

Do we really care? The challenge of guaranteeing human rights in the fight against deforestation

By Kelly Moore Brands and Zachary Wells

One of Many

Don Beto walks with a steady gait, passing spiked ceiba trees and blooming allspice, his thick hands picking and choosing which plants to pull and which to nurture. [1] He speaks to the plants in Mayan, a tradition learned from his father. Walking slowly, deliberately, he makes his way through the trails of his forest garden, stopping to harvest craboo, mint, vanilla.

Don Beto's Maya ancestors migrated south to Belize from the Yucatán Peninsula where they found primary jungle and peace from the Yucatán Caste War. His father was a snakebite healer, and Don Beto grew up when there was nothing but walking trails and the river for transportation, when all around him was forest and the fish in the river were plentiful, when the weather was predicted through an ancient ritual, the Cabañuelas.

His entire life, Don Beto has depended on the Maya forest for food, medicines and construction materials. He walks between the trees with knowledge passed down through generations. He knows the name of each species he cares for in Mayan, Spanish, English, and Latin, and although he can lay claim to one of the most biodiverse forest gardens in the world, [2] the city is creeping closer.

Belize's population is growing at an annual rate of 2.15% [3] - compared to the world average of 1.2% [4] - meaning that it will double in three short decades. This increase in population, coupled with a deforestation rate of 2.3%, [5] is a great challenge to Don Beto and forest managers like him. Belizean Maya are some of the poorest people in Central America, and they have remained dependent on the forest for their survival for millennia.

Today, roads and neighbors surround Don Beto's forest, yet most of the younger generation leave the village to work in town. In his colloquial Belizean he laughs with a certain helplessness and says, "Everything has gone. People have killed everything. Now, we don't have notin'." [6] Unfortunately, Don Beto's story echoes around the world.

The Sixth Great Extinction

One of Earth's great scientific studies, the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, found that 60 percent of ecosystem services – the life-sustaining processes provided by intact natural habitat and biodiversity – are degraded or being used unsustainably. Soils that have supported agriculture for centuries are filtering water less effectively; flowers and crops are not pollinated as they normally would be because birds and bees are less prevalent; regulation of disease has diminished; and nutrients are cycled less efficiently. [7]

Global forest cover is decreasing by between 7 and 13 million hectares every year, mostly because cultivated agricultural areas have taken over one quarter of the world's terrestrial land mass. [8] This is at a time when an estimated 1 billion people in developing countries are deeply dependent on forests for their livelihoods and 350 million are wholly dependent on

them.[\[9\]](#) Species are disappearing 1000 times faster than the natural background rate.[\[10\]](#) This is Earth's sixth great extinction; the first caused by humans.

This ecological destruction appears unstoppable while the poorest of the poor suffer the most from its effects. But a new confluence between Earth's two most pressing environmental challenges – habitat loss and climate change – has suddenly changed the equation. How this plays out may ultimately determine whether there is a happy ending to Don Beto's story and to the stories of the other “bottom billion.”[\[11\]](#)

The Role of Forests

When forests like Belize's Maya forest are cleared for development or agriculture, two things happen: the trees and soil stop sequestering carbon; and, if burned, the carbon within the biomass is released into the atmosphere. Depending on the new type of land use, things can get progressively worse.[\[12\]](#)

Because recent scientific evidence suggests that 18-20% of global greenhouse gas emissions stem from this type of forest destruction in the developing world,[\[13\]](#) the momentum of the anti-deforestation movement may soon yield the greatest funding pool that forest conservation has ever seen. There is a new consensus that preventing deforestation is one of the best ways to put the brakes on climate change.[\[14\]](#) If done right, this will not only yield tremendous carbon sequestration benefits, but help to stem the mass extinctions that are conservationists' worst nightmare.

