budget cuts halved the resources directed to CONAFOR’s subsidy programs. For many, federal budget cuts put at risk the further consolidation of a multilevel MRV system since, along with other aspects of REDD+, it may not now be considered a policy priority by CONAFOR.

Actors did, however, recognize that GCF and FCPF negotiations for the IRE could play a pivotal role in securing continuity for the implementation of REDD+ MRV and capacity building by channeling financial resources to these efforts. In the case of Yucatan, some actors expected that the future Climate Change Fund of the Yucatan Peninsula, which is currently under construction, could become an important source of finance for monitoring activities throughout the region. The value of the MRV system will be to enable the monitoring of results and to inform local decision making, apart from its obligations to the UNFCCC. This still needs to be recognized so that it can be prioritized in public budgets across levels.

The risk of reduced support for MRV efforts (and those of REDD+ in general) is also exacerbated by what actors perceived as a lack of interest in translating climate change policy into meaningful joint actions by the relevant ministries within the federal administration (particularly CONAFOR, SEMARNAT, SAGARPA and the Secretariat of Social Development [SEDESOL]). For many, this is what has impeded REDD+ from fully permeating national policy. More recently, in the context of the Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which took place in Cancun, Mexico (December 2016), SAGARPA and SEMARNAT signed an agreement to promote agricultural productivity without affecting forests and biodiversity and, for this, both ministries have committed to coordinate their work to avoid forest areas being turned into agricultural or livestock areas. The agreement still needs to prove its impact and, if taken seriously, could lead to the integrated landscape management that REDD+ seeks to achieve in Mexico, and support the work of the SNMRV and other national and subnational monitoring initiatives. Such joint action will be necessary if the deforestation goals that are established in the Mexican legal framework, the country’s NDC and the Bonn Challenge goals are to be achieved. The lessons from the MRV process suggest that REDD+ faces the challenge of transition from a political commitment to an actual agenda in Mexican climate change and sustainable rural development policy.

6.2 Areas of opportunity

6.2.1 The relevance of the MRV system at the subnational level

Results show different priorities between national and subnational actors’ conceptions of what MRV for REDD+ should be. On the one hand, CONAFOR created the SNMRV to comply with strict international and national requirements for producing data on GHG emissions and removals from REDD+ activities. On the
other, subnational actors are convinced that the REDD+ MRV discussion should move beyond monitoring forest carbon, taking into account local dynamics and informing decision making at state, regional and local levels. For subnational actors, the MRV discussion has become an opportunity to highlight its value as a policy evaluation instrument and as a tool for communities.

These two positions are not mutually exclusive. Subnational monitoring initiatives could contribute to the monitoring and reporting of safeguards and non-carbon benefits and will represent an essential element to understanding the effectiveness of REDD+ activities, which is also an objective of the MRV system, according to ENAREDD+ (CONAFOR 2015c).

Subnational actors in this regard are not limited by the international guidelines and thus have room to maneuver, to promote the monitoring of other data at subnational level, and consider how it can contribute to, or be nested within, national monitoring systems. The broader emphasis of the Paris Agreement also provides an incentive to find ways to contribute, not only additional data, but also to transparency and more participatory processes. Furthermore, interests that extend beyond carbon monitoring could find a place in the SNMF, which CONAFOR is currently defining and which seeks to encompass different monitoring initiatives related to forest ecosystems in Mexico. The creation of a MRV system for REDD+ has brought to the surface the importance of developing new or integrating existing monitoring systems that could contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of REDD+ policies and activities, beyond carbon.

As presented earlier in the ‘Multilevel perspectives on REDD+ MRV in Mexico’ chapter, subnational actors also take pride in their efforts to lead state-level and community monitoring as a way to identify activities that work, and those that do not, and thus to guide policy for REDD+ investments. National authorities could take advantage of this subnational interest, and use it to learn about success and failure in REDD+ activities. The IRE is not intended to incorporate information produced by community monitoring into the national MRV system, but it leaves open the opportunity to explore ways to do this in the future (CONAFOR 2016).

