

Short Commentary

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Challenges in Colombia to Implement Sustainable Development Goal # 15

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Abstract

Colombia, one of the most biodiverse countries on the planet, is making efforts to comply with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the year 2030, found in the administration of its natural forests, one of the biggest challenges in terms of implementation of the peace agreements. In this way, the article presents a context analysis that relates forest monitoring, implementation of peace agreements and policy actions proposed by the Government of Colombia, to achieve compliance with SDG# 15.

Keywords: Deforestation; Ecosystems; Government Policies; Illicit Crops; Natural Forests; Peace Agreements; Protected Areas; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Introduction

In response to international commitments and the need to move towards a better world, through a common commitment that translates into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it places us on the year 2030 agenda as the deadline for the development of these challenges in such complex issues as education, eradicating hunger, improving health, and sustainability in development. For a mega diverse country like Colombia, implementing the SDGs associated with biodiversity management and sustainable, supposes a wide range of challenges to address, so in this case we will focus on the analysis of the challenges for a country like Colombia to implement SDG 15. Sustainably manage forests, fight against desertification, stop and reverse land degradation and stop the loss of biodiversity.

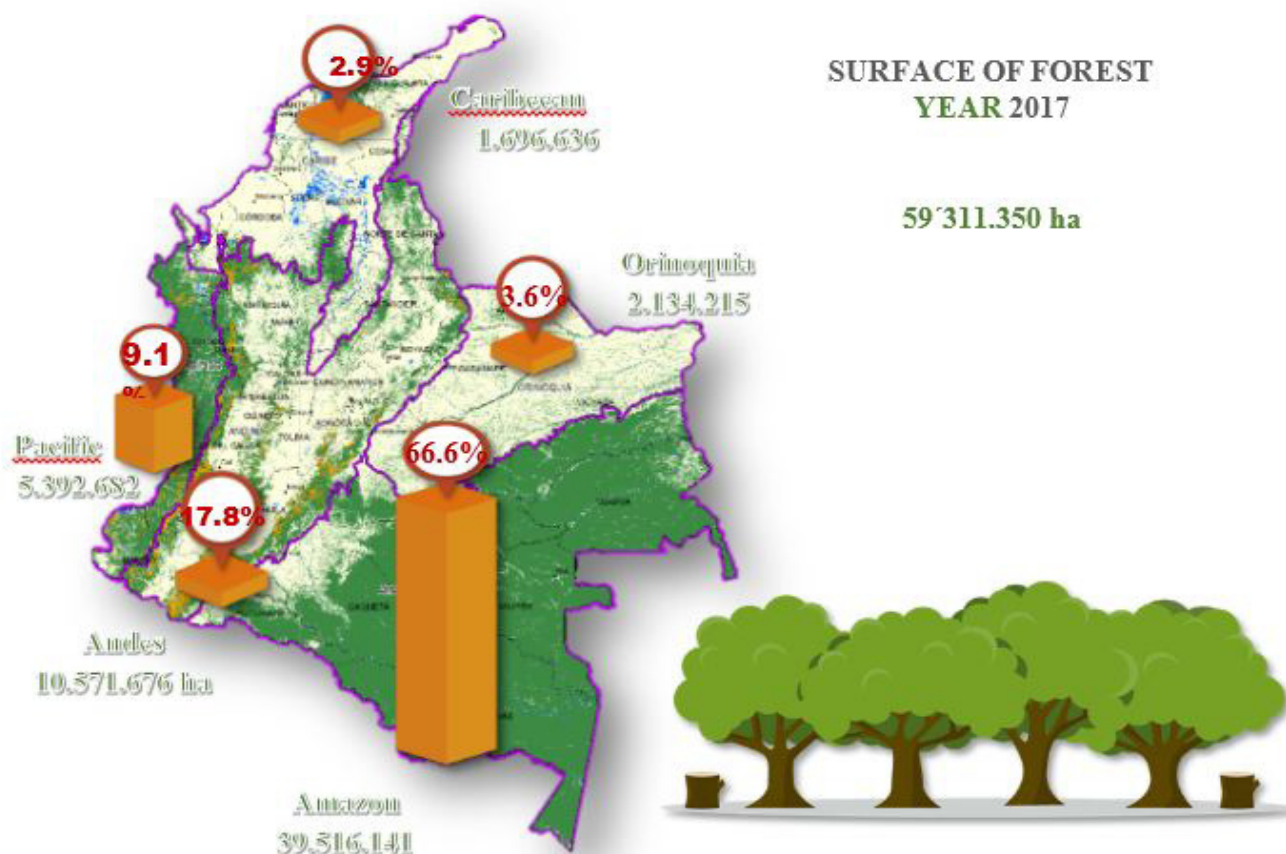
Now, focusing on the challenges of sustainable forest management and avoiding the continued degradation of lands,

it is essential to point out that Colombia has the challenge and responsibility of managing half of its continental territory in Natural Forests and approximately 7 million hectares in areas with aptitude for the establishment of forest plantations, which makes the country classified as the second with the greatest diversity in the world¹. In this way, the surface of natural forests in Colombia amounts to 59,311,350 ha (IDEAM 2018²), making it the third country in South America with the highest forest coverage.