This December in Copenhagen, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is expected to finalize a mechanism for protecting the world's threatened forests and the biodiversity within them. Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) is a way for rich nations to help cut greenhouse gas emissions by paying poor nations to conserve standing forests. The preservation of Earth's (and Don Beto's) remaining forests is on the line. To put things in perspective, 100 million hectares have been lost since 1997 when the Kyoto Protocol was signed with language that expressly prohibited payments for avoided deforestation.[\[15\]](#)

Money, Money, Money

Currently, there are international flows of voluntary funding to stop deforestation that hover around several hundred million dollars per year. One country alone, Norway, has already committed \$2.6 billion, including \$500 million annually for their International Climate and Forest Initiative and another \$2 million in support of Tanzania's national strategy for REDD.[\[16\]](#)

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Environment Programme (UNEP) have already approved \$18 million for REDD activities supporting UN-REDD, a program to build capacity in countries which might reasonably have avoided deforestation credits on the market by 2013.[\[17\]](#) The World Bank has committed \$300 million to the startup of the Forest Carbon Partnership, designed to help developing countries get ready for REDD.[\[18\]](#)

The infant market for avoided deforestation (REDD) credits has already gained substantial momentum. In a voluntary market where buyers had no obligation to buy, avoided deforestation accounted for 2 of the 42 million tons of credits traded in 2007. The result was around \$10 million in funding.^[19] If REDD is linked to a regulatory cap-and-trade style market, in which rich nations may opt to buy offsets as one way to meet strict emissions targets, it could increase exponentially to many tens of billions of dollars each year.^{[20][21]} In comparison, the world's protected areas currently receive only \$6.5 billion per year.^[22] In essence, REDD could be a game changer for protecting the threatened forests on which 9 out of 10 of the world's poorest people depend.^[23]

Dozens of scientists, academics and policy makers are diligently working on incorporating lessons learned from existing carbon markets into REDD. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) received 33 formal proposals on structuring the REDD instrument in 2008.^[24] Over the coming months it is absolutely essential that designers address the key obstacles to an efficient and just payment system for avoided deforestation under REDD:

1. Bottlenecks in approving projects;
2. Distributional equity issues; and
3. How avoided deforestation can guarantee that carbon sequestered by protected forests is both permanent in the face of unforeseeable pressures, and additional—meaning it would not have happened without outside funding.

Yet, while the technical aspects of REDD demand the attention and funding justifiable in such a momentous creation, Don Beto and his billion-strong cohort are falling through the cracks.

Rights and Wrongs

Perhaps the most important and controversial element will be determining who legally owns the forests that REDD intends to protect. If this issue is not addressed at the onset, there is the potential to severely undermine traditional and indigenous rights, which would lead to a further marginalization of the world's most vulnerable peoples.

Returning to Belize's Maya Forest, it is not hard to see how fragile land rights are and how great is the potential for abuse.

Narciso is Maya.^[25] Like Don Beto, he was raised on the traditional medicines and folklore of the forest. He has a passion for the land demonstrated by the care he gives to each cacao tree, soursop fruit, watermelon vine, and kernel of corn that he plants. Every day he walks alongside the plants of his garden, stopping to pick wild plums, mangoes, or passionfruit. He still practices Maya rituals taught to him by his father to ensure the health of his garden. His eyes are penetrating, and tell the story of his days working under the sun, tending plants, harvesting corn.

As a poor farmer, Narciso has seen times of plenty and times of scarcity, but his sense of humor has helped him through it all. He knows that his children want to work in town rather than learn the ways of the farm, but he says, "I like money, but I like food better. I can't eat my money," and laughs.^[26]

While both Don Beto and Narciso come from similar backgrounds and practice similar types of forest gardening, there is one major difference between these friends: Don Beto has legal title to his land; Narciso does not.

REDD has the potential to move hundreds of billions of dollars from rich, high carbon-emitting developed countries to poor, carbon-sequestering developing countries. It also has the potential to take from traditional owners the forests that they have been tied to for millennia, because they often do not have legal title to land that they have occupied for generations. By creating a huge economic incentive for forest preservation, REDD may inadvertently lead to a global land grab like the world has not seen since the height of colonialism.

