

Community Peer Forum for Exchange and Monitoring of REDD+ and PES

Increasing local capacity to make informed decisions



The main objective of the **Community Peer Forum** is to increase the capacity of indigenous and other forest communities to respond to the risks and opportunities associated with REDD+ and other economic incentives for environmental services (PES), by fostering a targeted exchange of information and practical experiences between peer community leaders and their organizations. The ultimate goal is to enable local communities to make informed decisions in ways which strengthen their land tenure rights, improve forest governance and livelihoods, and deliver other social and environmental co-benefits.

REDD+ is considered by many experts to be the most important low-cost climate change mitigation solution. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) stated that REDD is “the forest mitigation option with the largest and most immediate carbon stock impact in the short term per hectare and per year globally.” But for REDD+ and other PES mechanisms to succeed, it is essential to recognize and properly engage local communities given their role as forest stewards globally. A positive step in this direction was the adoption of safeguards in the Cancun Agreement to respect the rights of indigenous and local communities and promote their full and effective participation in REDD+ actions. While REDD was not regulated at COP17 in Durban, it gained increased recognition and support as every nation that previously opposed it now either endorses or has halted its opposition. As a result, pilot projects will continue to proliferate, seeking opportunities in an expanding voluntary carbon market, and in the evolving sub-national, national, and international REDD regimes.

Despite these advances, there is still no clarity on how the conditions and mechanisms to implement REDD+ will take place. One of the most debated issues is how countries will implement effective and transparent systems to channel benefits to local communities, recognizing their rights, including rights to land, territories and resources, and Free, Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), as called for by the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169, among others. The active participation of indigenous and other local communities is essential to ensure that these rights are taken into account and respected.

Forest Trends’ Communities and Markets Program promotes the implementation of safeguards and informed participation of local communities in policies, programs, and pilot projects around REDD+ and other PES mechanisms. In Brazil, we are developing the Surui Carbon project in the States of Rondônia and Mato Grosso, the first indigenous-led REDD+ project in the Amazon. We commissioned a precedent-setting legal study that established the carbon ownership rights of the Surui and other indigenous people in Brazil, developed a carbon baseline accounting methodology which reflects the unique socio-economic deforestation drivers of the Surui, and implemented a comprehensive FPIC process that resulted in a moratorium on illegal logging in the Surui’s 248,000 hectare territory.

We are assisting the Government of Acre to design and implement a program for compensating indigenous stewardship of ecosystem services within the new System for Incentives for Environmental Services legislation (SISA).

We have also conducted several capacity building workshops on REDD+ and PES to hundreds of indigenous and community leaders throughout Latin America and Africa. The Community Peer Forum is a new initiative that will leverage on this work, as well as on Forest Trends’ family of programs and network, to inform and catalyze community peer learning exchanges on REDD+ and PES.

On November 27-29, 2011, the Community Peer Forum was launched in Antigua, Guatemala, during a meeting involving representatives from 12 community-based organizations from Latin America, including COICA, AIDSEP, the Amazon Working Group (GTA), and the Mesoamerican Alliance for People and Forests, along with representatives from Forest Trends, the Rights and Resources Initiative, and Helveta-Swiss Intercooperation.

The Community Peer Forum will function as an interactive space to promote greater exchange of information on REDD+ and PES at both the organization and community levels. Considering that participating organizations already have their formal affiliations and networks, the Forum is not a formal coalition or yet another official network, but rather a complementary effort focused on increasing the knowledge, awareness and capacity of existing organizations and their respective coalitions and networks. Through mutual learning, participants will be able to increase their capacity to make informed decisions on REDD+ and PES project development opportunities and also be better positioned to influence the evolving regulatory framework around these mechanisms to ensure the rights of communities to their traditional lands, resources and customary practices are respected.

Specific Objectives

- Promote greater consultation, participation and inclusion of indigenous and other forest peoples in national processes for preparing REDD+ strategies and other PES, emphasizing the need for proper safeguards, particularly FPIC, and benefit sharing systems.
- Empower local communities to respond to the challenges and opportunities for implementing REDD+ and other PES projects at the community level, with transparent, culturally appropriate and accurate information, as well as technical support.
- Build the capacity of local communities and their organizations to critically discuss REDD+ and other PES mechanisms, drawing on the collective experiences and knowledge of Forest Trends' network of experts and selected indigenous and community rights organizations.

Initial Activities

- Develop database for monitoring community experiences in REDD+ and PES project development, harnessing key lessons to expand community knowledge and engagement.
- Identify key themes and forums for influencing the respect of community rights in relation to REDD+ and PES, focusing on the implementation of safeguards and equitable benefit sharing, giving priority to a national and regional focus.
- Share relevant information, data and analysis on REDD+ and PES to strengthen the capacity of community leaders and their respective organizations to properly respond to the risks and opportunities with REDD+ and PES schemes.
- Leverage on existing regional and international meetings or conferences to convene meetings of the Community Peer Forum, focusing initially on the Rio+20 Conference in Brazil.
- Sponsor exchange field visits between communities working with REDD+ and other PES projects.
- Produce digital video clips, publications, and other educational materials for local communities to increase their awareness and information about the challenges and opportunities around REDD+ and other PES schemes.