However, while there is no inherent contradiction between establishing parallel monitoring with different priorities, government institutions will not necessarily possess sufficient finance, staff and capacities to extend the scope of REDD+ MRV in Mexico, particularly given recent cuts in the federal budget. It is therefore important that additional actors and sources of finance support extended MRV technical requirements. For example, one current NGO effort advocates the recognition of traditional governance mechanisms for local monitoring, and robust monitoring mechanisms for carbon, sustainable productive practices and natural resources.55

6.2.2 Recognizing and integrating subnational efforts, capacities and experience

Results point to the need to strengthen the participation of state and local actors in the design and implementation of the MRV system. Subnational actors sought increased recognition of their technical capacities, experience, needs and interests in monitoring for REDD+. For example, the Observatorio de la Selva Maya (OSM)56 and the Laboratorio de Observación de la Tierra of the Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR),57 which represent subnational monitoring platforms, are led by civil society organizations and academia, and seek to gather information on the state of forest resources and land-change dynamics in the states of the Yucatan Peninsula. Local actors perceive these as tools that could inform subnational MRV discussions, but their role in national MRV is still uncertain. Both subnational and national informants across levels recognized that such civil society organizations and academic platforms are crucial to ensure that information is collected and shared among actors, especially since information does not flow well between government

56 For more information, see http://www.observatorioselvamaya.org.mx/ (accessed March 2017).
57 For more information, see http://www.ecosur.mx/blog/laboratorio-de-observacion-de-la-tierra/ (accessed March 2017).
institutions. Furthermore, such monitoring platforms become mechanisms for enhancing transparency and broadening stakeholder participation and confidence, thus supporting the Paris Agreement and its Enhanced Transparency Framework (De Sy et al. 2016).

Another opportunity identified to enhance subnational participation in MRV is provided by voluntary working platforms, such as CTC-REDD+, which exist at national and state level, and the states’ GT-MRVs. Although decisions taken by these working groups are not legally binding, their role could be strengthened since they are identified by subnational actors as useful forums where a diversity of stakeholders interact and address REDD+ priorities. In particular, for Chiapas and Yucatan, the GT-MRVs have proved to be sound platforms to identify experts, needs and interests, and to discuss states’ objectives and priorities for MRV. Actors in Chiapas also perceived the GT-MRV as a group in which participation was more active than in others, such as those dedicated to REDD+ benefit sharing and safeguards. Furthermore, such groups represent a way to secure continuity in discussions and an effective solution to changes in policy agendas that come with changes of administration.

6.2.3 Positive perceptions of Mexico’s international commitments and negotiations

National and subnational actors highly valued the opportunities offered by the negotiations with the FCPF through the IRE to (i) polish, define and put into practice years of REDD+ planning and efforts, and (ii) enhance the role of the states. Across levels, informants agreed that the approval of the IRE by the FCPF’s Carbon Fund would play a crucial role in continuing the REDD+ process in Mexico and that unresolved aspects such as MRV could be targeted. Some actors believe that the IRE could empower states and enable them to demand from CONAFOR and other agencies that their needs and interests be heard. Moreover, subnational actors are stressing that the Bonn Challenge commitments, where SAGARPA plays a crucial role, depend mostly on states’ efforts and are therefore identifying it as a priority factor that, taken together with REDD+, will trigger change in states’ policy agendas.

Respondents in Chiapas and Yucatan also recognized that the GCF has highlighted the role of the states in the REDD+ process and that this, in turn, has empowered them to request MRV information from CONAFOR. Although state governments still need to address the flow of information and the communication of objectives and improve how other actors within the state are participating in the GCF process, the involvement of states in the GCF could prove useful to ensuring the continuity of REDD+ negotiations and to enhancing the role of the states. Moreover, given that federal and state budget cuts threaten the progress of MRV at national and subnational levels, actors in Chiapas and Yucatan are looking to the GCF as a potential source of finance that will help them consolidate their monitoring efforts.
7 Conclusions

Ultimately, the further development of a robust, transparent, and efficient REDD+ MRV system, and of other national and subnational monitoring initiatives to help us understand and evaluate the impacts of REDD+ activities and policies, will depend, in part, on how national authorities and subnational actors face these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities.

