



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



ENVIRONMENT

GUATEMALA

USAID supports the protection of Guatemala’s environmental resources through a comprehensive approach that contributes to biodiversity protection and sustainable forest management.

Guatemala is one of the most biologically diverse nations on the planet, boasting 14 different ecoregions and immense biological and cultural diversity. Four million hectares of sub-tropical forest are found in Guatemala, 70 percent of which are located within natural protected areas covering approximately 30 percent of Guatemalan territory.

USAID environment activities contribute to conserve Guatemala’s biodiversity, reduce land-based emissions, enhance national and regional security, and generate income and employment. USAID supports policy and legal frameworks that strengthens Guatemala’s System of Protected Areas, enables long-term sustainable forest management, builds an effective environmental justice sector, and engages communities whose livelihoods depend on healthy ecosystems and thriving standing forests. Conservation efforts have contributed to increase the presence of iconic species, documented by sustained biological monitoring.

USAID's comprehensive approach has opened high value international markets for timber and non-timber forest products, increased incomes well above the minimum wage, generated lasting employment, and engaged local communities in conservation initiatives.

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Guatemala's immense biodiversity is crucial to the multiple livelihood benefits it generates. These natural resources represent the potential for significant income generation through sustainable forestry and fisheries, sustainable tourism, and other livelihood opportunities. Despite this rich biological and cultural heritage, natural resources throughout the country are threatened by habitat loss, over-exploitation, trafficking of flora and fauna, agricultural encroachment, climate change, weak governance, and organized criminal activity. Guatemalan agencies responsible for managing the country's natural resources suffer from chronic underfunding, insufficient human resources for management and protection, and limited institutional capacity.

To compound these threats, Guatemala is one of the ten countries most vulnerable to extreme weather events and natural disasters. Guatemala's geographic location makes it prone to tropical storms, droughts, hurricanes and earthquakes, and the incidence of extreme weather events is predicted to worsen as a result of climate change. These climate change effects exacerbate Guatemala's poverty conditions and malnutrition rates, increasing the vulnerability of many households, especially in the Western Highlands and the 'Dry Corridor.' The 'Dry Corridor' is an ecological region of Central America, which is particularly vulnerable to increasingly irregular rainfall, suffering from both severe droughts and flooding.

INCREASED ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

USAID partners with Guatemala's private and public sectors to strengthen forest and non-forest value chains to increase incomes and create jobs. USAID facilitates economic opportunities by pursuing high-value international markets and ensuring products meet quality standards. Expanding market access and the value of the goods being exported increases incomes for families, community wealth, and government revenue, while simultaneously conserving biodiversity and strengthening the sustainable management of Guatemala's forests.

Additionally, USAID partners with the government and local communities to support co-management of forests, agroforestry and conservation of biodiversity, by supporting small and medium businesses engaged in sectors such as tourism and fisheries.

USAID also protects livelihoods and economic activities by reducing vulnerability to natural disasters and threats including soil erosion, landslides, forest fires, and other environmental risks. USAID does this through support for improved watershed management, sustainable forest management, and protected area management. USAID has expanded its successful concessions model of forestry management to protect and enhance the natural resources that underpin the Guatemalan economy, partnering with the Government of Guatemala to extend the concession contracts and create new ones. Community forest

concessions have proven highly successful at conserving forest cover, improving rural livelihoods, and generating jobs. They strengthen existing and new forest enterprises and diversify community incomes by strengthening tourism enterprises. USAID focuses on increasing and protecting economic gains for families and communities in a sustainable manner, preserving Guatemala's natural resources for citizens and tourists for present and future generations.

IMPROVED GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY IN PROTECTED AREAS

Thirty-one percent of the country lies within a protected area and, limited investment in the management or government presence within these areas, has created breeding grounds for organized criminal activity ranging from drug trafficking, to illegal mining, wildlife trafficking, illegal logging, and other illegal activities that threaten the protected areas and the populations that live there.

USAID partners with government entities, local partners and other USG agencies, to strengthen the conservation of biodiversity, protected area management, environmental governance, civil society, and indigenous communities through Guatemala's Protected Areas System (SIGAP).

Reducing environmental crime is a critical step to weakening organized criminal networks in Guatemala and improving overall security in the country and region. USAID will continue to support the justice sector, building on its capacity to address environmental criminal cases more effectively.