ETH sustainability
Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

ACADEMIA ENGELBERG
Dialogue on Science

Latin American Forest Policies Research and Influence Project

International Student Initiative for Action on Climate Change (ISIACC)

Origins of the Project

At the 2004 Academia Engelberg conference titled "Will Climate Change the World?", a multicultural, multidisciplinary group of 18 academics and young professionals from 15 different countries was given the task of developing an Action Plan for projects that would contribute to climate change mitigation through reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The participant group formed the International Student Initiative for Action on Climate Change (ISIACC) and developed an Action Plan containing three separate project proposals. Following the Engelberg Conference, the "Latin American Forest Policies Research and Influence" project was selected from the three in the action plan, and funding was acquired for its' implementation.

Purpose

Vision:
A mobilization of the academic community that contributes to climate change mitigation by influencing public policy to reduce the net emissions of greenhouse gasses resulting from deforestation in the Latin American region by proposing alternatives for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests.

Goals:

(1) Develop policy papers with recommendations in relation to climate change mitigation at the international, regional and national level
(2) Obtain endorsement of the recommendations by the academic community in the region
(3) Guide and influence policy making through a communication, outreach and advocacy campaign

Justification

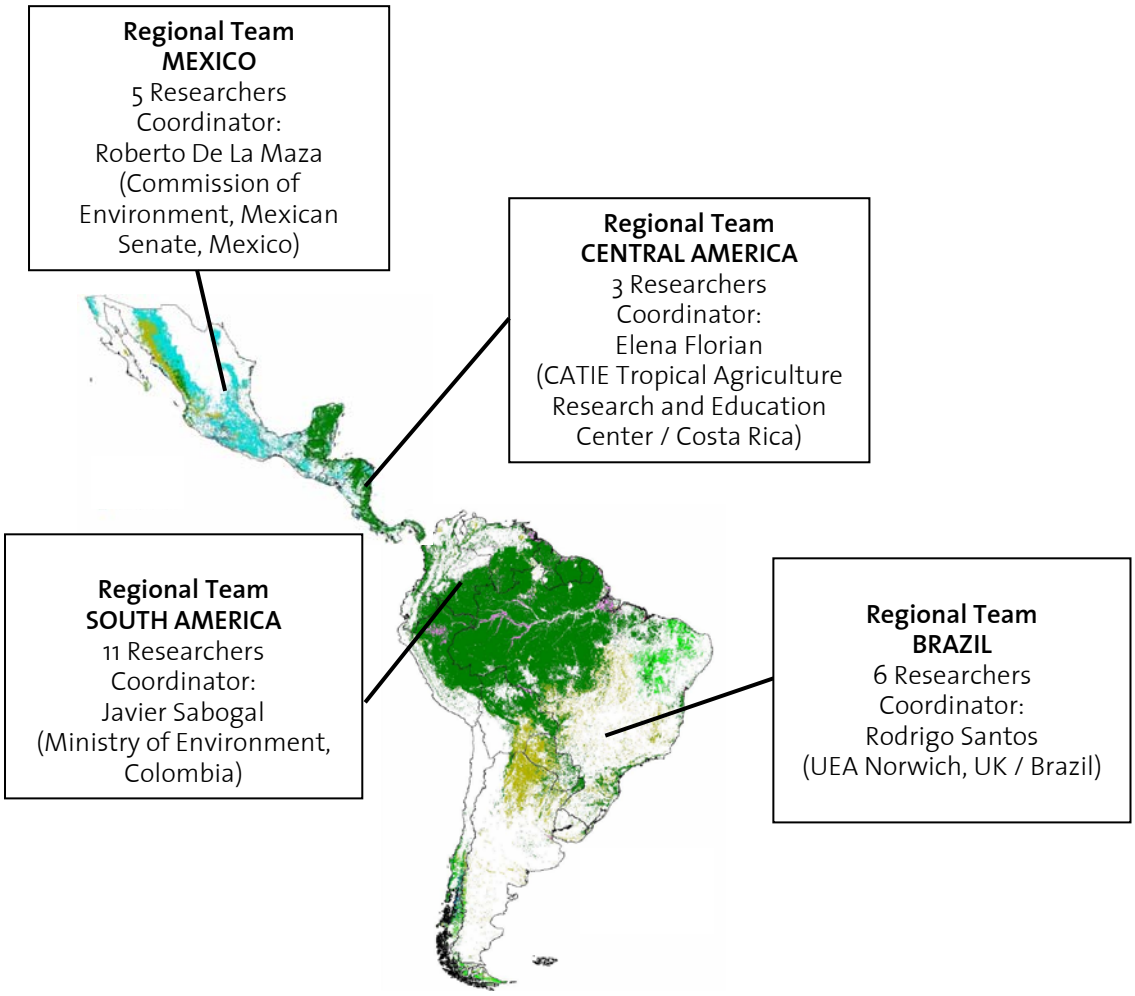
Role of Forests: Deforestation contributes to a minimum of 18% of global GHG emissions, an amount greater than the share produced by the transport sector[1]. Forests present significant, cost effective opportunities for climate change mitigation due to their role in the as both a "carbon sink" and a "carbon source" in the global carbon cycle. Reducing deforestation and the associated GHG emissions can also help conserve biodiversity, manage and preserve fundamental ecosystem goods and services and protect indigenous areas. Furthermore, deforestation can contribute to changes in regional climate and hydrology, often leading to warmer, drier conditions that reinforce warming trends from climate change[2]

The Latin America Region: Collectively, the region emits approximately 48 % of the global total of CO_2 resulting from land use, land use change and forestry[3]. In Brazil, the primary source of domestic GHG emissions is from deforestation as the agricultural frontiers expand[4]. Furthermore, the region is rich in biodiversity, containing 8 of the worlds 34 „Biodiversity Hotspots", which provide important ecosystem services of both environmental and socio-economic importance[5].

