

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 24, 2020

Belmopan

Cayo, Belize



Ya'axché's Community Forestry Symposium for State Actors: Forest Conservation and Governance

Belmopan, Belize, February 24th 2020 — Belize's state actors and partners gathered at the George Price Center in Belmopan on Thursday, 20th of February to dialogue and create a way forward for forest conservation and governance at Ya'axché's Community Forestry Symposium. The event is part of a regional EU/ICCO Forest Governance Project, which includes Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, to safeguard forests, increase government transparency and indigenous community participation in forest management.

CEO in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Sustainable Development, the Environment, Climate Change and Solid Waste Management Authority, Dr Percival Cho opened the symposium by emphasizing the need for harmony between forests and agriculture — balancing food security and socio-economic benefits with conservation and the protection of Belize's vital forests.

An update on Belize's first Agroforestry Policy currently being developed to guide decisions regarding agroforestry was provided. Ya'axché, over the past 17 years, has been promoting this climate-smart farming practice in the Maya Golden Landscape in southern Belize. The main crop from this farming practice is cacao beans, which farmers are harvesting and selling both wet and fermented, the chocolatiers are converting the beans to chocolate, and companies are exporting the cacao beans to markets in the United States of America and Europe. The Agroforestry Policy aims to create a balance between sustainability and productivity, as the climate-smart farming practice diversifies income streams from the various crops grown alongside cacao, keeps forests standing and provides habitat for wildlife.

Representatives from the Belize Forest Department, Agriculture Department, Global Environment Facility-Small Grants Programme-Belize & Cuba, University of Belize-Environmental Research Institute, Instituto de Investigaciones Fundamentales en Agricultura Tropical-Cuba, and Friends for Conservation & Development provided updates on their work in forest management.

Resoundingly collaboration built upon a shared vision, inclusive of all relevant local communities, sectors of government ministries, civil society, private and non-profit organizations, was expressed as vital to moving forward. Belize boasts a 59% forest cover and it was noted that connecting the forested lands across Belize is important. Ya'axché has been directly protecting over 151,000 acres of forests and empowering 8 communities in the Maya Golden Landscape in southern Belize since 1998.

END.

Ya'axché Conservation Trust

20A George Price Street, P.O. 177

Punta Gorda, Toledo District

Belize

Phone: (+501) 722-0108

E-mail: info@yaaxche.org

Web: yaaxche.org