In Ecuador, bamboo is gradually evolving from a natural forest product into a crop growing in patches of forested land. The bamboo species with the largest potential is Guadua (Guadua spp.) and this species is at the centre of debate today in Ecuador. The main question is how to harness a promising forest product in a sustainable way and reconcile the different needs of smallholders and the industry. It is also necessary to identify how growers and consumers are going to find each other and under which conditions a balanced bamboo market can develop. In Ecuador, various types of partnerships for the sustainable production and marketing of bamboo are becoming operational, involving small-scale producers, bamboo-processing or consuming industries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and/or international organisations such as the International Network for Bamboo and Rattan (INBAR). This chapter analyses under which conditions the parties involved are willing to participate, what the opportunities are for developing the production of bamboo in Ecuador and under which conditions partnerships can generate an income for smallholders. We will highlight several bottlenecks and pitfalls that hamper the development of the bamboo sector and how the situation is exacerbated by a lack of sound governmental policies. We will argue for a type of partnership that incorporates plantations into a mosaic of land use, of which small-scale farming, the provision of environmental services and other livelihood components form a part. However, a number of bottlenecks should be removed before such multi-scale and multi-sector bamboo partnerships can become successful and offer a win-win scenario for all the parties involved.
Approach and Research Questions

This chapter analyses experiences with the production of bamboo in Ecuador that the author gathered between 2000 and 2003 as an INBAR collaborator. The INBAR established a regional office in Guayaquil in 2000 in order to stimulate bamboo sector development in South America. INBAR has a pro-poor focus and stimulates low-income farmers in the first place, but it also considers the collaboration with industrial partners essential for the sector’s development. Ecuador has been chosen as the focal point because Ecuador’s coastal region still possesses large areas of bamboo combined with a rural tradition of its utilisation and a strong urban construction sector that uses bamboo poles. This situation offers a variety of entry points for further sector development.

The central research question of this chapter is whether multi-sector bamboo partnerships are viable in Ecuador and what kind of partnerships are likely to be the most successful. A crucial issue in this respect is whether stakeholders are willing to collaborate and which partnership format is the most suitable for the delivery, processing and marketing of raw or semi-processed bamboo. An additional question concerns the conditions under which partnerships should operate in order to meet the goals of environmental sustainability, poverty alleviation and economic viability. The fact that the bamboo sector is slowly emerging as one that has only recently been recognised as a part of the formal economy of Ecuador gives this chapter an exploratory and hypothetical character.

This chapter first presents the particular biological, processing and marketing characteristics of bamboo that determine the product range and processing opportunities. Secondly, it investigates the pros and cons of applying bamboo in construction, furnishing and handicraft. Thirdly, it indicates what environmental services bamboo can perform as a forest product and what opportunities this offers as regards linking up with the currently developing markets for carbon credits. Subsequently, the focus is on various experiences with partnerships that are aimed at sustainable and pro-poor bamboo production and the segments of the economy in which the development of such partnerships looks particularly promising.