Property Rights or Severance Pay

Many developing country forests are de facto open access and subject to the "tragedy of the commons." Like oceans, forests are often seen as places to take from or take over. Ownership is often theoretical rather than factual; control is ephemeral rather than actionable. The cost of controlling the hinterlands of many developing countries is simply more than their governments can bear. This is especially true throughout much of Africa.^[27] There, 650 million hectares of forest - owned on paper by corrupt and poor governments – are “managed” by local peoples.^[28]

Historically, colonial governments saw forests as sources of state wealth and, for the first time in Africa’s history, they legally centralized forest ownership.^[29] Yet they have been unable to consolidate power over them for several tumultuous centuries. While some customary management systems that have evolved over centuries still remain, increasing pressures from logging, development, land conversion to agriculture, and climate change are destabilizing many local communities along with the traditional leadership that governs forests.^[30] Refugees crowd out indigenous peoples and logging companies penetrate pristine jungles at a time when customary ownership is no longer legitimate. The result is a continent-wide “tragedy” and a deforestation rate twice as high as the rest of the world.^[31]

Africa’s tragedy resonates elsewhere from Belize to Indonesia. While 80 percent of the world's forests are publicly owned, much of them are inhabited and managed customarily by ordinary citizens like Narciso.^[32] These same forests, long forgotten by governments, might suddenly become eligible for funding through REDD.

It is not hard to imagine a scenario in which traditional forest dwellers will find themselves squatters on land destined for preservation, their rights revoked in the pursuit of this new wealth. The amount of forestland managed for conservation, most of which is in protected areas, increased by 96 million hectares between 1990 and 2005.^[33] Already half of the 20,000 protected areas created over the past 40 years overlap with areas of traditional use.^[34] And, while the government of Belize could exercise eminent domain over Don Beto’s forest, it is much easier to bypass Narciso’s rights simply because they are not backed by a legal title.

The Heart of the Matter

REDD must be designed to incentivize two things: *rights* through tenure reform; and *empowerment* through the protection of private forests as well as public. The first thing to understand is where a land grab is likely to occur.

In preparation for this article, the authors convened a symposium at which international environmental leaders met to discuss REDD and its potential impacts on traditional forest owners.^[35] One surprising conclusion from the expert panel was that REDD does not threaten traditional forest dwellers because they are not significant drivers of deforestation. Therefore, developing country governments will gain nothing from expropriating traditional forests and putting them under permanent protection because it will not help lower deforestation rates from the national baseline.

This is only partially correct. The notion that traditional forests are not major sources of deforestation is misunderstood. First, there are many cases in which small-scale farmers cause the most intensive destruction (see the case of Virunga below). The single-largest cause of deforestation globally is conversion of forestland to cropland and pasture, caused mostly by subsistence farming.^[36] Second, all of the major drivers of deforestation can be found on lands that are inhabited, if not owned, by local peoples. In this case it is the lack of property rights that relegates forest dwellers to the roles of helpless bystanders or sellers of illegal logging concessions. The question is really who owns forests and whether they can control what happens in them.

In reality, REDD does not threaten traditional forest dwellers *if* their land is not threatened by deforestation. Governments have no incentive to centralize intact, unthreatened forests under REDD. However, in many cases traditional forest dwellers inhabit lands where deforestation is incredibly intense. They can be the causes or they can be disenfranchised victims. The fact that they often do not own these forests is precisely why REDD threatens their customary existence. REDD will not guarantee land rights unless it is crafted specifically to do so.

Indonesia's Potential

Indonesia, a country on the cusp of joining the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership and rivaling Brazil as the largest supplier of deforestation emissions, epitomizes the threat to traditional forest dwellers.^[37]^[38] Its 2008 legislation, Regulation on Implementation Procedures for REDD, was roundly criticized by the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination for deferring to a 1999 law on forestry which denies traditional rights to forested land and which the country has used to sell logging concessions without local consent.^[39]

Indonesia also has perhaps the largest REDD potential of any nation. Eighty percent of their emissions stem from deforestation and peatland degradation. The palm oil-driven economy results in around two million hectares of forest loss each year or two percent of forest cover.^[40] Its remaining forests contain hundreds of IUCN Red List threatened and endangered species, including Sumatran tigers, orangutans, Javan rhinos, and pygmy hippos.^[41]

Unfortunately, Indonesia's case is not unusual. According to the Rights and Resources Initiative, forests legally owned by traditional groups account for only 11.4 % of the world's 30 most forested countries, and lands managed by customary law and traditional tenure systems largely outweigh community and indigenous lands recognized under statutory tenure law.

