



Executive Summary: Regional Dialogue for Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, and Civil Society Organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean

This workshop was held in Panama on September 20-22, 2019, and aimed to identify success factors and lessons learned from the Capacity Building Program (CBP) of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) in order to ensure alignment with programs for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Topics such as benefit-sharing, monitoring social and environmental impact risks, and monitoring carbon inventories were discussed with a view to promoting new, appropriate activities for the various national REDD+ strategies.

The Capacity Building Program has sought to provide forest-dependent indigenous peoples (IPs), local communities (LCs), and civil society organizations (CSOs) with informational tools to enhance their understanding of the principles and key processes involved in the implementation of REDD+ activities and programs.

When a country signs an Emissions Reduction Payment Agreement (ERPA) with the FCPF, it starts to receive payments for verified reductions in emissions. Agreements are expected to be signed between 2019 and 2021 in Latin America and the Caribbean, which will pave the way for the implementation of new national REDD+ strategies, especially emissions reduction programs, in the countries.

To ensure that indigenous peoples, local communities, and civil society organizations have the opportunity to work with national governments on the design of REDD+ strategies and ERPA programs, the FCPF developed the Capacity Building Program, which has been in place for nine years. Governments have made significant progress in designing REDD+ strategies with the involvement of IPs, LCs, CSOs, and other stakeholders at the local level. Grassroots community organizations like ACICAFOC and Sotz'il have served as bridges, or intermediaries, in the flow of funds from the World Bank to communities and project areas. These intermediary organizations have developed community participation processes that have been key to capacity building and the attainment of REDD+ objectives.

Progress under FCPF/CBP and Main Challenges Identified at the Workshop

The participants heard about experiences with FCPF capacity building in 17 Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) countries at the regional level. Special attention was given to the work of Sotz'il with indigenous peoples in eight FCPF countries, with a view to strengthening these processes in more than 80 indigenous and Afrodescendant communities in the countries and the region. Ten workshops were organized during the first phase of the project, reaching 2,126 participants, of whom 42 percent were women. In addition, 51 meetings were held between indigenous groups and government agencies responsible for the implementation of REDD+. ACICAFOC, for its part, reported on the results of its work with CSOs and LCs in five FCPF countries. Seventy-nine workshops were conducted for 2,620 participants, 36 percent of whom were women. Some 909 youths between the ages of 15 and 35 years also attended these workshops. In addition, 27 meetings were held with civil society organizations and government agencies responsible for REDD+ in the countries.

Policy Framework. The LAC region's policy framework for building capacity in REDD+ and the management of natural resources was presented in the opening session, along with the expectations for the workshop and the interest in the possibility of continuing with REDD+.

Representatives of the indigenous peoples and grassroots community organizations expressed their commitment to maintaining and preserving the Planet and conserving its forests and natural resources through rational action.

The REDD+ mechanism has provided a framework for creating and building capacity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on a large scale, compared with parcel projects. The strategy has made it possible to bring governments and multilateral agencies together with the communities represented at the event by indigenous peoples, Afrodescendants, and civil society who live near or within forests. It has also made it possible to rally various social actors around a single objective.

Conceptual Framework. Theoretical and practical concepts were discussed in a series of panels by experts who cited critical elements in their interventions. The topics addressed were: the perspectives of REDD+ focal points, the current status of REDD+ in the countries, rights and safeguards, and preliminary studies on gender and traditional forest knowledge.

Among the most notable contributions was a REDD+ strategy that had been formulated in line with international commitments and is currently being implemented in several countries. During development of the strategy, a consultation and validation process was conducted with indigenous peoples and other social actors, and consideration was given to the technical and ancestral knowledge of those who were consulted. The participation of women was particularly encouraged during the process. It was also noted that certain legal aspects have slowed down implementation of the REDD+ strategy in the countries.

Achievements that were mentioned included the development of plans and diagnostic assessments, as well as prior reference consultations in the countries and in each of the indigenous territories with a view to making the processes more efficient and effective. Another significant achievement has been the development of financial instruments by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Conservation International/Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (CI/DGM), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Another factor cited in the presentations was the incorporation of women as a key aspect of participation within the territories.