Note: ¹The country occupies 0.22% of the terrestrial surface and lodges more than 10% of the species known at the moment, and is within the group of the 14 countries that lodges the greater index of biodiversity in the Earth.

²Forest and Carbon Monitoring System. Annual Report of the rate of deforestation for the year 2017. IDEAM.

Additionally, the distribution of forests in terms of ownership presents these conditions: a) ethnic groups have collective private property over 53.4%, finding 46.1% in indigenous reserves and 7.3% for communities of African descent, b) 1.9% in rural reserve areas; and c) 15.58% in the National System of Protected Areas³.



Source: Forest and Carbon Monitoring System, IDEAM, June 2018.

Figure 1: Monitoring of Forests and Distribution in Biogeographical Regions.

In Colombia, 54% of the national deforestation for the year 2017 was recorded as follows: a) 31% in the northern Amazon, b) 10 % in the Andes Center North, c) 5% in the South Pacific, and d) 4% North Andes. The direct causes of deforestation have been identified at the national level, closely related to the liberation of these territories by groups outside the Law, as a result of the signing of the Peace Agreements and Termination of the Conflict with the Armed Guerrilla Group FARC⁴, which exercised territorial control in areas where State institutions had no presence and where there is no defined ownership over land. Therefore, the expectation of titling and speculation with prices has been decisive, in addition to the increase of illicit crops (coca mainly) from 69.132 hectares registered in 2014 to 146.139 hectares in 2016⁵, demonstrating a direct connection with the implementation of the programs of promotion of the Government for eradication and substitution, as

well as with the presence in these territories of FARC dissidences and other criminal bands.

Note: ³Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development. Comprehensive Strategy for Control of Deforestation and Forest Management (EICDGB). Version 1.0. Bogota Colombia. August 2017.

⁴Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia.

⁵Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito (UNODC). (2017). Colombia Monitoreo de Territorios Afectados por Cultivos Ilícitos 2016. Bogotá D.C., Colombia.

The loss of these ecosystems is alarming, not only because we are losing natural capital that we do not even know about, but also for the effects of desertification on the soils that entails

the loss of this coverage. In addition, forests provide about 9 million tons of firewood each year (which is for domestic and industrial consumption), regulation services and water supply, as well as allowing the recharge of reservoirs for the hydraulic energy generation (the main source of electrical energy of the country). Additionally, the country uses nearly 500 forest species to supply an estimated consumption of 4.5 million cubic meters of wood per year for forest products. By these considerations, it is recognized that forests are an essential natural resource for human development and the sustainable economic growth, promoting food security and serving in the fight against poverty in a country with a forest vocation.

As part of the progress of the provisions being developed by the country to control deforestation and forest degradation, as well as to implement a rural development model that avoids conflicts in land use, emerges the Integrated Strategy for the Control of Deforestation and Management of Forests (EICDGB)⁶, an instrument that promotes the social, economic and cultural recognition of forests, which is articulated with the current Green Growth Mission in the country. These instruments have generated, the document of the National Council of Economic and Social Policy (CONPES⁷ 3934 of July 10, 2018), orientations that, after more than two years of diagnoses and evaluations, tables of experts and consultancies in the field, generates the recommendations that will mark the plans and programs to be executed until the year 2030 for the country.

In this way, the great challenge now for the new Government 2018-2022, is to generate policy guidelines that lead, to economic competitiveness, to the sustainable use of natural capital and

protection of ecosystem services, to resilient economic growth in the face of disasters and climate change and to ensure social inclusion and well-being.

Is necessary in the first instance and before the end of the second decade of this Millennium, the articulation between the sectors of Agriculture, environment, trade, defense, infrastructure and the creation of new entities such as the Forest Service, with the purpose of generate the conditions to develop the aspects related to the increase of agricultural productivity in a sustainable manner without expanding the agricultural frontier and promote policies to improve indicators of green growth in the agricultural sector (soil, nutrients, energy, waste, carbon-intensity)⁸, elements which are already indicated in the strategic axis: Productivity of the Earth.

Finally, it is important to value the monitoring and social influence in the implementation of government strategies, which are being generated so diligently, responsibly and inclusively, so that they become realities and not only consultation documents, whence is essential to protect social leaders and protect the advance of participation mechanisms, including local and regional monitoring.

- **Author's Note:** This article does not reflect the position of the Colombian government, corresponds to a position and considerations of the author.

Note: ⁶By its initials in Spanish.

⁷Ibid.

⁸National Department of Planning DNP. Green Growth Mission.