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Title: Management & Marginalization: Trade-Offs Associated with Organization in Oaxacan Community Forest Enterprises

With a long history of communally owned and managed forestlands, Mexico is often among the countries highlighted as a model for community forestry. The state of Oaxaca contains an especially high number of reputedly “successful” community forest enterprises (CFEs) that commercialize various timber and non-timber forest products and services. This study explores how different organizational strategies and structures of CFEs in Oaxaca advance objectives like profit at the expense of other objectives, such as participation, transparency and trust. While scholarship has frequently promoted CFEs as having the potential to address multiple goals, our study reveals how theoretical “win-wins” belie social challenges that face CFEs that have altered their organizational structures to accommodate more profitable and vertically integrated enterprises. To explore some of the trade-offs these CFEs face, our study utilizes a case study approach, purposefully selecting four vertically integrated CFEs across a spectrum of different organizational structures. Interviews with approximately 70 community members reveal gaps in both the literature’s documentation of the organizational complexity of CFEs, as well as social issues that arise as organizational strategies and structures evolve to increase profits. Previous scholarship on CFEs has primarily focused on summative economic outcomes (such as profit) and environmental outcomes (such as deforestation) rather than on organizational complexity and its impacts on procedural outcomes (such as participation, transparency or trust). However, better understanding organization and associated trade-offs may allow CFEs – or other stakeholders interested in their proliferation and success – to make more transparent and deliberate decisions to mitigate or avoid undesirable outcomes and unanticipated consequences. As CFEs are promoted and replicated globally, our study is an important step in understanding the perverse outcomes and unintended feedbacks that arise from varying organizational strategies and structures and illustrates the tension between effectiveness (the fulfillment of social development goals including participatory decision-making and transparency) and efficiency (profitability, competitiveness) in CFEs.