state in large, isolated regions, and perverse economic incentives. Strong civil society participation, however, has been moving the forest policy agenda forward, balancing law enforcement with strategic actions aimed at better forest governance.

Strengthening voices for better choices

In response to these challenges, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) launched "Strengthening Voices for Better Choices" (SVBC). Financed mainly by the European Union, this global project aims to test and promote improved governance arrangements that will engender sustainable and equitable forest conservation and management.

In Brazil, one of six project countries globally, SVBC is pursuing this goal in Acre, Brazil's westernmost state (see map). Acre is of minor territorial or economic importance, but it has been leading the search for environmental and social policy alternatives.

Illegality plagued Acre's forest sector for many years up to 1999, when a conservation-minded governor took office and launched a drive towards "forest government". Inspired by Chico Mendes, the activist and union leader who led a civic movement against deforestation in the 1980s, the state has been strengthening its extractive industries (such as rubber and Brazil nuts), setting aside protected areas and creating incentives for improving forest management.

Roughly half of Acre's territory is now in protected areas, and it has kept its average deforestation rate to about 0.3% a year. Nevertheless, Acre has not succeeded in lowering either total deforestation (541 km² in 2005 compared with 441 km² in 1999), or its share of overall forest loss in the Brazilian Amazon (2.9% in 2005 and 2.6% in 1999).

SVBC's strategy in Acre is based on the belief that illegal logging is essentially a problem of governance, not law enforcement. Furthermore, conserving forests and promoting sustainable activities must go beyond illegality per se, as some technically illegal activities may be sustainable and some legal activities unsustainable.

These considerations have led SVBC, together with its main partner, WWF Brazil, to develop a three-pronged strategy under the banner "Free Acre of Illegal Logging". This focuses on promoting better practices, improving governance and creating responsible markets. The overall objective is to remove the incentives for unsustainable and illegal activities, driving up their opportunity costs and increasing the attractiveness of sustainable alternatives.

Land cover map of Acre, Brazil. Land cover is based on the Vegetation Map of South America, prepared under the Global Land Cover 2000 Project (http://www-gem.jrc.it/glc2000/).

SVBC is partnering with a wide range of local, national and international organisations to realise its goals. Besides WWF Brazil, it is working with the Federation of Industries of Acre and the state government to develop a stepwise approach to legality verification and certification for forest companies. It has also established a partnership with the state government and several NGOs, including Greenpeace Brazil, to jointly implement actions under the "Free Acre of Illegal Logging" banner. Locally and nationally, IUCN has been playing a role in policy making through its participation in Acre's State Forest Council and CONAFLOR.

SVBC's achievements

Promoting better practices   Together with WWF Brazil and members of WWF's Global Forest & Trade Network (GFTN), IUCN has helped to establish the SIM programme in Acre. SIM, or Modular Implementation System, is a stepwise system aimed at enabling forest companies to attain certification. Participants commit to improving their management practices and obtaining FSC certifica-

tion within four years. The programme also
supports improved forest governance, gen-

that the lessons of this work are properly
documented and communicated.

A Consolidating skills for improving governance and forest management. In the
public policy arena, SVBC will focus on
ensuring that state forestry bodies are
able to manage participatory processes,
resolve conflicts and support planning. In
the timber sector, the
focus of support will
be on new techniques
for sustainable forest management. SVBC will also
finance and implement a
long-term capacity-building programme
for community forestry extension agents.

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