



Project REDD+ in Equateur « ZAMBA MALAMU »  
Woods Hole Research Center (WHRC)



Ministry of Environment and  
Sustainable Development



# ON THE LINE OF THE EQUATEUR

## NEWSLETTER

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*In October 2014, the WHRC and the Project Equateur team presented our first newsletter to inform the general public of the implementation of our REDD+ pilot project in Equateur province, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

*The past few months have proved difficult for Project Equateur, and hardships have delayed the publishing of this second newsletter. Nevertheless, we hope this second newsletter will be a valuable source of information for others working on REDD and sustainable development.*

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### *Updates from Mbandaka*

In order to ensure efficient implementation and follow up on activities, and to be constantly available to support our local partners, the Woods Hole Research Center opened an office in Mbandaka, the capital of the Equateur province, in July 2013. Being located in the heart of the Equatorial rainforest and on the shores of the majestic Congo River has been both a blessing and curse for Project Equateur, as logistical issues and unforeseen challenges have necessitated creative thinking and inventiveness on the part of the project team.

And so it has only been since early 2015 that Project Equateur has had the equipment necessary in order to be a fully functional office space. Laborious procurement procedures, a difficult logistical context, the absence of a WHRC office in Kinshasa and an uncompetitive market in DRC have all contributed to difficulties in the acquisition of vehicles and office equipment—delaying the much anticipated implementation of our community activities. However, with all necessary equipment now in hand, the Project Equateur team hopes that we will now be able to move forward with no more delays.

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## *1. Participation to the XX<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties*

From the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2014, parties from around the world gathered in Lima, Peru to attend the XX<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP) on climate change. National delegations, scientists, activists, and representatives from the private sector and civil society discussed and debated measures that need to be taken to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The WHRC sent Joseph ZAMBO, communication officer and Melaine KERMARC, project manager, to Lima to participate in the conference and present Project Equateur's early findings. Beyond being an

extremely valuable experience on a personal level, our representatives were able to meet and network with other practitioners and experts from other countries working on REDD+. They were able to take part in international conversations concerning the [participation of communities in the monitoring of deforestation and carbon stocks](#) and [observing the evolution of the REDD process at an international level](#). Mr. Zambo and Mr. Kermarc were also [interviewed, and spoke about Project Equateur's activities and expectations for REDD+](#).

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## *Acknowledgement*

*We would like to thank and congratulate our communications officer, Joseph ZAMBO MANDEA, who is leaving us to return to his old position as the REDD Focal Point for Equateur Province. His earnestness, excitement, and hard work will be very much missed, but we wish him success in his new position and hope to continue collaborating with him for the advancement of REDD+ in Equateur Province.*

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*Representatives of household groups formed in Bokumu-Mokola and Bokumu-Mbongo.*

## ***2. Structuring of Target Communities in Gemena***

In the North-Ubangi area of the sector Banga-Kungu, WHRC is working with the Evangelical Community of the Ubangi-Mongala (CEUM) to implement REDD+ activities in two target communities.

Joseph ZAMBO travelled to Gemena early this year to train the CEUM team, after which he visited the communities of Bokumu-Mokola and Bokumu-Mbongo to begin structuring household groups.

The structuring of those communities into homogeneous groups of households enables us to:

- Ensure that communities are represented in their diversity during the decision making process;
- Facilitate the implementation of project activities and sensitization of the whole community.

The methodology used during this stage is based on the Method of Group Formation by the FAO, and has been tested and perfected in Buya I (Project Equateur's other target community) in southern Equateur. After identifying heads of households, community members are organized into homogenous groups of about a dozen, based on geographical situation, social affinities or clan. Each group then elects a representative to sit on the village committee. The members of the committee then themselves elect a representative, a vice-representative and two advisers to oversee the work in their village.

The two communities named above were structured in 36 household groups and each one then elected a representative to sit on the village committee.

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## ***3. Local Testing of Improved Stoves in Buya I***

Wood and charcoal production are still the main sources of energy in the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, despite being the main cause of deforestation at national level, the impact of wood

collection at the village level is limited. This work, collecting deadwood in the forest, is done principally by women and children.

Thanks to a survey on gender done by Larissa STIEM, a student from the University of Lund, the WHRC identified wood collection as incredibly time-consuming for women—so much so that it prevents them from engaging in other necessary agricultural and income generating activities. Therefore it seemed that finding an alternative to traditional stoves would be a priority—both to reduce wood consumption as well as women’s workload.

