

COP30 - Forest Roadmap | Designated Contact - Hispanic Access Foundation

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives,

Hispanic Access Foundation welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Roadmap for Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030. As a national nonprofit advancing equity, conservation, and community empowerment, we emphasize that durable forest solutions must center **community engagement, cultural relevance, and inclusive access to conservation leadership and resources.**

(a) Critical Barriers to Halting and Reversing Deforestation

1. Disconnection Between Communities and Forest Stewardship

Many communities—particularly Latino and other underrepresented groups—face systemic barriers to accessing and engaging with public lands. This disconnect limits public support for conservation and reduces the diversity of voices shaping forest policy.

2. Economic Pressures and Unsustainable Land Use

Deforestation is often driven by economic necessity, including agricultural expansion and resource extraction, particularly where sustainable alternatives are underdeveloped or inaccessible.

3. Limited Access to Funding and Technical Assistance

Community-based organizations and local leaders frequently lack access to funding, training, and technical resources needed to engage in conservation, restoration, and sustainable land management.

4. Underrepresentation in Decision-Making

Latino and other frontline communities remain underrepresented in conservation leadership, policy design, and natural resource management, leading to solutions that may overlook local knowledge and needs.

5. Insufficient Culturally Relevant Outreach

Conservation initiatives often fail to engage diverse communities due to language barriers and lack of culturally relevant communication strategies.

(b) Key Levers to Accelerate Forest Conservation and Restoration

1. Community-Centered Conservation Models

Investing in community-based organizations to lead conservation, restoration, and education efforts ensures solutions are locally relevant and sustainable.

2. Workforce Development and Diversification

Building diverse conservation career pathways—through training, mentorship, and professional networks—strengthens the long-term capacity of the environmental sector.

3. Targeted Funding and Capacity Building

Expanding equitable access to grants, technical assistance, and federal resources enables community organizations to participate meaningfully in forest conservation efforts.

4. Faith-Based and Values-Driven Engagement

Engaging faith leaders and institutions can mobilize communities around stewardship values, increasing participation in conservation initiatives.

5. Cross-Sector Partnerships

Collaboration among governments, nonprofits, community leaders, and the private sector can scale solutions and align conservation with economic opportunity.

(c) Best Practices and Lessons Learned

1. Building Diverse Conservation Leadership Through Networks

Hispanic Access Foundation's Conservation Network connects and empowers Latino professionals working in land, ocean, and waterway conservation. By strengthening professional networks and leadership pathways, this model addresses representation gaps while advancing conservation outcomes.

2. Faith-Based Environmental Stewardship

Through the Por La Creación Faith-Based Alliance, faith leaders are mobilized to promote environmental stewardship and conservation within Latino communities. This approach demonstrates the power of culturally grounded, values-based engagement.

3. Expanding Access to Resources Through Capacity Building

The Community Navigator Program supports local leaders and organizations in accessing federal funding, strengthening grant development, and overcoming systemic barriers. This model enables broader participation in conservation and restoration efforts.

Key Lesson:

Forest conservation efforts are most effective when they invest in people, leadership, and trust-building, ensuring communities are active stewards rather than passive stakeholders.

(d) Advancing Inclusive Forest Conservation and Restoration

1. Centering Equity and Inclusion

Forest strategies must prioritize historically underrepresented communities, ensuring equitable access to resources, leadership opportunities, and the benefits of conservation.

2. Recognizing Cultural Connections to Land

Conservation approaches should reflect the cultural values, traditions, and knowledge systems of diverse communities, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

3. Supporting Community-Led Solutions

Locally driven conservation and restoration initiatives are more sustainable and responsive to on-the-ground realities.

4. Adapting to Diverse Contexts

Flexible, place-based approaches are essential to reflect varying levels of forest cover, economic development, and governance capacity.

5. Strengthening Pathways to Participation

Reducing barriers to funding, education, and engagement ensures broader participation in forest conservation and sustainable land management.

Conclusion

Halting and reversing deforestation is not only an environmental imperative but also a social one. Success depends on our ability to build an inclusive conservation movement that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

By investing in leadership, expanding access, and fostering culturally relevant engagement, we can create solutions that are both effective and equitable, ensuring forests are protected and restored for generations to come.

Best,

Hilda

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