It was emphasized that self-sufficiency is essential. It can be achieved, in part, through program assistance for IPs, LCs, and CSOs aimed at building capacity to carry out the processes independently and over the long term. To achieve this, international assistance programs should strengthen processes to ensure that consultations follow an appropriate methodology and include free, prior, informed consent. The experts agreed that REDD+ information needs to be more widely disseminated in order to create awareness and ownership of the knowledge by the various social actors.

Participant Exchange of Experiences. Twelve presenters reported on their experiences in Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Paraguay, and Chile. The objective of the panel was to highlight good practices that had been implemented in subprojects with the assistance of ACICAFOC and Sotz'il. In addition, observers from Kenya offered comments.

Working Groups. The participants were divided into five working groups, each to discuss responses to trigger questions. Their observations were then presented in a plenary session that allowed for further dialogue and exchange of ideas. The trigger questions were: (1) What are the main capacities needed, and what are the remaining gaps still to be covered through capacity building? (2) How should the next phase of the REDD+ Capacity Building Program be structured and organized? (3) What should be the orientation of the Capacity Building Program in 2020-2025? (4) How can we reach the most vulnerable people in the communities – women, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities?

Some of the most important conclusions of the event emerged from this dialogue among the groups. The project's gaps in coverage were noted, with emphasis on the need to increase the number of communities participating in the Capacity Building Program and on the importance of implementing conservation processes in parallel with processes that contribute to well-being and maintenance of livelihoods.

Future phases of the program should be designed to strengthen productive projects aimed at forest conservation and, at the same time, establish closer relations between governments and stakeholders in order to articulate national public policies that will ensure that they can remain in the territories.

The REDD+ guidelines call for development of a strategic plan that takes into account the diagnostics already mentioned and also provides for consultations with the indigenous communities. The plan should include lines that refer to different areas of implementation: on the one hand, forest conservation and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and, on the other, the social and cultural elements that are shaped by the worldview of the IPs and other stakeholders.

It is also indispensable to strengthen safeguards in future phases of the project, including the social, environmental, legal, and political elements that will ensure the permanence of the programs. So far, there has not been significant progress in terms of rights and safeguards. This is an area that requires attention at the national level so that each country will have its own unique system and adopt an effective approach that takes into account the worldview of its indigenous peoples and respects the agreements for their protection. It is also important to involve vulnerable groups in the consultation process in order to enrich the outcome.

Field Visit. Sixty representatives of countries, international organizations, subject matter experts, and members of the visited community participated in a guided visit to the Guna-Yala near Darién, an archipelago that stretches into the Caribbean Sea. This visit was organized to showcase specific REDD+ activities that have been implemented on the islands and on the mainland. The report of this visit is available as a separate document.

Conclusions from the Dialogue: *“Lessons Learned from the Capacity Building Program in Latin America and the Caribbean”*

The Dialogue concluded that the following key elements should be considered in a new implementation phase of the REDD+ strategy.

Effective Social Participation by Women and Youth

Women must play a larger role in decision making and the design and development of projects. Further studies should be undertaken in other territories to promote their integration. Their degree of participation could be used as an indicator in management evaluations.

Young people need more challenging projects that will generate economic compensation. The availability of training processes, especially those that involve technology aids, would make their participation more attractive. It was proposed to encourage schools to include capacity building for REDD+ in their curricula.

Transparency and Accountability

The Dialogue recognized the need to build fiduciary capacity within local community organizations to support the implementation of processes and project administration. Hence, the capacity-building approach should include not only training but also technical support and regular auditing by funding agencies in order to ensure the appropriate use of resources.

Conservation and Livelihood

It is important to conserve the environment while at the same time guaranteeing food security. Both these elements need to be taken into account as part of the safeguards. While indigenous peoples protect and take care of the environment, they also need to subsist and be assured of a livelihood.

REDD+ presupposes a dialogue to redefine approaches so that they will include respect for living conditions and provide the means for improving them. It is therefore recommended to develop a portfolio of projects from among which it will be possible to prioritize those that are most appropriate for ensuring the subsistence of communities while also conserving the environment.

