



Projects Securing Community Rights and Transforming Local Economies

Sustainable development for forest-dependent communities

INTRODUCTION

REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) projects work to tackle forest loss and degradation as a means of reducing carbon emissions. In order to ensure long-term protection of forests, REDD project developers need to work with the people who live in and around them to address the underlying drivers of deforestation, which often distill to poverty and precarity. To accomplish this, REDD projects engage in a wide range of activities, including providing education, medical care and assistance in developing alternative livelihoods. One intervention that has proven tremendously effective is the provision of legal assistance for determining land tenure, which enables communities to claim ownership of the forest and thus have a stake in its protection.

In this case study, we explore two projects that are transforming local forest economies



Community mapping, from the Chocó-Darién project.

by ensuring land rights and shifting economic incentives towards long-term sustainability.

The projects highlighted in this study (and in this series of case studies) are certified against the VCS Standard for the carbon credits they produce (i.e, Verified Carbon Units, or VCUs), and against the Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards to demonstrate they are improving the lives



Chocó-Darién participants

of people in and around the project area and conserving biodiversity. 92% of VCUs issued by REDD projects are also labeled with the CCB Standards.

STRENGTHENING LAND TENURE IN AFRO-CARIBBEAN COLOMBIA

One of the main features of the Chocó-Darién Conservation Corridor REDD Project (Chocó-Darién Project) is that it establishes land tenure to preserve Afro-Caribbean culture and protect the forest. Located in northern Colombia, the Chocó-Darién Project was developed by the Colombian company Anthroctect and is co-designed and managed with COCOMASUR, an Afro-Colombian community association. The project was the first certified REDD project on community-owned, collectively-titled land.

Before the Chocó-Darién Project, many of the Afro-descendant communities in the area were largely unaware of their land rights. Moreover, previous efforts at land titling did not provide clear information about boundaries. As a result, land titles were not enforced and squatter cattle ranchers continued to move into the area, cutting down the forest to create new land for grazing. The project therefore started by educating Afro-descendant communities about their rights. They also worked extensively with communities and the national government over six years to adjust incorrect GPS coordinates and expand community titles to the land they had been living on for generations.

Now that they have established clear ownership of their land and the surrounding forest, communities are actively engaged in long-term land-use planning, with a core focus on the protection of the forest. For example, forest patrols play numerous roles for this project. First, they are used to gather measurement information for REDD validation and verification. Second, they serve as an opportunity to talk to squatters about the fact that they are encroaching, which has been a successful, non-violent approach that is usually enough to deter the majority of encroachers. Finally, open-invite forest walks that can involve as many as 50 to 60 people help get communities invested in



Madagascar lemurs. Photo by Felix Ratelolahy

Open forest walks can involve 50 or more people and help get communities invested in their forestland as an integral part of their collective identity

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In addition to solving land tenure challenges, the Chocó-Darién Project has generated local jobs and positioned the Afro-descendant community as a successful example of natural resource governance, both within Colombia and globally. Until just before the project started, the Chocó-Darién region was the site of guerilla violence, which left the area unstable, with poor infrastructure and few viable sources of income. Not only did better-established land tenure provide stability, but it also laid the groundwork for more sustainable economic activity. For instance, the project is helping refine forest management plans, such that communities decide which areas are optimal for sustainable timber harvesting or other non-timber use and which are designated private protected areas, off-limits for clearing or logging. As a result, communities in the project area now derive a substantial portion of their income from the sale of sustainably-harvested timber, whereas before the project began, logging was haphazard and unsustainable. The project is also designing a revolving fund for micro-enterprises like poultry farming and aquaculture.

Using REDD as a mechanism, the Chocó-Darién Project is supporting communities



Makira project stakeholders at a healthcare visit. Photo by John-nah Ranariniaina

in claiming their land and stewarding it effectively, helping reaffirm their sense of place and ownership in the process.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PROJECT BENEFITS

In 2001, the Madagascar Ministry of Environment, Ecology and Forests, in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), launched a program to create the Makira Natural Park, a 372 thousand hectare Category II protected area. Operating under protected area status since 2012, the Makira Natural Park REDD Project (Makira Project) not only protects one of Madagascar's most pristine remaining rainforest ecosystems, it also improves community land stewardship and governance

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and supports sustainable livelihood practices that improve the welfare of households.

From its inception, this project has worked to place control in the hands of the communities that collaboratively manage the Makira protected area with WCS. These communities also manage a green belt of community forests that encircles the park through management contracts between the government and community associations that the project has established. The community forests around the protected area function as a “leakage belt” (see “addressing leakage” case study) to mitigate the risk that drivers of deforestation are shifted elsewhere.

50% of net carbon revenues go back to community associations via a national trust fund, the Tany Meva Foundation, with the remainder going to the management of the protected area, governmental climate change initiatives and project operating costs. These

*Makira project stakeholders participating in rice intensification.
Photo by Dina Androlix*



community associations manage financing for local operations, including ecological monitoring and surveillance patrols that serve to guard against illegal hunting and logging in the green belt of the protected area. In addition, associations set community development goals, determining their own management plan priorities for the community forests and surrounding areas that they manage, such as improvements to agricultural irrigation systems, renewable energy installation or training in sustainable cash crop development including vanilla and cloves.

Through establishing community governance capacity and management plans, and via the trust fund, the Makira Project has been able to ensure that performance payments from reducing deforestation come back to communities and that all members have

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Gathering forest measurement information, from the Chocó-Darién project.

access to benefits and financial resources. As a result, there have been significant reductions in illegal hunting and cutting down of trees, and formerly degraded lands are now home to thriving plantations of sustainable cash crops. In addition, the project has been able to meet some of its other development targets, including building schools and hospitals and providing mobile health clinics and agricultural training to isolated communities; activities which provide both direct benefits to poor rural communities and act as incentives for these communities to protect the forests within the protected area.

CONCLUSION

Successful REDD projects take a holistic approach to improving livelihoods, working with local communities to ensure land tenure and provide important benefits which are financed through the sale of REDD carbon credits. This approach is crucial because the reality is that, for forest-adjacent rural people, poverty and resource insecurity are primary drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Projects like Chocó-Darién and Makira, which reduce instability by strengthening land tenure and supporting local self governance, are working not just to tackle deforestation but to shift the fundamental land use dynamics and economic drivers at the local level.



Standards for a Sustainable Future

Verra supports climate action and sustainable development through the development and management of standards, tools and programs that credibly, transparently and robustly assess environmental and social impacts, and drive funding for sustaining and scaling up these benefits. As a mission-driven, non-profit (NGO) organization, Verra works in any arena where we see a need for clear standards, a role for market-driven mechanisms and an opportunity to achieve environmental and social good.

Verra currently manages a number of global standards frameworks designed to drive finance towards activities that mitigate climate change and promote sustainable development, including the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) Program and its Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ framework (JNR), the Verra California Offset Project Registry (OPR), and the Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards. Verra is also developing new standards frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard (SD VISta) to enable project developers to demonstrate the sustainable development benefits of their projects, and the Landscape Standard to promote and measure sustainability outcomes across landscapes. Finally, Verra is one of the implementing partners of the Initiative for Climate Action Transparency (ICAT), which helps countries assess the impacts of their climate actions and supports greater transparency, effectiveness, trust and ambition in climate policies worldwide.

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