Prime Territory

Thousands of miles from Belize's forest gardens and Indonesia's palm oil plantations lies Virunga National Park. Established in 1929 as part of Albert National Park in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Virunga's creators relocated its indigenous inhabitants outside of its boundaries. Today, the home of the endangered mountain gorilla is threatened by encroaching habitat loss due to small-scale agriculture and an influx of 1.5-2 million Rwandan refugees.[\[42\]](#) Over 1000 miles from the capital city of Kinshasa, and through some of the world's most dense jungle, this wild place is prime REDD territory: the area is rich in biodiversity – supporting more birds and mammals than any other African park including endemic okapi and bonobo;[\[43\]](#) deforestation is high – 15 square kilometers were deforested in under a month in 2004 inside Virunga itself;[\[44\]](#) and the price of land is low – far from developed markets, it has little agricultural (or other) value.

Though a confluence of small-scale Congolese agriculturalists, rebels, and refugees is responsible for most of the forest loss, indigenous Pygmies like the Batwa are the ones who suffer most because they depend on disappearing forest resources for their daily survival.

After suffering relocation in the 1920s, eastern DRC's inhabitants are once again threatened by relocation. While 8% of the country is already protected, the government plans to increase that area to between 10 and 15%.[\[45\]](#) International REDD funds are attractive to conservationists because forest protection can provide more gorilla habitat, and to governments (in Kinshasa and elsewhere) because any increased international presence can help reduce the violence.

Because land ownership in DRC is linked to Congolese citizenship and Pygmy groups are not considered Congolese, these indigenous peoples cannot legally own their land, and therefore cannot benefit from REDD funds. In addition, although they practice collective land ownership, this is not recognized by DRC, which requires title to be held by a single owner.[\[46\]](#) Without legal claim to their land, people like the indigenous Batwa and the area's small-scale farmers can be forced to settle elsewhere while the government and environmentalists claim a victory for conservation.

The Road to Riches

The traditional response to biodiversity loss has been to gazette protected areas, often through the removal of local inhabitants. It is important to note that while governments like the one in Kinshasa may believe that gazetting inhabited forests will put them on the road to REDD riches, ultimately, it will not.

It appears that REDD will function by transferring international funds to developing country governments proportional to reductions achieved from national emissions baselines.

Technology for monitoring deforestation, improving at a staggering pace, will enable all concerned stakeholders to verify the gains that the developing world makes under REDD and quantify what that means in terms of emissions reductions. The difference between deforestation rates under REDD and the original baselines will determine how much money a country receives. Of course, that means the activities intended to slow deforestation – REDD projects – have to work.

The past two decades provide ample evidence that command-and-control style parks do not equate to successful conservation.^[47] In this case, the conservation experience has large implications for understanding what governments should do under REDD. Relocating communities without addressing the root causes of deforestation will simply shift pressures geographically. If trees keep falling, no matter where they are, baselines will not drop and governments will not get paid. The fear lies in the mistakes that could be made during REDD's early years, specifically that the financial promise will lead to relocations.

Relocation also happens to be on the minds of indigenous peoples seeking a place at the REDD table. The day before the Monterey event which concluded that the threat from REDD might be overstated, indigenous leaders from all over the world gathered in Anchorage, Alaska to discuss their role in the fight against climate change. Four days of dialogue at the Indigenous People's Global Summit on Climate Change produced a declaration from indigenous peoples to the folks who will staff the Copenhagen climate talks. Among a slew of heartfelt recommendations, it had this to say:

“All initiatives under Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) must secure the recognition and implementation of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, including security of land tenure, ownership, recognition of land title according to traditional ways, uses and customary laws and the multiple benefits of forests for climate, ecosystems, and Peoples before taking any action.”^[48]

Despite the fact that: 1) the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that indigenous peoples have rights to the resources and land that they have traditionally owned or used;^[49] 2) the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has called for UNDRIP to provide a framework for designing REDD^[50]; and 3) many NGOs including the Rights and Resources Initiative^[51] call for tenure reform that prioritizes ownership rights over mere access, there is still little desire by governments to act on tenure reform.

Clear ownership of land provides the foundation for real forest management because it provides the owner with the legal right to exclude others from using forest resources without paying for them. It also represents the basis for serious personal changes in behavior. Without it, forests will continue to be overexploited.

