MRV for REDD+ in Mexico
The political process of a technical system

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Key messages

- The monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of activities carried out for REDD+ in Mexico can shed some light on the challenges that could be faced when complying with the provisions of the Paris Agreement and the enhanced transparency framework (ETF) it establishes. Addressing the concerns presented by multiple stakeholders on several levels will contribute to highlighting transparency, in accordance with the ETF.

- National and subnational stakeholders should make an effort to officially clarify the objectives and scope of the National Monitoring, Reporting and Verification System (SNMRV); and of subnational stakeholder participation (institutional arrangements, times, inputs, outputs, roles, and responsibilities); and how to establish complementariness with other national and subnational monitoring initiatives.

- The experience and knowledge of subnational stakeholders can improve and enrich MRV in Mexico, since its efforts, interests and needs go beyond the simple monitoring of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that the SNMRV has performed so far.

- Long-term institutionalization should be ensured for REDD+ and the MRV system at the different government levels to overcome changes associated with political cycles and ensure the continuity of financial, technical and administrative efforts. Given that budget cuts have affected public administration in Mexico, more stakeholders and funding sources (private sector, academia, civil society, foundations) should support technical requirements for MRV and other monitoring initiatives.

- Interviewed national and subnational stakeholders valued the implementation of the national initiative for the reduction of forest emissions (IRE) through the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and the mechanisms to strengthen subnational stakeholders (such as the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force, GCF), as well as opportunities to clarify questions on MRV procedures and empower the states for decision-making.

Introduction

As part of the global efforts to mitigate climate change, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) encourages developing countries to implement activities known as REDD+. In accordance with UNFCCC guidelines, countries planning to implement REDD+ activities should, among other actions, establish forest emission reference levels and/or a forest reference level, and establish a strong national forest monitoring system. These systems should provide accurate information and data that are transparent and consistent over time to carry out MRV activities for forest-related anthropogenic emissions.

Various studies (Korhonen-Kurki et al. 2012, 2013; Ravikumar et al. 2015; Kowler and Larson 2016; Vijge 2016) have used a multilevel governance perspective to understand the progress of different countries in the creation of their MRV systems for REDD+. When analyzing the flow of information, the interests and the interaction among stakeholders, and power relations, the design and implementation of MRV systems is understood not only as a technical requirement, but also as a multilevel political process. This approach helps

explore ways in which even seemingly technical processes such as MRV are shaped by processes that require political agreements and, at the same time, need to overcome multilevel challenges to move forward.

The REDD+ process in Mexico, led by the National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR), is supported by a legal and policy framework that sets demanding goals for emissions reduction.[1] Progress towards REDD+ includes the National Strategy for REDD+ (ENAREDD+), approved in August 2017 by Mexico's Intersecretarial Commission on Climate Change, which sets out objectives and courses of action for the MRV system and for establishing the national reference level. Additionally, the country has Early Intervention Areas for REDD+ (AATREDD+), designed to implement institutional arrangements, governance models, funding and monitoring systems to provide lessons for the implementation of REDD+. As part of REDD+ readiness

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1   The General Law on Climate Change sets the objective of achieving a rate of 0% carbon loss in original ecosystems and CONAFOR sets this goal for year 2020 (CONAFOR 2015). In the context of the Paris Agreement, the Nationally Determined Contribution indicates a deforestation rate of 0% by 2030 (Gobierno de la República 2015).

efforts, and in compliance with the General Law on Climate Change and the General Law on Sustainable Forest Development, CONAFOR has moved forward in the development of the National Monitoring, Reporting and Verification System (SNMRV) for estimating GHG emissions and emissions reductions in the forestry sector and changes in forest cover (CONAFOR 2016; CONAFOR et al. 2016). Official sources indicate that the SNMRV was consolidated in 2015 (CONAFOR 2016; CONAFOR et al. 2016), but our interviewees emphasized that it is still a process under development.

In light of the 2015 Paris Agreement and the ETF it establishes, an analysis of how the MRV system was developed in Mexico is relevant. The ETF aims to support good practices, legitimacy and accountability for all stakeholders involved in the progress of MRV for nationally determined contributions to reduce GHG emissions (UNFCCC 2015). It also provides the foundation to balance technical requirements (such as MRV) with knowledge and the participation of subnational stakeholders (see De Sy et al. 2016).

The efforts to develop and implement an MRV system for REDD+ in Mexico should also address the wider political context of the country's REDD+ readiness. Despite the significant potential for innovation of the REDD+ intervention scheme in Mexico, efforts have been hindered by numerous barriers (see Deschamps et al. 2015; Libert and Trench 2016). These include limited coordination among government sectors and levels, the prevalence of traditional *top-down* work patterns in CONAFOR and other institutions, and the lack of political will, among others (Deschamps et al. 2015; Libert and Trench 2016).

