VERRA REDD CASE STUDY

photo by CIFOR

Addressing Leakage, Supporting Communities

Tackling leakage at the source through agricultural interventions

INTRODUCTION

Protecting the world's forests is crucial to reducing carbon emissions, conserving habitat and ecosystem services, and supporting rural livelihoods. Forest carbon projects such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) projects are one helpful way to drive finance towards protecting high-risk, carbon-rich forested areas. To be successful, however, REDD projects need to avoid leakage, the situation in which project activities can force the drivers of deforestation outside of the project's boundaries and thus lead to increased emissions. Well-designed REDD projects mitigate leakage by taking a holistic approach to transforming the forest economy, thereby ensuring that the activities driving deforestation do not simply relocate elsewhere but rather are altogether eliminated. This case study covers a REDD project in Indonesia that is addressing leakage at its root by establishing new, sustainable agricultural programs, with very positive results.

ADDRESSING LEAKAGE

The Katingan Peatland Restoration and Conservation Project (Katingan Project), managed by a small Indonesian company called PT Rimba Makmur Utama, works to protect large areas of peat swamp forest in Indonesian Borneo. For the Katingan Project, avoiding leakage is not just about climate integrity, it's actually at the very heart of the project's conservation work.

Helping communities become more productive on the land they already have is a centerpiece of the project's strategy. In order to meet increasing demand for agricultural production while decreasing deforestation and avoiding leakage, the Katingan Project has helped locals intensify agricultural production on existing farmland through:

- Introducing rotational planting and promoting agroecological methods that integrate tree planting with farming;

• Using a cover crop and infusing underground biomass with bacteria to improve decomposition and fertility of the soil; and,

• Establishing agroecology schools to teach the cover crop/bacterial infusion technique to local communities.

Taken together, these activities increase agricultural production and farmers' incomes from existing productive land while decreasing pressure on nearby forests.

The project has also undertaken several other activities to increase income for farmers, further mitigating leakage. First, the Katingan Project is working with coconut farmers in its buffer zone (the area adjacent to, but outside of the primary conservation area) to switch from producing coconut meat to coconut sugar, which provides 5 to 10 times more revenue, thus increasing income without increasing farmed land. Understanding that no intervention will succeed without a market, the project is working with a company to buy the sugar through a farmer cooperative. The project is also supporting increased harvesting of rattan, a climbing vine used to make furniture and other goods, over timber. Rattan is fast growing, economically valuable and easier to harvest than timber, providing an alternative that supports forests & livelihoods.

Project participants grow rice, vegetables, sago and fruit crops like durian, jackfruit and rambutan, pictured above. Photo by Matt Preston

Underlying all of these innovative activities is a governance system that PT Rimba Makmur Utama helped design and implement to effectively work with local communities. The project has undergone a participatory planning process with a particular focus on ensuring meaningful participation from marginalized community members, such as holding meetings only for women in the evenings, when they are most likely to be free. They have also set up a checks and balances system for transparent decision making to promote democratic natural resources governance. Having strong systems in place allows the Katingan Project to focus on community needs and long-term results.

Representatives from PT Rimba Makmur have shared that building trust has been both the biggest challenge for the project, and key to its success. The project has been so successful, in fact, that rather than

The project has been so successful at increasing farm productivity that farmers outside the project area have also started practicing sustainable agriculture.

seeing an uptick in practicing unsustainable agriculture elsewhere, which would be considered leakage, the project has inspired more people outside of its boundaries to practice sustainable agriculture because of the productivity increases the project has been able to show. This trend has arguably expanded the positive effects of the project, since improved agricultural practices result in reduced emissions from non-project areas.

Project participants collecting rattan, which is resilient and grows quickly. Photo by Decky for Photovoices Katingan

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Any project validated to a third party standard such as the VCS Program must show that it is effectively reducing, managing and accounting for leakage. Projects must identify pressures that lead to land-use change and reduce or remove them, establish a strong monitoring plan and account for any potential remaining leakage by subtracting it from the carbon benefits claimed by the project. In order to have an accurate sense of the gains the project could expect to make to stop deforestation, and the potential for leakage, the Katingan Project calculated baseline activities and leakage risk in advance of implementation and according to a robust methodology. The project underwent a detailed assessment to identify potential sources of risk, and then designed their activities around addressing them. In practice, there are numerous ways to address leakage and guard against undermining gains made in sequestering carbon and establishing alternative livelihoods for communities.

CONCLUSION

The Katingan Project has proven much about what makes a successful REDD project, especially where leakage is concerned. Many REDD projects take a similarly active approach to halting or mitigating leakage, working with stakeholders on alternative livelihoods that circumvent the need for forest encroachment while diversifying and improving local incomes.

The Katingan Project is one of many REDD projects doing the necessary work to support communities such that both forest and climate integrity and human-well being can be improved.

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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