



Pilot REDD+ Project in the Equateur Province: Achievements and Early Findings



Achievements

- Opening an antenna of the research center in Mbandaka, capital of the Equateur Province, providing us on the ground presence to supervise project activities;
- Several villages were surveyed through the baseline, enabling the selection of four pilot villages and their control. This survey also provided key socio-economic information on both zone in which the project operate in and their specificity, as well as key findings to enable the design of the project activities.
- Activities were identified in 2 communities triangulating results from a participatory method and different surveys.
- Local capacities are being developed on climate change, ecosystem services, REDD, sustainable development and project management through a number of workshop and field based activities.
- Developed an operational methodology on how to realize the first steps of the FPIC process in the Central African context.



Challenges & Operational Issues

The Equateur Province is the poorest and most politically unstable of the DRC and the infrastructures are almost inexistent, raising many challenges for the implementation of REDD. From this first year of implementation, some of the principal challenges encountered were:

- Poor understanding of climate change and related issues:
- Weak and disunited governmental institutions:
- Weak capacities of local actors:



Free and Prior Informed Consent

The FPIC process provides a framework in which can be integrated the different steps necessary for developing a community conservation initiative. The WHRC is developing an operational methodology on how to realize those different tests by calibrating well tried and tested community appraisal and research tools to the REDD context. The methodology is developed in partnership with our local partners, which provide insights on the local context, and are then tested in the pilot communities. Participation is also being assessed by semi-independent research (gender and vulnerable group participation, political analysis of REDD). The different steps realized so far are the following:

- Phase 1: Baseline Survey
- Phase 2: Sensitization on Climate Change and Introduction to REDD
- Phase 3: Causes of Deforestation and Priority of Development
- Phase 4: Socio-Environmental Assessment
- Phase 5: Participatory Mapping

Benefits Sharing

The benefit sharing is a central point of the REDD process, which will determine the success of the program. The way in which benefits are being distributed will not only ensure the Equity, Efficiency and Equity of the process, but ensure that forest users are receiving the right incentive.

Cash Transfer: Direct cash transfers have become increasingly fashionable in the development realm, but this approach is unsuited to the Congolese context for different reasons. First, the monetary value of things is variable from an individual to another, as access to market is limited, much of the exchange of goods and services is done through bartering and no saving facilities exist at community level. Secondly, the financial infrastructures are inexistent in DRC, which would make the transaction prohibitive for such scheme. Finally, considering the little rate of financial literacy, even among NGO workers, setting up cash transfer would demand an important amount of capacity building before being realistically practical.

Community vs. Household level benefits: One aspect of making REDD work is to engage community as a whole in the framework, yet it is essential to recognize the heterogeneity of the individual composing it and to provide different answers for different level of dependency and control over the forest. In order to do so, the Equateur Project provides community level interventions, such as access to clean water or building a school and household level activities, such raising small livestock, agroforestry or apiculture from which each household can choose from based on what is most suitable for them. Both the community and household level activities were identified in a participatory manner with the community and discussed with technical experts.

Building and strengthening Community Institutions: To ensure the efficiency of the REDD process in DRC, it is essential to build and strengthen village level institutions to slowly take ownership and manage conservation and development activities. We have observed different level of capacities, with some communities where customary institution are still in place and relatively functional and others where they have slowly deteriorated and are now in conflict with government institutions or challenged by villagers. Even if weakened, customary institutions should not be ignored and have to be involved in each step of the process as they have traditionally been in charge of giving land right and access to forests. The WHRC has worked in creating a Local Development Comity (LDC) by grouping all the household of a village in an homogeneous manner (clan, ethnic group, geographical proximity...) and having them elect a representative forming an assembly from which can be elected members of the LDC. This assembly is a powerful tool for ensuring good communication with villagers and also facilitating the implementation of activities. Slowly, more and more responsibility can be passed on the LDC as the capacities of its members are being built through the implementation of activities.

REDD as a tool for Sustainable Development

Too often REDD is seen as a conservation program and an end in itself. Most of the actor of REDD in DRC are conservation NGO and forestry actors. It is important to put REDD at its place as a financial tool to achieve sustainable development. Doing so will enable a much needed debate on the goals to be set by the government over the future of DRC. It will also bring at the table key players, which are the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Land Rights and the Ministry of Energy. In fact, today it is estimated that only 8% of deforestation is coming from the forestry sector, more that 80% being caused by increasing demand in fuel wood followed by slash and burn agriculture.

Sustainable development must be put at the center of the REDD debate in order to foster a debate about the use and management of forest resources in Congo and trade of related to their use or preservation. REDD can be a powerful catalyzer in dealing with great issues such as land rights community conservation concession, the development of a national energy policy and a plan for fostering investment in agriculture in sustainable manner.