Public Policy: The technical, social, institutional and economic challenges associated with forest sink activities will be best addressed through a variety of policy mechanisms, including direct regulation or command and control strategies, administrative or planning instruments, market based instruments and education and research at the international, regional and national levels[6].

Project Team

The project is led by the Coordinating Committee (CC), comprised of the ETHsustainability Project Manager Michelle Grant and the Regional Project Manager Fabio Segura, along with the coordinators of each of the four sub regional working teams outlined below.



Spatial Distribution of Forests in Latin America According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Map reproduced in ECLAC [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean] (2004). *Spatial Distribution of Poverty in Relation to Environmental Systems in Latin America*, (Maps 10.a and 10.b cartographical annex)

Project Phases

1. Background Research

The first stage of the project involved extensive background research by each of the sub-regional working teams. The reports for each sub region were structured around the following main themes:

Chapter 1: Identification and analysis of key activities generating or reducing forest-related greenhouse gas emissions in the region, including agriculture and cattle grazing, forest fires, timber and wood extraction, macro-projects and urbanization.

Chapter 2: Definition of key geographical areas for action which included the development of a multi-criteria model for prioritization.

Chapter 3: Analysis of existing policies and recommendations for their improvement / amendment and for the creation of new policies and mechanisms. The analysis covered the relevant general legal framework and legal instruments, climate change mitigation policies, policies specifically related to the activities analysed in chapter 1, policies related to specific geographical areas, and other general policies of relevance.

Output from Phase 1: Draft Regional Reports

2. Review Process

The regional background research reports have undergone extensive evaluation in four stages:

(1) One Day Local Public Consultation Events
Each Regional Team organized and carried out a one day Public Consultation Event to bring together ISIACC members with scientists, informed representatives from the academic community, public policy makers, forest specialists and students from the sub region. The aim of these events was to obtain feedback from each of the different sectors above mentioned on the vision of the project as well as the content of the sub-regional background research document.

The event in Mexico City was held in the Deputies Chamber of the Mexican Congress (44 participants)

(2) Regional Seminar for Project Researchers The Amazon, Colombia
To consolidate and review the background research a group of 15 of the project researchers came together in the Colombian Amazon to discuss their findings and plan the next project stages.

Project Seminar, Leticia, Colombia, Oct 2006

(3) Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP)
Each sub-region has established a STAP, composed by invited policy makers, scientists and specialists. The STAP will review the background research documents and provide expert input.

(4) Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research Review
The background research will be used as the basis for the preparation of the "Engelberg Declaration" and the supporting policy paper. As part of the final process, a number of researchers from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change research in the United Kingdom will review the policy paper document.

STAP member Dr Manuel Rodriguez, former Colombian Minister for Environment and chair of UN Forum on Forests meets with member s of the Brazilian project team

Output from Phase 2: Final Regional Reports, Policy Paper, Declaration Document

3. Declaration Endorsement and Guiding Public Policy Making

The "Engelberg Declaration" will contain key recommendations for polices related to forests and climate change mitigation at the international, regional and national level. Supported by the "Regional Policy Paper", this will be widely disseminated and endorsed by the academic community in the region through a mass media, communication, and outreach campaign. This will be used as a tool for an advocacy movement to guide policy making in the region, by bringing attention to forests and climate change in the political agenda, promoting the implementation of the recommendations among policy makers and fostering alliances for action between policy makers and the academic community.

Current Status – May 2007

Early Success: Prior to the formal launch of the final phase of the project, the ISIACC group was invited by the Colombian Ministry of the Environment to provide policy recommendations for the Colombian National Development Plan. One of the groups' key recommendations – supporting "avoided deforestation" as a strategy for mitigating climate change – was included as a top priority for the countries international agenda.

Project Status: The four sub-regional teams are currently consolidating the background research reports following the review by each of the STAP members. At this point in time the proposals at the international level are being further elaborated, and the team is currently undergoing discussions with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Economics and Trade Branch for opportunities to collaborate on this aspect of the project.

Colombian Environment Minister Juan Lozano Ramirez and Vice-Minister Claudia Mora Pineda at the press release of the National Development Plan, containing recommendations from the ISIACC group

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[1] Stern, N. (2006) *The Stern Review on The Economics of Climate Change*, Executive summary, pp XXV

[2] Laurance and Williamson (2002) Conservation Biology 15(6): 1529-1535

[3] UNEP (2003) Global Environment Outlook 2003 – Latin America and Caribbean, pp. 44

[4] Ibid.

[5] Conservation International (2007) *Biodiversity Hotspots by Region*, available online: http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots/hotspots_by_region/

[6] Rodriguez, M., Espinoza, G., (2002) *Gestión Ambiental en América Latina y el Caribe*, Inter- American Development Bank, Washington DC pp. 175 – 225