Preventing the Land Grab

The need for deep land tenure reform is evident. The question then becomes how to do it. As noted by Dr. Richard Rice, Chief Economist of Conservation International, at the Monterey Institute symposium, REDD itself presents opportunities for promoting local forest ownership. Indigenous rights will be hard to trample with impunity because many companies

will intensely scrutinize the product that they are buying – the carbon credit. Investors in a voluntary market will pressure project implementers to ensure that local rights are respected. Particularly, many large corporations understand that buying credits from a project that disenfranchises locals can bring about as much negative attention as positive. In this way, REDD can generate new support for respecting local rights and perhaps even turning over land ownership.

On the other hand, transaction costs can push standards down, governments and even conservation organizations have been accused of acting without scruples in other conservation programs,[\[52\]](#) and some companies really do not care. According to Keegan Eisenstadt, CEO of ClearSky Climate Solutions, LLC and a panelist at the Monterey Institute symposium, some offset buyers do purchase credits without researching at all the projects that generated them.[\[53\]](#) A proportion of credits on the voluntary markets come from projects lacking certification of any of the multiple standards intended to ensure social and environmental outcomes. Though the proportion of dubious credits is declining as the market matures, some buyers do not ensure the standards of the good they purchase. They either do not care or do not understand the variability of the product.

The way to ensure that traditional forest dwellers own their land would be to make deep tenure reform a prerequisite for REDD funds. Donors would ensure that all relevant statutes are aligned with the UNDRIP and that laws preventing women from holding land are rewritten. The industrialized world should consider helping developing countries reform land legislation as a way of ensuring solid returns on a multi-billion dollar investment.

The reality of international policymaking is that tying tenure reform directly to REDD eligibility would likely kill the entire post-Kyoto climate agreement in Copenhagen. Talks would cease if the developed world insisted on land tenure reform for the right to engage in REDD. That leaves a couple of “second best” options.

According to Dr. Stephan Schwartzman, Director of Tropical Forest Policy at Environmental Defense Fund, two paths for ensuring traditional land rights could work.[\[54\]](#) First, donors like Norway, which yield incredible influence through the weight of their financial support, could insist on specific actions related to land ownership on a country-by-country basis. For example, in committing \$2 million annually to Tanzania’s REDD-readiness program, Norway could insist that Tanzania undertake projects that educate citizens on land rights, and provide financial and technical assistance to demarcate lands and create village land certificates, which are legal title to indigenous lands.

Second, increasingly strong wording could be added to the standards that project developers must meet in crafting avoided deforestation projects, particularly the Community, Conservation and Biodiversity Alliance Standards. These are intended to complement verification procedures dealing mainly with the physical sequestration or avoided release of carbon, by specifically ensuring that forest carbon projects promote the co-benefits of community development and protecting biodiversity.[\[55\]](#)

The Good News

Even as Copenhagen draws near, good precedents are being set, including in places like Don Beto and Narciso's Belize. In 2007, the Belizean Supreme Court ruled that two Maya villages were to be granted the collective rights to their traditional lands and resources, demarcated by the state according to their customary practices. This win did not come easy; Maya groups negotiated for over 10 years with the government and made appeals to international human rights bodies.[\[56\]](#) The hope is that other nations' courts will look to this hearing and grant their indigenous peoples the rights to their traditional lands, therefore ensuring that avoided deforestation projects actually accomplish their purpose.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), for instance, recognizes rights to land under the principle right to property, outlined in the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights. In 2001 the court ruled in favor of an indigenous Awas Tingni community on eastern Nicaragua's Mosquito Coast, opposing the government of Nicaragua in its sale of logging concessions without local consent. After seven years, additional hearings, and an appeal to the UN Human Rights Committee, the government handed over the title.[\[57\]](#)[\[58\]](#)

In a similar case, the 2009 Goldman Environmental Prize winners from Suriname, Wanze Edwards and Hugo Jabini, stood up to the national government in its continued sale of destructive logging concessions to Chinese companies without local consent. The case went to the IACHR, which eventually guaranteed the rights of all indigenous peoples in Suriname. And, because the IACHR functions internationally, these judgments apply across the Americas. The government of Suriname has since proclaimed that it will fully abide by the ruling. Implementation elsewhere remains to be seen.[\[59\]](#)

Such examples of international institutions upholding traditional land rights in the face of government opposition are heartening. One problem, however, is that they remain reactive mechanisms for settling disputes. Proactive methods to avoid land conflict remain scarce.