In order to achieve this objective, the WHRC has launched an in-situ testing of 3 different models of

improved stoves, all built with locally available materials (mostly clay and adobe bricks). Cost ranges from 3 to 15 USD per unit. Fifteen households were selected to receive an improved stove (5 of each model), and the stoves were built in their kitchens in the presence of local masons, who will be in charge of building stoves for the rest of the community. Each model will be evaluated by the recipient household, after which a cost-benefit analysis will be done to find the most appropriate model. Once this is decided upon, one stove will be built for every household in the community of Buya I.



*Jean-Claude, customary chief in Buya I, inspects one of the new improved stoves.*

#### ***4. Improving Cassava Drying Method in Buya I***

Cassava, the staple crop in southern Equateur, is the product most consumed by the population of Buya I. While most international assistance focuses on improving productivity, the principal difficulty faced by this population is the processing and storage of their agricultural produce.

Cassava must be properly dried before it can be transformed into flour, a process which can be complicated in Equateur due a high moisture level and frequent rain. If it is not dried appropriately, cassava flour can quickly deteriorate, leaving the local population in short supply well before the next harvest, causing serious food security issues. Most

often the drying is begun in the sun and finished over an open fire, increasing household wood consumption and creating smoke-related health risks. When cassava comes in direct contact with smoke it needs additional peeling, which, along with affecting the taste, reduces the quantity significantly.

In order to address this problem, the WHRC has begun construction of an oven for cassava drying. This oven will prevent the cassava from coming in direct contact with any smoke, while also reducing the

amount of wood used in the drying process. WHRC has again chosen to use locally available materials and to work on improving already existing technology of wood fueled drying in order to facilitate the adoption of this new method by the local population. The fact that this test is being implemented in-situ enables us to identify and address any problems that may arise from normal household use. Demonstrating for and working with villagers is also the best way to ensure adoption of these improved methods.



*To the Left : Robin BRUNET, agricultural consultant, demonstrating how to use of organic debris to enrich the soil in the agroforestry activities.*



*To the Right: The agronomist of the Botanical Garden of Eala, Gode LOMPOKO, inspects the tree-nursery in Buya I.*

## 5. Experimental Agroforestry Plots

To promote better crop management, techniques that promote fertile soils and agroforestry practices, Project Equateur has built experimental agroforestry plots in the village of Buya I. Our objective is to communicate more efficient agricultural practices to the community, such the introduction of fruit trees, leguminous trees, and/or nitrogen fixing trees. These practices will help encourage sedentary agriculture (thereby reducing deforestation from traditional slash and burn practices) and the diversification of crops planted. We hope that these practices will have a direct effect on food security, nutrition, and revenue at household level, while at the same time reduce the impact of these communities on the forest.

Three one-hectare parcels of degraded fallow land have been rented to each of the three clans that make up the community of Buya I. All plots have been cleared, holes have been dug at locations selected for tree planting, and a tree nursery has been set up. The WHRC has hired community members to do this work, acting upon the premise that even short-term activities should be used as an opportunity to strengthen local capacities. These plots will be used to demonstrate how agroforestry can rehabilitate land degraded by slash and burn agriculture, as well as to teach community members how to implement these practices on their own lands.

## ***6. Designated Consultants and Capacity Building***

One of the main objectives of Project Equateur is the building of local capacities. This is vital to the success of REDD, as eventually these projects will need to be transferred to, and run by, local organizations. The CEUM team (Evangelical Community of the Ubangi-Mongala), which operates in northern Equateur in the Gemena area, has been restructured in order to improve the operational capacity of the NGO, which has managed to do very little since 2013.

In December 2014, a newly hired CEUM team received training in order to ensure that they had a solid understanding of climate change, the importance of the forest on both a local and global scale,

sustainable development, and the goals of REDD+ to help forest communities to develop and more successfully manage their resources.

The WHRC has also begun the process of hiring two new Designated Consultants (CD) to replace the University of Cepromad (UNIC) and the Diocesan Bureau of Development (BDD). These partnerships were absolved due to poor performance on the part of the consultants. The CDs are responsible for the implementation of research activities and sustainable development within the pilot communities, thus it is vital to the project's success that they be responsible and reliable.