The lack of a general understanding by different actors of what the objectives of Mexico’s SNMRV are, how it will be carried out, which methodologies will be used, what roles and responsibilities each actor in this process has, and how it will relate to other monitoring initiatives, has generated tension between national and subnational actors. Many of the latter consider their experience and expertise would greatly benefit CONAFOR’s compliance with specific international REDD+ guidelines for MRV with monitoring beyond technical carbon variables, which would represent an essential element to understanding the effectiveness of REDD+ activities.

The acceptance of the REDD+ MRV process would be viewed in a brighter light if its design process and decision making were to be decentralized by including subnational actors. This, along with making MRV information (objectives, decisions, reporting, etc.) publicly available through clear and effective communication channels would enhance its transparency.

Also, the design of the MRV system for REDD+ in Mexico is already testing traditional work patterns across institutions, since it is urging innovation around how actors cooperate, how information is shared, and how to take into account and strengthen subnational technical capacities and experiences. However, much more cooperation among institutions is required. The development of the REDD+ MRV system could become an innovative attempt to transform how actors share and analyze results, how policies are designed in Mexico, and to assess which activities work and why.

Although the research did not cover more recent steps taken by CONAFOR and the UTERMV in the REDD+ MRV process, current approaches are starting to indicate increased coordination and communication with subnational actors and other government institutions, an interest in continuing to strengthen subnational capacities for MRV and define roles and responsibilities, and improvements in the ENAREDD+ derived from the public consultation process, among others. As the process progresses, the ambiguity between the objectives of the SNMF and the SNMRV are expected to dissipate and synergies with other national and subnational monitoring initiatives should be explored.

The Carbon Fund’s approval of the IRE is key to developing an MRV system in Mexico. However, as institutional memory can be lost due to high political turnover, both national and subnational government agencies need to make ongoing financial and political efforts to internalize REDD+ MRV within their government agencies and thus secure continuity for REDD+ MRV implementation. Since the government alone does not have enough capacity to extend the scope of REDD+, it is important for additional actors to support extended MRV technical requirements. Continued financial, technical and administrative support for further implementation and improvement of the SNMRV and of monitoring initiatives will be needed to attain Mexico’s ambitious climate change objectives.

58 CONAFOR (personal communication) and follow-up interviews mentioned recent workshops with subnational actors where the MRV discussion has been prioritized. This was perceived as a positive development by interviewees.
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The CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) is the world’s largest research for development program to enhance the role of forests, trees and agroforestry in sustainable development and food security and to address climate change. CIFOR leads FTA in partnership with Bioversity International, CATIE, CIRAD, INBAR, Tropenbos International and the World Agroforestry Centre.

Since 2009, CIFOR has conducted a multi-donor funded Global Comparative Study on REDD+ (GCS-REDD+) in 10 countries (Indonesia, Brazil, Bolivia, Cameroon, Peru, Tanzania, Vietnam, DR Congo, Nepal and Mexico). The project began as a four-year global research study on first-generation REDD+ demonstration and readiness activities and has since expanded to address a number of related topics, including multilevel governance in REDD+ benefit sharing and land use decisions.

REDD+ is a multilevel process, and issues of scale, power and politics apply to both land use decisions and the institutions set up as part of REDD+ and other initiatives aimed at improving landscape governance. The nature and extent of multilevel communication and coordination influence the legitimacy of the institutions and processes established. It is thus necessary to analyze the political and economic challenges and opportunities behind technical processes such as Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) systems.

This occasional paper focuses on Mexico’s approach to REDD+ MRV and the interplay between national and state levels. It aims to increase understanding about the interests and levels of understanding of the different actors involved in REDD+ MRV, why their visions vary, how coordination functions across actors and scales and the underlying factors that affect it. The paper identifies challenges and opportunities and provides insights on how the process can be improved to create a multilevel REDD+ MRV system that responds to the different needs and interests of national, state and local actors. The lessons from Mexico are also relevant for other countries engaged in this process.