Objectives, methods and limitations

This Infobrief presents a summary of the main findings and recommendations from the research and analysis presented in *The Politics of REDD+ MRV in Mexico: The Interplay of the National and Subnational Levels* (Deschamps and Larson 2017). This study aims to understand the various stakeholder interests in and perceptions of the MRV system for REDD+, why their views differ, the factors that affect coordination between stakeholders and levels, and how these can be addressed to create an MRV system that can address multilevel challenges. By analyzing the ideas, interests and roles of stakeholders in the process, the study identifies challenges and areas of opportunity for creating a multilevel MRV system that addresses the different needs and interests of national, state and local stakeholders and that is also effective, legitimate and fair.

In this study, the states of Chiapas and Yucatan were selected for an analysis of the experience at state level, among other reasons[2], because both are members of the AATREDD+ and have solid experience in monitoring their forest resources, which facilitates the study of the process. Forty-nine interviews were conducted at the national level and in those two states, with government representatives, academics, civil society organizations, forestry producers, members of technical advisory committees for REDD+ (CTC-REDD+) and working groups for MRV (GT-MRV), and with the Public Agent for Territorial Development (APDT) in Yucatan. Since the REDD+ and MRV processes in Mexico are currently under way, research only includes findings from previous stages of the process (most of the interviews were conducted

between August and November 2016). However, this Infobrief also includes feedback and proposals collected at a workshop held by CIFOR in May 2017 in Mexico City, where the results of the study were presented[3].

Results

Lack of understanding and effective communication

The results show that there is a lack of effective communication in relation to what the country should provide to comply with the international guidelines of the UNFCCC and the objectives and scope of the SNMRV under the leadership of CONAFOR, and how this could be supplemented with subnational interests and needs. UNFCCC guidelines require countries to establish unified national systems for MRV. However, they do not require the MRV system or process to be centralized. In this sense, experts with technical knowledge and central government officials should clearly explain what the UNFCCC requirements for an MRV system are and what is negotiable based on subnational priorities.

National and subnational stakeholders should still make efforts to clarify the objectives and scope of MRV at the national and state level, how the SNMRV will operate and how state data will be fed into it, who will participate in information contribution, which methodologies and assumptions will be used, and how the system could relate to other national and subnational monitoring initiatives, including state-level MRV schemes. Even though efforts have been made to define the role of the states in MRV for REDD+ (EcoLogic 2016), subnational stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in the process are still to be agreed on and implemented. Since the legal framework does not define the participation of the states in MRV (EcoLogic 2016), addressing the legal gaps would strengthen such a role and the implementation of state-level schemes for MRV. Similarly, the links between the SNMRV and REDD+ safeguard and benefit-sharing systems should also be clarified.

Acknowledgment and integration of subnational experience, capacities and interests

The experience, expertise, needs and interests of subnational stakeholders go beyond the objectives of the current SNMRV which, due to UNFCCC requirements, uses an emissions-centered approach. Thus, subnational experience and knowledge can largely enrich the SNMRV and discussions on MRV and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the impact of REDD+ policies and activities.

Subnational-level interviews emphasized the importance of the MRV system as a source of information for state and local policies, and also as an opportunity to strengthen and include community monitoring efforts and their application at the local level. Establishing synergies with other systems (such as the National Biodiversity Monitoring System, the National Forest and Soils Inventory, future REDD+ safeguard systems and the system for measuring sustainable development objectives as part of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development) will be essential to articulate interests among the various levels and understand the impact of the activities under REDD+.

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2   See Deschamps and Larson (2017) for more details on the methodology.

3   'Taller Nacional sobre Gobernanza multinivel, MRV y REDD+ en México', 25 May 2017. The study carried out by Deschamps and Larson (2017) also includes comments from five external reviewers and from CONAFOR's Technical Unit Specialized in Monitoring, Reporting and Verification.

Positive perceptions on international commitments

National and subnational stakeholders valued the opportunity provided by negotiations with the FCPF through the approval of the IRE. Signing an Emission Reductions Payment Agreement (ERPA) with the Carbon Fund of the FCPF would contribute to the implementation of the intervention model and a results-based payment scheme, and would help address questions on MRV procedures. Additionally, interviewees highlighted the relevance of subnational efforts and mechanisms such as the Governors' (GCF) Task Force and its fund to help empower states and financially consolidate MRV-oriented efforts. The Bonn Challenge, where states are responsible for restoration targets, was also identified as a priority for positioning subnational needs in relation to MRV.

