

# MESO-AMERICAN SUBREGION

## CONTEXT

Meso-America comprises southern Mexico and the Central American countries. Its ecosystem includes the Meso-American biological corridor, which contains 7% of the world's biodiversity and is the source of economic and social development for more than 34 million people. The sub-region's importance, strategic location, natural resources potential and challenges in counteracting degradation, drought and desertification led the Global Mechanism (GM) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) to support Meso-America's environmental strategies.

Many sub-regional initiatives for natural resource and environmental management are linked to combating land degradation, desertification and drought, and receive support from donor, cooperation and multilateral agencies. The Sub-Regional Action Programme (SRAP) to combat desertification and drought is at the planning stage which involves the participation and support of the ministries of environment of the Meso-American countries, including the Dominican Republic. The SRAP will orient policies, strategies and technical aspects for UNCCD implementation and will be linked to other sub-regional, sector and inter-sectoral initiatives.

The Central American Platform for the Promotion of Investment in Sustainable Land Management (PIMAST) is a sub-regional initiative in which multilateral and bilateral organizations participate. It aims to mobilize investments for poverty reduction, food security, sustainable use of natural resources, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

## CHALLENGES

More than 52 million ha of Meso-America is affected by land degradation and soil erosion. The sub-region also suffers from declining water sources, desertification processes, and reduced soil fertility that jeopardize agricultural and crop productivity; cause forest cover losses of more than 400 000 ha/year; increase the risk of landslides; catastrophes and floods; and result in unstable ecosystem functions; food insecurity; and increased poverty levels.

Institutional, technological, financial, political and legal limitations include poor coordination, the duplication of efforts, isolated initiatives and low participation of local stakeholders.

However, the sub-region has a solid regional institutional framework, which is backed by agreements and requests expressed through the Central American Presidential Summits. Priorities are land management, responses to climate change, biodiversity conservation, food security, poverty reduction, and opportunities arising from free trade agreements.

There is potential for increasing support by aligning the investments of multilateral, bilateral and other agencies on sustainable land management (SLM) issues. For this to succeed, current problems must be identified, quantified and evaluated (both physically and economically), financial needs estimated, and regional programmes and projects formulated. The SRAP will enable financial resources to be channeled to countries within the Meso-American framework.

Over recent years, international financial cooperation has directed nearly USD75 million to regional projects dealing with environmental issues, watershed management, management of trans-border protected areas, food security, degraded pastures, and ecosystem management. Now the time has come to align these with SLM.



Map courtesy of IFAD

 The Global Mechanism (GM) was established under Article 21 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and began its operations in October 1997.

The GM is defined as an organizational entity mandated "to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of existing financial mechanisms... [and]... to promote actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources to affected developing country Parties."

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### COMMON OBJECTIVES

The Regional Agro-Environmental and Health Strategy (ERAS) is facilitated by the executive secretariats of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development, the Central American Agriculture Council and the Commission of Central American Ministries of Health. It includes several inter-sectoral activities and initiatives for agro-environmental management in Meso-America, for which the GM acts as Technical Secretariat of the Strategic Axis for Sustainable Land Use. The ERAS is also supported by an Inter-Agency Consultative Committee comprising key organizations in the region, in which the Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee - comprising delegates from the ministries of environment, agriculture and health - participate.

Other Central American initiatives include the Regional Climate Change Strategy (in preparation), the Regional Water Resources Strategy and the Regional Forestry Strategy Programme. These are supported by the technical committees of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD) that include the National Focal Points for climate change, desertification and drought, forest management and biodiversity conservation.

Through PIMAST, the Meso-American SRAP and development of Integrated Financing Strategies (IFSs), Central American countries and the GM hope to encourage participation and harmonized commitment of financial resources from multilateral and bilateral institutions, national budgets, private banks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to contribute to SLM, which is fundamental for UNCCD implementation.

### WHERE DO WE STAND ON IMPLEMENTATION?

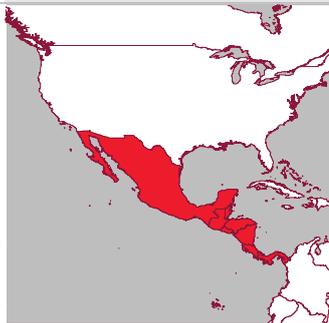
PIMAST is now becoming operational. It aims to encourage multilateral, bilateral and regional investments in SLM and will be supported by the IFSs that are being implemented in Guatemala and Honduras and are being developed in others. As a first step in IFS development, sub-regional capacities are being strengthened through the Designing IFSs (DIFS) training programme, which began in Costa Rica and Mexico with high level participation from all over Meso-America.

The Permanent Forum for International Cooperation of Meso-American Ministries of Environment has been established to support and articulate sub-regional efforts to implement the UNCCD. The SRAP is being promoted and coordinated by the Meso-American Focal Points and works through the national and sub-regional environmental policies of Central American countries. The GM supports and advises these initiatives within the context of its mandate.

### NEXT STEPS

Institutional, government and private capacities to design and implement IFSs will continue to be strengthened, and SLM promoted through strategic alliances with networks of institutional partners, and through national and regional dialogue. PIMAST will allow the coordination and sharing of processes among public and private institutions, donor and cooperation agencies and other UNCCD stakeholders. Resources for SRAP implementation will be sought from international cooperation agencies.

Map courtesy of IFAD



FOR MORE INFORMATION



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