



Contributing to National Climate Goals

Supporting conservation priorities through project interventions

INTRODUCTION

As part of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, many nations have resolved to reduce emissions by protecting and improving management of their forests by establishing national REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) programs. Because deforestation accounts for about 15% of global emissions, REDD activities are critical to combating climate change.

While several countries have established national or subnational REDD programs, most governments have yet to move meaningfully past the readiness phase of REDD implementation, and many grapple with how best to implement the policies and programs needed to reduce deforestation. Meanwhile, REDD projects have been addressing the drivers of deforestation in high-threat areas for more than a decade, preventing millions of hectares from being deforested and supporting sub-national and national conservation

goals. Now, as nations look to the post-2020 emissions landscape, it is critical that projects and jurisdictional programs work together to support national objectives and transform forest economies.

In this case study, we explore a REDD project doing work that actively supports national level efforts to conserve forests, reduce emissions and improve local livelihoods.

PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT PROTECTED AREAS

A number of REDD projects support regional governments and local stakeholders by helping to manage national parks or reserves. Many of these projects are, in fact, managed or co-managed by the national park service department itself. One such project, GuateCarbon in Guatemala, directly supports jurisdictional conservation by:

- Contributing to Guatemala's NDC objectives by reducing deforestation in the



biosphere reserve in which it is located.

- Filling finance gaps in a country where funding for direct conservation is insufficient to protect threatened forests.

The first REDD activity in Guatemala and one of the first worldwide, the GuateCarbon REDD project in Petén Department was conceived in 2007, began generating emissions reductions in 2012, and issued its first carbon credits in 2017. The project operates in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, the largest protected area in Mesoamerica, and is jointly managed by the National Council for Protected Areas of Guatemala (CONAP, acronym in Spanish) and a community forest association in Petén (ACOFOP, acronym in Spanish), with technical support from multiple organizations, most prominently the Rainforest Alliance and Wildlife Conservation Society.

The GuateCarbon project supports a range of activities. One major set is aimed at enforcing laws and monitoring threats, including supporting park guards, forest monitoring and conservation, and fire prevention. The other set of activities supports local livelihoods based on forest-friendly activities that incentivize forest protection, which includes support for community-based enterprises in sustainable forest management, commercializing non-timber forest products and promoting community tourism.

The project covers a lot of ground, making necessary activities like forest patrols a big challenge. Project revenues go to basic necessities like gasoline and maintenance for ranger vehicles so that forest patrols can continue. The project also aims to more adequately finance and equip local fire control brigades and ensure that previously deforested areas can regenerate. Meanwhile, supporting alternative livelihoods within the community concessions proves that keeping a healthy forest is more profitable in the long run. Together these activities reduce deforestation within the reserve.

FUNDING TO SCALE IMPACT

Even though this is considered a 'local project,' the project operates at a scale that in other contexts would be considered jurisdictional, considering that the project area covers about 660 thousand hectares, an area about half the size of Puerto Rico. Indeed, one of the key goals of the initiative is to "advance and incentivize forest protection at both the state and the community level." Without the revenues from the GuateCarbon project, the local and national governments would have to find other sources of funding to manage and conserve the enormous area the project covers.

Many of the project's activities are ultimately a means for meeting management objectives that are required by Guatemalan law, but have

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not been implemented due to a systematic lack of enforcement of regulations caused by difficulties in maintaining adequate financing for basic land management and monitoring activities. The GuateCarbon project provides an avenue for long-term financing and sustained engagement that gives state and local actors a better chance of maintaining the management goals of the reserve than they would otherwise have.

The project has been so successful that CONAP is considering the same concession model for other protected areas in Guatemala, including some national parks. However, given uncertainties about the future of carbon markets, it is unclear whether CONAP will be able to expand its forest protection activities via such projects, though they contribute to national goals. Indeed, recognizing the importance of national-level accounting, Guatemala's projects are moving towards nesting into national programs. While GuateCarbon has developed in parallel to the national REDD process, it has also spurred much of the progress that has occurred at the subnational and national levels. In fact, Petén was Guatemala's first jurisdictional region to develop its own deforestation reference level, driven in large part by the organizations involved in GuateCarbon, who used this data to inform the project baseline, with a nested future in mind.



Project participant measuring tree diameter as a part of a forest carbon assessment.

CONCLUSION

While scaling up REDD activities is not without its challenges, many projects are already working with or being implemented by local and national governments. National governments have a crucial role to play in setting policy that enables further forest protection gains. However, the level of local engagement done by projects is often not possible at the national level. Projects can play a key, effective role in addressing site-specific issues and reducing deforestation. Furthermore, projects have made (and to date, largely kept) commitments to communities that will need to be maintained to ensure positive outcomes for communities and protected areas. Continued coordination between projects and national governments can help ensure the progress and in-country capacity that projects have built over decades is not lost.



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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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