

PARTNERSHIP FOR TRANSPARENCY FUND

PROJECT COMPLETION ASSESSMENT

Risk Mapping in the Forest Sector: A Citizens' Tool to Curb Forest Corruption implemented by TI Costa Rica

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January 2006

The Project

In April 2003 PTF provided TI Costa Rica with a grant of US\$17,500 to be used to help strengthen control mechanisms in the fight against corruption in the forestry sector. The project was completed in mid 2004. The specific objectives were to:

- a. Identify corruption risks in forestry and the use of soil control in three conservation areas
- b. Pilot a practical and replicable corruption risk management methodology aimed at protecting vulnerable forest resources by identifying and measuring the risks currently faced in the conservation areas.
- c. Use a risk prevention matrix to prepare an action plan for appropriate controls for the identified areas at risk.
- d. Prepare and disseminate a manual to implement the toolkit developed by the project.
- e. Use information technology to build citizen awareness and hence **contribute to better environmental management and control.**

In pursuit of these objectives, in June through September 2003 TI Costa Rica undertook pilot studies in the three vulnerable conservation areas of Osa, Tortuguero and Huetar Norte. In the same period the information collected was presented in the form of corruption risk matrices to workshops with participants from government, business, and civil society. The corruption risks that had been identified were analyzed and discussed. A prevention plan was prepared and discussed with the workshop participants. Subsequently, a manual was prepared to enable the approach developed to be replicated.

In preparing the risk matrices a number of meetings were held with individual representatives of various stakeholders in the forest sector in order to gather and triangulate the necessary information. When these were discussed with the workshop participants, including government officials, forest industry businessmen and civil society representatives, it was possible to build a consensus on the nature, extent and gravity of the risks.

Following the workshops, over the next six months TI Costa Rica prepared a forest corruption prevention plan, which was then reviewed by workshop participants, as was a training manual on how to apply the same methodology in other vulnerable areas. TI Costa Rica mounted several training workshops for volunteers and officials; these were also attended by several journalists so that they would be fully informed about the corruption risk map and prevention program.

The project's results were published and diffused through an interactive Website, which gives public access to all the information collected by the project, the methodology, and results. A training manual has also been published.

The Evaluation

On December 26 2005 I met with Roxana Salazar in the offices of TI Costa Rica. Ms Salazar is the head of TI Costa Rica and was overall manager of this project. Ms Salazar is trained as a lawyer with a special interest in the environment. Unfortunately, I was unable to meet with other relevant individuals, as they were away on holiday. However, my long discussion with Ms Salazar and the various documents and press reports that she was able to show me convinced me that her report on the implementation and outcome of this project was reliable.

A key issue to be explained was why officials who might well be the beneficiaries of corruption would be willing to collaborate with TI Costa Rica in carrying out the project. One might expect them to be unhelpful, if not hostile, and indeed Ms Salazar explained that key officials in the Conservation Areas were initially obstructive. Her close personal connection with the Minister of the Environment, Senor Carlo Manuel Rodriguez, was critical in gaining access to and the cooperation of the relevant officials in his Ministry. After the Minister intervened, Ms Salazar reported that collaboration was fairly smooth. Since the project was undertaken during a period when ex-Presidents and other very senior politicians were being prosecuted for corruption, the public were much more alert to issues of corruption and this too may have helped secure officials' cooperation. Moreover, illegal logging was already a matter of public concern. Also, involving a range of stakeholders in the workshops, including officials, businessmen and civil society representatives may also have made it difficult to pretend that the problems did not exist and facilitated the process of identifying points of corruption.

Costa Rica has several activist environmental NGOs and there are also a number of international or foreign NGOs which have a particular interest in the protection of Costa Rica's forest heritage. Many of these organizations tend to take somewhat extreme positions in opposing all forms of logging in the natural forest conservation areas. Since TI Costa Rica was seen as less extreme, official and business cooperation was easier to secure. The key question that arises is whether the project will have any impact on forest corruption. Unfortunately, it is very hard to provide a clear and categorical answer.

The final project report is a very thorough and detailed document that can be used to carry forward the dialogue between civil society and concerned officials. The existence of a National Office for Illegal Logging provides a natural partner for TI Costa Rica with the administration. Ms Salazar reports that its Executive Director, Senor Juan Jose Jimenez, has been very receptive to the aims of the project and has incorporated the report's recommendations into Costa Rica's national strategy to fight forest corruption. The Ministry of the Environment has used the training manual.

An important benefit of the project is the training of citizens groups and officials, introducing them to an effective instrument – risk mapping -- for fighting corruption. The main impact of this project has been the increase in awareness about possible means to implement citizen control that would significantly reduce corruption in the processing and execution of logging permits by all parties involved in the process.

From the various newspaper cuttings, it is evident that the project has been well disseminated. Posting the relevant reports on TI Costa Rica's Website has also facilitated the dissemination of the findings and recommendations. Nonetheless, the sustainability of this initiative depends on continued active monitoring and advocacy by local civil society groups. It is not clear whether this will happen specifically using the toolkit developed under the project, but given the great international and national interest in conserving Costa Rica's natural environment, it seems probable that there will be some follow up. Ms Salazar has been asked to present the methodology and findings developed in this project in neighboring countries.

One weak aspect of the project was financial reporting. Prior to my meeting with Ms Salazar, TI Costa Rica had failed to submit a final financial report showing the itemized use of the PTF grant. This apparently was due to staffing changes in TI Costa Rica. I pointed out the importance of providing proper and complete accounts and on January 11 2006 a full financial report was received, including copies of all invoices. This was reviewed and seems to be in order.

Lessons Learnt

The following lessons may be drawn from the experience of this project:

1. To gain access to and the cooperation of key officials, who may well feel threatened by a civil society initiative aimed at curbing corruption, it is invaluable for the leaders of the CSO to have *personal connections* with the relevant political leaders that enables them to obtain their explicit support.
2. *Persistence* in the face of opposition is essential.
3. *Involving all the main stakeholders* in joint focus meetings and workshops is effective in building consensus on an anti-corruption action plan.

4. *Corruption risk mapping* is a useful tool for building awareness of the specific nature of the corruption taking place and provide the factual basis for developing anti-corruption measures.
5. *Retention of a final payment* (say 10% of the grant) until the completion report and final accounts are provided would help to ensure that these are promptly and properly prepared.

31 January 2006