Negotiation and Resource Sharing

Mention was made of the Paris Agreement, which incorporates the REDD+ strategy, and the commitment of its Parties to develop public policies on the subject in order to ensure the conservation of natural resources and their sustainable use. Strategic alliances should be developed between the funding agencies, the States, and the people working on conservation. The stakeholders should formulate points of agreement on how to move forward.

The Rights of New Generations

It is essential to work on legal elements that will ensure territorial security, which is indispensable for implementing REDD+ projects in the territories. Emphasis was placed on the

need to recognize the role of indigenous peoples in conservation. There should be incentives to promote this effort.

Dialogue with Power Brokers and the Role of States

Efforts should focus on building capacity within governments in areas related to the importance of forests. This will require a major policy initiative on the part of cooperating agencies. It is suggested that a dialogue on the subject be promoted with policymakers, businesses, industries, and other public stakeholders. In particular, information about REDD+ safeguards needs to be more widely disseminated.

Success Factors and Lessons Learned

One of the workshop's objectives was to identify the success factors and lessons learned from implementing the REDD+ strategy to build capacity among those living in forest territories that should be conserved and protected. The most important points that emerged from the workshop are outlined below.

Success Factors

1. Projects implemented through intermediary organizations have made it possible to improve the living conditions of families while at the same time building alliances between community members and organizations like ACICAFOC and Sotz'il.
2. Community grassroots organization has been strengthened; new leaders, many of them women and youth, have emerged.
3. Incentives have been created for forest conservators that have motivated local inhabitants to continue following good practices.
4. The REDD+ strategy has recognized ancestral rights and calls for respect for the indigenous worldview.
5. It has been demonstrated that small organizations are capable of big achievements and can make a contribution toward improving the environment.

Lessons Learned

1. Community participation needs to be scaled up throughout the region, which means finding effective mechanisms in hard-to-reach areas.
2. A systematic REDD+ capacity-building process is needed to safeguard livelihood in a way that incorporates sustainability, using mechanisms that ensure economic and social development as well as sustainable development of the environment.
3. One of the challenges has been finding effective language within the REDD+ initiative to build local capacity. Didactic mechanisms are needed to convey information to the most vulnerable sectors (women, youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities).
4. In most countries, government authorities appear to have little interest in conserving the environment and natural resources. They are unaware of even the basic elements involved in implementing REDD+.
5. People have shown little willingness or commitment to learn about protecting the environment; their daily lives prevent their extensive involvement.
6. Continued emphasis should be placed on capacity-building processes and measures to encourage the restoration of degraded lands.

7. REDD+ remains a relatively new concept for many of the stakeholders. More effort should be made to raise awareness.
8. The REDD+ capacity-building projects should be backed by principles of social inclusion so that they can better address the problems that affect the livelihood of forest-dependent communities.
9. When a new project is initiated, it is important to plan for evaluating the management and impact of the actions that are being taken in the territories.
10. If environmental projects are to be more successful, it is crucial that REDD+ include seed capital projects, both to make participation in conservation more effective and to tackle other vital social problems.
11. Certain elements should be addressed in coordination with the health, education, and social sectors. There is no impact unless concepts and goals for well-being are incorporated.
12. Neither REDD+ action nor its theoretical framework envisions other vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities and the elderly. According to the inter-American conventions, these groups must be included because they also live in and help to conserve the forests.
13. To ensure sustainability, REDD+ should promote investments through credit unions, organized collectives that focus on environmental protection to ensure sustainability.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Continue to offer training for capacity building in the 16 LAC countries.
2. Develop subprojects focused on conservation and the production of livelihood.
3. Promote indigenous collective management systems, because they continue to be very effective for conservation, such as REDD+.
4. Extend programs like FCPF/CBP, which has been effective both in building capacity and in facilitating and improving the quality of dialogue, not only on REDD+ issues but also on topics related to natural resources in general.
5. Support management of the program through intermediary organizations such as ACICAFOC and Sotz'il, which are conducting successful processes in the territories and have also gained a high degree of credibility with both funding agencies and the beneficiary populations.
6. Strengthen intergenerational processes: generational renewal through the integration of youth in the participating community organizations is under way.

Links to the Presentations

1. Text of the presentations: <https://www.acicafoc.org/material-redd/>
2. Dialogue conducted by the World Bank: <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/events/2019/09/03/dialogoregionallac>