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**GUATEMALA**

# SUCCESS STORY

## The Rainforest Can Remain Forever

**Communities can provide for their families while protecting forest**



Photo: USAID/Guatemala/Claudio Saito

Jorge Soza Chi, through the forestry concession program, has helped Guatemalans balance conservation and development within the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

***“The rainforest is the most powerful and generous giver. We have to look after her to ensure she is with us forever... That is something I have taught my children,” said Jorge Soza Chi, president of the forest concession program FORESCOM.***

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Since childhood, Jorge Soza Chi has worked in the Peten rainforest, first as a tree expert in chicle, a product used in chewing gum, and later as president of FORESCOM. This internationally acclaimed forestry concession program works with communities to achieve a balance between protected ecosystems and economic development of concessions within the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

The government program grants forest concessions to communities for 25 years to manage timber and non-timber economic activities, which have low impact on the environment while providing family income. With USAID support, the advance of the agricultural frontier has slowed and the massive internal migration of Guatemalans has been absorbed into settled areas within the Reserve. More fragile areas are under government protection set apart as restricted natural habitats.

Under Jorge’s leadership, Peten residents are experiencing a fundamental change in mind-set. They now view the care of the forest as their responsibility, as a job, and a way of creating a future for generations to come. Jorge pioneered communities to the next level of forest management with an entrepreneurial vision, a management structure, and updated accounting practices. Concessions now generate millions of dollars annually in timber sales and non-timber products.

Since its founding in January 2004, FORESCOM has become the first community forest enterprise in Guatemala to cover business costs with fees charged for services. In highest demand are advisory services in forest management and forward-looking business planning. Communities can see a future for themselves managing concessions with an entrepreneurial eye.

More than 520,000 hectares (about 1.28 million acres) of the Reserve have been certified as “environmentally friendly” between 2002 and 2006, which is an attractive selling point to international buyers. In 2004 alone, concessions generated more than 24,000 permanent jobs and over 46,000 temporary jobs, which are raising the standard of living for entire communities.