Conclusion and recommendations

The implementation of the IRE and mechanisms to strengthen subnational stakeholders (such as the GCF) provide opportunities to make progress towards a more institutionally inclusive MRV system. This is relevant because the discussion and development of the MRV system for REDD+ in Mexico is now challenging traditionally-vertical work patterns, and institutional specialization and its implementation will require stronger collaboration across levels and sectors to enhance the establishment of the institutional agreements needed to achieve the objectives of the system. This may be difficult, as institutional relations in the country tend to be centralized. The development of the SNMRV and state monitoring schemes, as well as the creation of synergies with other monitoring initiatives, could articulate interests on multiple levels and become an innovative attempt to transform how stakeholders share and analyze results on forest cover changes, how Mexican policies are designed, and how assessments are carried out to determine which activities work and why.

The MRV system for REDD+ will resonate with subnational interests when it goes beyond the technical aspects of carbon monitoring and when its potential is explored both as a tool to understand and analyze the effects of implemented activities and to contribute to the decision-making process.

Recent steps taken by CONAFOR[4] might indicate progress on how MRV is currently addressed by national and subnational stakeholders. In an attempt to help advance the process, we identify recommendations that reflect the perspectives of the stakeholders that participated in the national workshop organized by CIFOR and the analysis of challenges and areas of opportunity to develop a multilevel MRV process (for more details, see Deschamps and Larson 2017):

- Defining and strengthening coordination and collaboration to promote the exchange of information on MRV and databases across levels and sectors and within government institutions. Establishing formal and effective communication channels and exchange forums for national and subnational stakeholders in relation to MRV (training, information exchange, feedback) will help increase the perceived transparency of the process.

- Strengthening the definition of roles and responsibilities for various stakeholders (state stakeholders in particular) within the legal framework; providing clarity in relation to state-related SNMRV procedures; and standardizing methodologies, assumptions, definitions and inputs to establish the starting point for state MRV schemes.
- Acknowledging state progress in monitoring-related issues and ensuring the inclusion of subnational stakeholder experience and capacities in the SNMRV and in the definition of state schemes for MRV.
- Fostering synergies and complementariness between interests and priorities established at a subnational level (e.g. community monitoring initiatives), the objectives of the current SNMRV, and other initiatives such as the National Forest Monitoring System.
- Channeling sufficient and transparent funding for the continued development of MRV for REDD+ at the national and subnational levels. In a context where drastic budget cuts undermine the ability of CONAFOR and the government to sustain REDD+, more stakeholders and funding sources are needed to support the technical requirements of MRV and other monitoring initiatives.
- Prioritizing the development of the MRV system within the climate change agenda through the political interest and will of national and subnational authorities. This is favored by the fact that actions related to REDD+ and its MRV are essential to comply with the country's ambitious goals to address climate change.
- Ensuring long-term institutionalization for REDD+ and the MRV system at the different levels to overcome changes associated with political cycles and ensure the continuity of financial, technical and administrative efforts. To this end, incentives should be identified (such as the implementation of the IRE) for the different stakeholders and levels to become involved in the development of MRV.
- Strengthening subnational forest monitoring platforms led by civil society organizations and academia[5] and the GT-MRV, since their role is essential to ensure information exchange and analysis among stakeholders, especially given the existing obstacles to information flow across government institutions. In addition to helping increase legitimacy through transparency and promoting stakeholder participation and trust, these platforms and working groups will also ensure the continuity of discussions.
- The design of the MRV system for REDD+ initiated efforts to strengthen subnational technical capacities for MRV, which have been lauded by subnational stakeholders[6]. CONAFOR must continue with these efforts, and the lessons learned must be made available to subnational stakeholders to inform and improve the process.

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4   CONAFOR (personal communication, 2017) and interviewees mentioned several recent workshops with subnational stakeholders where MRV issues were further discussed, which is perceived as progress.

5   For example, the Mayan Forest Observatory (Observatorio de la Selva Maya) and the Earth Observation Laboratory (Laboratorio de Observación de la Tierra) of the Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR) seek to gather and analyze information on forest resources and land use change dynamics in the Yucatan Peninsula. Interviewees stated that these platforms could provide information for MRV discussions, but their role in the national MRV system is still uncertain.

6   This is in reference to efforts related to the development of state and local monitoring capacities led by the project 'Reinforcing REDD+ Readiness in Mexico and Enabling South–South Cooperation', the Mexico REDD+ Alliance, GCFF, regional universities and research centers.

Acknowledgments

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