

Forests and Land Tenure: A Look at National REDD-type Initiatives in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Ecuador

Samuel, Seble

MSc Candidate, Environmental Change and Management, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, seble.samuel@gmail.com

As consensus grows regarding the anthropogenic causes of climate change, deforestation has emerged as one of the primary contributors to greenhouse gas emissions worldwide (IPCC 2007, Parker et al. 2009, Hall 2012). This urgent need to drastically reduce global deforestation as a climate change mitigation mechanism has led to the launching of the international initiative UN-REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) (UN-REDD 2009). The move of forests to the international scale poses many implications for land tenure as the vast majority of carbon-rich forests reside in regions where land ownership is ill-defined, contested or insecure (Bruce et al. 2010). As Latin America comes forth as the global leader in terms of expanding REDD coverage, Costa Rica, Mexico and Ecuador stand out as the three Latin American countries developing national-level REDD strategies through the incorporation of pre-existing forest conservation programmes with a PES (payment for environmental services) component (Hall 2012, Petkova et al. 2011). While efforts are in place to attempt to minimize several structural challenges associated with REDD and land tenure, the rapid expanse of these programs has posed several implications including an insecurity of land title, conflicting overlap between land and resource rights, and a potential loss of territorial autonomy. These implications point to a need for increased capacity building, programmatic flexibility, conflict mediation, clarification of grey areas, and a proper mechanism of consultation in order to create an increasingly equitable participation process that minimizes land conflicts and promotes an overall sustainable forestry management system.