Courts like these are setting the right principles in place, but because they hear cases one by one, they risk being swamped by forest tenure disputes under REDD. In addition, many indigenous groups are not so well organized and lack the resources to launch an appeal. A robust NGO sector will be essential in guaranteeing the rights of traditional forest owners.

From Ownership to Action

If the international community can get statutory ownership into the hands of local forest dwellers, the foundations for fending off the pressures that lead to deforestation will be laid. The next stage in constructing a sturdy framework for avoiding deforestation emissions in locally owned forests is to give local peoples the power to exercise their newly gained rights.

An emerging and pliable tool for structuring natural resource management projects, the conservation agreement, may be just the thing that local people need to manage their forests in the face of increasing pressures. Pioneered in tropical forests by Conservation International, in the Pacific Islands by NaturalEquity, and in the marine realm by The Nature Conservancy, the conservation agreement model outlines the compensation that communities, governments and businesses need in order to make resource protection financially viable. It enables local and indigenous community management by providing the necessary capital while simultaneously contracting actions based on science and targeting specific outcomes.

Finally it bears a strong mechanism for ensuring compliance, which could be integral in determining the permanence of any REDD project. In contrast to traditional donor-funded conservation projects, the agreement makes continued support conditional on verifiable actions.

One objective of the April 25, 2009 Monterey Institute Symposium was to determine the value of conservation agreements for structuring projects aimed at controlling deforestation. Participants including agreement experts from Conservation International and Natural Equity came to several important conclusions, namely:

1. The conservation agreement model is completely compatible with avoided deforestation activities and an appropriate tool for structuring conservation actions and action-dependent financing within projects intended to reduce emissions from deforestation;
2. In areas where forest tenure is either unclear or lands are untitled, conservation agreements hold great potential for clarifying forest resource ownership;
3. The timeline of the conservation agreement model is conducive to structuring long-term avoided deforestation projects and, hence, can help to promote permanent carbon sequestration in the face of foreseeable human activities.[\[60\]](#)

What Will Be, Will Be Very Important

Returning to Virunga for a final reflection, one can see the pains and prospects in all of this talk of deforestation, traditional rights and funding. In 2007 the Government of Democratic Republic of Congo, in partnership with the World Bank, engaged the services of a third-party observer to assess the government's capacity to control deforestation in Kinshasa. Global Witness found that the government in fact could not hope to manage illegal logging.[\[61\]](#) Since the investigation Kinshasa has recruited a long-term observer to monitor deforestation. It has also canceled 60% of logging concessions after another probe found 91 questionable deals hinting at corruption. Much remains to be done, however, to clean up illegal logging in DRC, including property rights for the country's 40 million forest-dependent people and the secure tenure of the Batwa pygmies.[\[62\]](#)

The most realistic prospect for ensuring deep tenure reform is a commitment from bilateral donors like Norway to provide the necessary funds and technical support for such an overhaul. The promise of assistance, however, should be accompanied by a firm stance that makes continued bilateral assistance under REDD contingent upon undertaking these actions – much like a conservation agreement contract.

On the other side of the world, in Belize, one man awaits the dream that his neighbor Don Beto has long since realized. One day Narciso, caretaker of his forest garden, will get on a bus that takes him into Belize's capital city. His hair disheveled underneath a worn baseball cap and beads of sweat on his face, he will approach the Ministry of Natural Resources. He will enter the stale building breathing a sigh of relief, knowing that within a few hours he will hold legal title to his land. Later, he will walk out into the sunshine, his title neatly folded in his back pocket, and he will remember his children that have shown little interest in learning from him about the ways of the forest. He will think to himself, "Even though they are not

interested now, I have time to teach them. Some day, one of them will come here to transfer the title to their name. In this way, my children will help preserve the forest.”

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- [1] The author (Kelly Moore) first met Don Beto in 2004 through archaeologist Dr. Anabel Ford, and spent weeks interviewing him and others over the summers of 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007. He is one of many forest gardeners in the villages of Bullet Tree Falls and Santa Familia Village in Western Belize, but Don Beto is a leader in his community, teaching school groups forest gardening techniques and passing information on to younger generations.
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