

Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Mexico Metropolitan Area Reforestation Project

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Criteria # 1 Sustainability

In terms of sustainability, the project has many achievements. First, it has generated local technical capabilities by employing local residents and implementing innovative ideas. Besides, infrastructure has been constructed and now the project has the capacity to generate its own financial resources. Furthermore, the project is being supported by local institutions and the Mexico City government has been a reliable financial counterpart. But above all, there is a very important element for sustainability, the effort of the operational agency (CORENADER) to build social acceptance and attain the appropriation of the project by the community. This challenge is not only a matter of environmental education, as the external evaluator suggests, the forest owners will barely be able to undertake the responsibility of conservation unless this is a cost-effective option for them. The pressure over metropolitan forests is due to the high relative value of other land uses in front of the conservational use. The reforestation project has understood this reality, so there are programs that have been implemented to compensate the environmental services of the forests and prevent human-caused fires. Even when these are not explicit payments for environmental services, there are some interesting schemes, for example: the payment of 1 peso for surviving tree, the subsidies to agro-forestry systems and the formation of paid firefighting squads with local residents. Nevertheless, to guarantee sustainability, it is advisable that the project evolves towards the recognition of the entire reforestation benefits and not only carbon sequestration or soil particles retention (wrongly defined as “the air purification effect of forests” on the evaluation report). It is necessary to recognize too, all the environmental services that forests provide to Mexico City such as the soil protection, the maintenance of landscapes, and the regulation of the watershed flows. In this way the project will have the potential of strengthening its sustainability by having better public and politic recognition and by creating mechanisms, such as local markets for environmental services, that in fact make forest conservation become a competitive land use.

Criteria # 2 Efficiency

Efficiency of the Project has not been the most favorable; achievements are not 100% of expected even though they have been close. First, coordination between the three different local governments was not accomplished. After this, even though the project plan was revised, it wasn't possible to complete the objectives in terms of reforested hectares and established times, while the project costs exceeded even the originally programmed amount. Therefore, more budgets than planned was necessary to get done fewer outputs. Besides, according to the evaluation report, 1,600 ha. were lost annually although there was the investment on firefighting infrastructure. There is a lack of information about the effectiveness of that infrastructure; statistics of its use, activity reports or squads' achievements, thus it is difficult to appraise its helpfulness. With regard to resources, they were mostly used on the reforestation of areas with a higher tree cover rate, leaving apart windbreaks and forest land with less than 10% of the surface covered with tree canopy, though reforesting these areas would have provided better outcomes. Even if the financial participation of local government is really valuable, it will be necessary to increase the efficiency of all the financial resources of the project including those generated by the nursery sales. To reach this, the active participation of landowners is imperative, through the incentive programs, efficiency can improve by diminishing fires, get to the most difficult areas, and secure the investment in the long run.