## ***7. Mid-Term Review of Project Equateur***

From the 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2014, Project Equateur underwent its mid-term review in the presence of a representative from the Congo Basin Forest Fund of the African Development Bank (CBFF-BAD), DRC government officials, a civil servant from the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD, previously known as MECNT, Ministry of Environment, Conservation of Nature and Tourism) and the management team of Project Equateur.

This mid-term review was able to identify managerial, administrative and human resource issues as the main

causes for delays in implementation. Nevertheless, it was also noted that despite a very low disbursement rate (20%), the achievement of targets was fairly high (about 27%), demonstrating that despite adversity and lack of funds, the Project Equateur team still managed to fulfill some of our goals.

Overall the results of the review were satisfactory. The weaknesses identified will need to be addressed in order to improve the financial management of the project and facilitate the completion of audits in order to increase the disbursement rate.

## Main Challenges

The implementation of a pilot project such as Project Equateur is a unique opportunity to challenge and explore existing theoretical ideas in the field, as well as to identify operational challenges and recommend possible ways to solve them.

- **Heavy administrative procedures** have been a significant obstacle throughout the implementation of this project. In the long term, these administrative hurdles could seriously hinder the implementation and adoption of the REDD process by Congolese nationals, who have generally had less experience and training when it comes to successfully navigating and meeting the high expectations of international donors and organizations.
- **Difficulties with disbursement.** This project has had major difficulties in mobilizing our funds in a timely matter. Accessing disbursement at the right time is essential to ensure implementation of activities, especially when working in the agricultural sector (which is inherently inflexible due to seasonal factors).
- **The lack of capacities** of local actors, not only in terms of administrative and financial management, but also technical ability, is a crucial factor that could compromise the success of any REDD+ program. An ambitious program to develop local capacities as well as close and

constant follow up will be needed in order to respond to the needs of local actors in Equateur.

- **The lack of infrastructure** in Equateur province not only makes implementation more complex, but also can incur high, and unforeseen, monetary costs.
- **Working in the context of Equateur province** is a major challenge when implementing REDD and other development and/or conservation initiatives. A large proportion of NGOs operating here act only as a *mechanism to capture funds*, rather than as real agents of development, conservation, and change. It is essential that this sector be straightened out in order to ensure efficacy and efficiency of projects. Finally, bad practices have led to *passivity and apathy* among local communities. Interactions between NGOs and communities can sometime be difficult, and we have witnessed firsthand an unfortunate (but understandable) lack of trust between community members. The phenomenon of *elites capturing benefits* is, unfortunately, more common than one would hope. Thorough work will need to be done with communities and local development actors to put a stop to this practice and improve how they interact and implement activities, otherwise development and conservation initiatives will continue to be seen (and used) as personal funds for those in the higher echelons of society.





### ***The word of the Dr. Glenn BUSH, Director of the Equateur Project***

*“It has been a challenging year for Project Equateur. However, it is important to put these experiences in perspective of the broader challenges to make REDD+ a reality in the DRC. Whilst the focus of project activities is at the community level and project stakeholders struggle with making work programs in the communities happen according to acceptable international standards and norms, we have experienced that perhaps the greatest operational challenges lie in structural issues related to the high level administration and management of funds being moved from the international community to the national government and out to field projects and programs. Whatever the current frustrations and difficulties, our experiences are normal.*

*The DRC is in the early stages of redefining itself as a functional state, after having come through decades of insecurity and instability (which sadly continues in some places). Government agencies are under resourced in terms of staff and predictable budget support, yet have no option but to set ambitious targets to overcome poverty and sustainable economic growth barriers. REDD is a novel concept, and whilst the institutional context of implementing it in the DRC is challenging, there are also few barriers constraining REDD+’s concept and implementation.*

*We have to be focused and pragmatic about what can be achieved, in what timeframe, and how much it will cost. Above all we must be patient, the financial and social cost of developing such an ambitious novel policy approach to conserving tropical forests will be high, but the cost of failure will be much higher. We look forward to playing our part and supporting the challenging and courageous endeavors of our colleagues in government and non-government organizations to earn success.”*

*“Gardens are not made by singing ‘Oh how beautiful!’ and sitting in the shade”*

*Rudyard Kipling*



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### ***In the months to come...***

*The activities of Project Equateur have all but stopped since the end of 2014 due to the absence of available funds and capable Designated Consultants working to ensure proper implementation of activities. However, the WHRC hopes to soon have access to operational funds, as well as recruit new partners in order to resume activities and continue the implementation of its pilot REDD+ project in the province of Equateur.*

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