



Ministère de l'Environnement  
du Développement Durable

# Developing civil society and government agency support to community forest management projects in the DRC

## *Pilot REDD+ Project in the Equateur Province* **Achievements and findings from the first 18 months**



### Background

The Woods Hole Research Center in Partnership with the DRC Ministry of Environment (MECNT) is implementing a pilot REDD+ project in Equateur Province. The project is increasing the capacity of local stakeholders for the development of REDD+ strategies, preparation for the management of carbon funds through designing and implement community based REDD+ pilot projects with potential for continued carbon financing.

### Key Achievements

- Project office and resource center of the Woods Hole Research Center in Mbandaka, capital of the Equateur Province, providing on the ground technical and managerial support to project partners and activities ;
- Baseline socio-economic survey of 12 villages, enabling the selection of four pilot villages and their control. Provided key quantitative living standards information about the zones in which the project operates. Their specificity, as well as key findings, enabled the design of project activities ;
- Design and piloting of a community group development approach to develop local institutions and operational structures for project delivery ;
- Ongoing development of local capacity on, comprehension of climate change, ecosystem services, REDD+, sustainable development and project management through workshop, and field based activities ;
- Ongoing development of an operational Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) method in the context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo ;
- Participatory planning of pilot activities to address priority deforestation and local development issues in target communities ;
- Implementation of community social infrastructure and household livelihoods development projects to develop a model for "Green Growth" at the local level.



### Strategic Challenges

Equateur is the poorest and least politically functional province's in the DRC. Community level state infrastructure is virtually nonexistent, creating additional challenges for the implementation of a REDD program there. In this first year of implementation, some of the principal challenges encountered were:

**Under resourced national and provincial government institutions** prevents the effective coordination between different ministries and governmental agencies to manage cross-sector initiative, which is needed to tackle climate change and sustainably manage natural resources. The centralization of government and concentration of capacity in Kinshasa is still a limiting factor to the development of jurisdictional REDD approach. The REDD program can be used to fast-forward the process of decentralization by strengthening local capacities and slowly transferring capacities at provincial and local level.

**Poor understanding of sustainable development and climate change amongst leadership.** This is a critical limiting factor in enabling government and civil society leaders, to take the initiatives to develop enhanced coping mechanism. No solution to mitigate and adapt to climate change will emerge before the locals can grasp the implication of deforestation on ecosystem services on which they benefit. Even at university level and in technical government agencies, the understanding of the issues being faced is still a major limiting factor in achieving sustainable development.

**Weak technical and managerial capacities of civil society actors** are a challenge for the implementation of conservation and development initiatives aimed at reducing deforestation in the villages. Without the presence in the field of experts and a program of building local capacities, the implementation of REDD will not be possible. The government also needs to take a more proactive role in regulating the civil society sector to avoid the elite capture of REDD funds.



### Operational Issues

Benefit sharing is a central principle of the REDD process and will determine the success of the program. The way in which benefits are being distributed will not only ensure the Efficacy, Efficiency and Equity of the process, but also ensure that forest users are receiving the right incentives. Key issues arising as the pilot scheme is being implemented are:

**Limited opportunity for cash incentives in the near term:** Direct cash transfers have become increasingly fashionable in the development realm, but this approach is presently unsuited to the DRC in the near term. The market prices of goods does not reflect their social value as access to market is limited and for much of the exchange of goods and no saving facilities exist at the community level. Financial infrastructure is not accessible to the rural poor in DRC, in addition there is a limited of financial literacy, even among NGO workers. Setting up cash transfer schemes would demand a significant amount of institutional and human capacity building before becoming practical to scale up REDD activities nationally.

**Getting the right balance between community & household level benefits:** One aspect of making REDD work is engaging a community as a whole yet provide direct benefits to heterogeneous rural households. Social infrastructure projects such as water points and schools are more readily implemented, bringing widespread short term confidence and goodwill to engage with the lengthy REDD project development process. However making a direct difference to household income and welfare is what will change attitudes and behavior in the long term and are projects that subsequently take longer to implement an degenerate household revenues.

**Recognizing diversity between rural households:** It is essential to provide different responses to the varying levels of household dependency and control over the forest and land resources. In order to do so, a range of site specific household level welfare generating activities have been developed e.g. raising small livestock, agricultural production and processing, agroforestry and apiculture, from which each household can choose, based on what is most suitable and practical for them.

**Building and strengthening community institutions:** To ensure the efficiency of the REDD process in DRC, it is essential to build and strengthen community level institutions to be able to take ownership and management of local development activities over time. Considering the highly variable level of capacities we have experienced, WHRC has worked on reinforcing a Local Development Committee (LDC) through a process of community wide group development based on democratic principles. This is not only a powerful tool for enabling free participation and representation in local development but also facilitates good communication and provides an operational structure for the implementation of sustainable development activities.

### REDD+ Stimulating the "green economy"

It is currently estimated that only 8% of deforestation is coming from the forestry sector, while more that 80% being caused by increasing demand in fuel wood followed by slash and burn agriculture.

Too often REDD is seen as a forest conservation program and an end in itself. Whilst the national REDD program itself is housed in the Ministry of Environment, most of the actors on REDD in DRC are historically biodiversity conservation or forestry focused. REDD is therefore on the margins of the sectors that will have the greatest impact on the forest estate e.g. agriculture, energy, mining or infrastructure.

It is important to reinforce REDD as a strategic financial mechanism to turn development in to sustainable development, through providing essential funds to stimulate "Green Growth". Doing so will encourage a much needed debate on the goals being set at governmental level about the future of DRC and set REDD in a strategic operational framework. It will also act as a focus to bring key sector ministries together e.g. the Ministries of Agriculture, Land Rights, Planning and Energy to name a few. Thus, it is vital to REDD's success that its implementers facilitate and encourage communication between government sectors to develop cross-sectorial policies.

