

Looking for Bridges: Dovetailing Conservation and Development in a Rural Mexican Community

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Orchids are a marketable non-timber forest product (NTFP) of cultural and economic value in the general study area, the Lake Pátzcuaro basin of Michoacán, Mexico. In the study community of Oponguio, and others, there is a need to improve the livelihood system (mainly production) to alleviate poverty, community fragmentation and ecological pressure. The Sondeo method was combined with Ethnographic Linear Programming modeling to perform an *ex-ante* analysis of the viability of an orchid culture activity. The results indicated that even while the orchid activity requires up to three years to generate cash, all households with available cash (including credit) and labor can participate without an adverse impact on the current livelihood system. The orchid activity acted as a significant supplemental activity even while the amount of cash generated was conservative. The general conclusion is that, with sufficient support, this sustainable management plan is a practical compromise and a significant step in bridging conservation and development.

Key words: *Natural product trade, orchids, Sondeo, ELP modeling, Michoacán, Mexico*

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